

THE FATHERHOOD CONNECTION PILOT

by Connecting Communities in Action, Inc. (CCA)

Region 2 • Salamanca, New York
ccaction.org



Fatherhood • Mentoring • Native Americans

INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

Three Community Action Agencies will partner with their local Departments of Social Services and with Reginald Cox, Office of Children and Family Services consultant, to pilot a Fatherhood Connection program across the Western Southern Tier of New York State. **The goal is to create a sustainable and researched-based initiative to engage men as father figures in the lives of their children, stepchildren, or grandchildren.** In order to achieve both short-term and long-term health and social impacts, direct service to fathers and families, training of facilitators, and research for longitudinal validation will occur. Mr. Cox will facilitate two 13-week Fatherhood Connection groups across the three-county area, engaging both father figures and new facilitators from each CAA who will be trained to continue the facilitation of the groups into the future. Forty men will be referred to the groups, 30 will participate, 20 will graduate from the program and six representatives from the three agencies will be trained as facilitators during the process.

LOCAL NEED ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE

The poverty rate for families with female headed households with no husband or similar male figure present stands at 29.7%. When these same female-headed households have children under 18, the poverty rate increases to 47.6% (over 4 times the rate in married couple families), and for those same households with children less than 5 years of age, the poverty rate explodes to 62.1%.

- Female headed households comprise 18% of Cattaraugus County's families, 16% of Allegany County's families and 23% of Steuben County's



families, and about a third of all births are to women who are widowed, divorced or never married.

- 42% of families living in poverty in Cattaraugus County are female headed with absentee father figures.
- Children in father-absent homes are almost 4 times more likely to be poor and are at significantly higher risks for substance abuse and aggressive behaviors.
- Children without present fathers are more than twice as likely to die by suicide.
- Father involvement with their children in school and academics is associated with students achieving mostly A grades, but 71% of high school dropouts are fatherless.

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

The coagulation of research on father involvement has concluded that fathers do matter. This revelation has led to efforts by agencies to support men in assuming more of the caregiver role; however, fathers

have limited parenting skills and few opportunities to acquire essential parenting skills. The complex needs facing these fathers are often beyond the scope of that a single program can provide in isolation.

Taking this limitation under consideration, this pilot will serve as the first step for the three agency collaborative across Cattaraugus, Allegany, and Steuben to merge efforts and begin investing in shared, larger systems of support for fathers that can lead to a large enough impact on community-level indicators. This initiative seeks to impact father involvement across a three-county rural geographic service area. The initiative educates fathers on how to engage and negotiate with child support as well as overcome obstacles to employment which both impact the level of poverty of fathers and their children in the U.S. The goals of the program are to ultimately;

- Increase father engagement and self-efficacy
- Improve overall attitude toward fathering
- Decrease the obstacles to employment
- Increase knowledge of child support
- Improve co-parenting skills and,
- Increase overall levels of life satisfaction

To achieve these goals, three Community Action Agencies have collaborated with their local Departments of Social Services, local family courts, probation departments, faith organizations, and other providers, as well as with the Fatherhood Connection to engage in a framework for evidence-based systems level change of which CCA is the lead.

. . . equipping fathers (residing and not residing with their children) with the skills and knowledge to become effective caregivers to their children and effective managers of the relationships with the mothers of those children

These stated efforts will inform community transformation by equipping fathers (residing and not residing with their children) with the skills and knowledge to become effective caregivers to their

children and effective managers of the relationships with the mothers of those children, which will in turn lead to greater positive outcomes among the youth of the three-county target area.

Please reference <https://childandfamilyresearch.utexas.edu/transforming-communities-fathers-through-evidence-based-systems-level-change>

EVIDENCE-BASED OUTCOMES

The initiative will employ a mixed-method design that will include a pre-post survey along with a semi-structured qualitative exit interview to establish the evidence base. Quantitative data to be gathered in the pre-post survey will seek to ascertain whether changes took place as a result of participation in the initiative. The survey seeks to explore pre-post changes in father self-reported engagement with child(ren) and self-efficacy, overall attitude toward fathering, knowledge of child support, and co-parenting skills. At present, we have collected survey data from over 45 fathers who are enrolled in the fatherhood groups and just completed our first round of post-surveys.

Additional qualitative and quantitative data will be gathered during the course of the pilot project, through September of 2021, in order to establish the broadest possible evidence base.

Similar fatherhood curricula (e.g. 24/7 Dad) have been deemed evidence-based, and we fully expect this will be the case with the Fatherhood Connection, which may have a more transformative impact on the community.

EQUITY LENS

The initiative does not discriminate on potential participants by race or ethnicity. All are recruited and welcomed. Special efforts are in place to recruit minority fathers, and CCA works closely with the Seneca Nation of Indians to create group participation among that Tribe. Data is collected on race and ethnicity so disaggregated analysis can take place to reveal differential impacts of the program by race/ethnicity.

CUSTOMER VOICE

The mechanism used to ensure consumer voice is the qualitative exit survey. Qualitative interviews are conducted, and will continue to be conducted, with program participants using a variety of methods to collect their personal stories and input into the efficacy of the program.

Fathers who have successfully participated in groups have been and will continue to be trained as facilitators and co-facilitators. Participants have been involved in local training opportunities that allow them to share their journeys with providers and members of the community.

Community Action is an ideal implementer for this project, as the concept of “maximum feasible participation” encourages program participants to be involved in forums, on advisory councils, and on the agencies’ boards of directors.

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