



‘Connecting Dads’

Bringing fathers into the child welfare picture

Issue/Need

Many children and youth in the child welfare system nationally and in DC come from single-parent homes where Mom is the head of the household. Dads are not in the picture so often and many family situations are so complicated that child welfare has tended to focus on Mom and the kids.

One of our primary goals in child welfare is strengthening families. Every child and youth has a father and needs and deserves to have a relationship with him and/or his extended family. To meet that need, we must do much more to identify, engage, and include fathers in all aspects of child welfare cases involving their children.

Fathers are potential resources for:

- Nurturing for children through a healthy relationship.
- Placement.
- Medical history information.
- Benefits, such as health insurance, survivor benefits, or child support.
- Permanence, through reunification or relative guardianship.

Response

The DC Child and Family Services Agency has launched an initiative we call “**Connecting Dads**.” We’re in the planning and early implementation stage of an innovative five-point model designed to help us routinely bring fathers into the child welfare picture. The model is called PADRE, and here’s what it means.

P	<u>Practice Standards</u> Promoting core values and procedures to increase child welfare engagement of fathers.
A	<u>Accountability</u> Ensuring inclusion of father engagement in social work supervision and management and developing tracking methods to monitor baseline and future performance
D	<u>Documentation</u> Increasing formal recording of efforts and achievements in identifying, engaging, and involving fathers in child welfare cases
R	<u>Responsibility</u> Providing resources that support social workers and others throughout the local child welfare community in acting to increase father involvement
E	<u>Education</u> Training and coaching to develop or refresh specific knowledge and skills that support increased involvement of fathers in child welfare cases

While the “**Connecting Dads**” initiative originated among CFSA managers and social workers with case-carrying responsibilities, the five work groups moving forward on the five focus areas of the PADRE model have attracted enthusiastic participants from several areas of our agency. We have also engaged some current and former client fathers in working with us to inform our thinking and strategies. All of us

are committed to spearheading a movement that results in consistent inclusion of fathers not only in CFSA practice but also in the work of our private provider agencies and throughout the child welfare system.

Progress to Date

- Engaged researchers from Howard University in studying existing attitudes and practices in the local child welfare system regarding fathers, with a written report of findings expected before the end of this year
- Reviewed CFSA policies and found no barriers to greater involvement of fathers. In fact, many policies encourage involvement of both parents.
- Established a monitoring mechanism—DadCount—to track father involvement on CFSA cases.
- Developed a tip sheet to help social workers capture father involvement in their formal case notes in FACES.

Next Steps

- Mobilize CFSA and our partners to make routine involvement of fathers a reality
- Develop new or enrich existing training about policy basis for father involvement; what full engagement and involvement will look like (ideal future state); specific strategies and skills for engaging and involving fathers; and best practices in overcoming barriers (such as incarceration, dislike/distrust of government agencies, animosity between Mom and Dad, etc.)
- Ensure full and consistent reporting via DadCount
- Develop a resource guide—DadHelp—of services and supports available to bolster our work with fathers