



U.S. Department of Health
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Administration for Children
and Families
Office of Family Assistance

www.fatherhood.gov

NRFC Technical Assistance Webinar



“Helping Fathers Address Stepfamily and
Multiple Partner Fertility Issues”

Moderator: Nigel Vann, NRFC Director of Training and Technical Assistance

Presenters:

Kay Pasley, Professor and Chair, Department of Family and Child Sciences, Florida State University

Billy Petty, Contract Teacher, People of Principle, Midland, TX

Guy Bowling, Manager, FATHER Project, Goodwill Easter Seals, Minneapolis, MN

September 22, 2009

Webinar Transcription (provided by Global Crossing)

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen thank you for standing by and welcome to the ICF International National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse Technical Assistance webinar. During the presentation all participants will be on a listen only mode.

If at anytime during the conference you need to reach an operator please press star zero. As a reminder this conference is being recorded Tuesday, September 22, 2009. I would now like to turn the conference over to Mr. Nigel Vann, Director of Training and Technical Assistance. Please go ahead sir.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much and good afternoon/good morning to everybody. So our topic today as you see on the screen is helping father's address step-family and multiple partner fertility issues. So we will get moving with this in just a few minutes.

There are just a couple of announcements that I want to make first. I also wanted to say how good it was to see folk at the OFA Conference in August. It was very nice to meet people again and meet a few new faces. And it was really good to just sort of see everybody connecting with each other.

I think well I hope anyway that you all went back renewed from that. I certainly always feel the energy and the passion off the walls when we get together like that so

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

looking forward to the next time we get to do that. So Matt can you just put the next screen up?

Thanks yes I just wanted to make sure everybody's aware that there are a couple of special webinars coming up. The Healthy Marriage grantees and I know we have a few of you on the line did receive this announcement and tomorrow - I mean I'm sorry on Thursday as you see on the screen at 12:30 Eastern Time.

There will be a special webinar on preparing for performance measurement reporting. Now the fatherhood grantees you have not received this information yet. There's been a problem with the email distribution system but you will get it before the end of the day today.

But as you see on the screen there is going to be this special webinar for everybody on Monday, September 28 that's the Fatherhood grantees at 2:00 Eastern Time. And the purpose for this webinar just briefly is because as I think most of you know now starting in October you are going to begin reporting new performance measurement data.

So these webinars are just designed to provide a refresher on how to use the online data collection tool to report data and what resources are available to us to assist you during this process. So the healthy managed people should have received the email with that information and the fatherhood people will get it by the end of the day.

Any questions about that for the healthy marriage people you can send an email to the info at healthymarriageinfo.org address as you see on the screen and the fatherhood grantees to info@fatherhood.gov. And Patrick Patterson will be facilitating healthy marriage webinar on Thursday and I will be with you again on Monday to help facilitate the Ffatherhood one.

So with that let me pass it to Matt just to remind you how this works if you have a question and then I'll say a few introductory remarks and introduce our first presenter.

Matt Crews:

All right thanks Nigel. I just wanted to tell everyone how you can ask questions. As everyone's going to be able to listen we have the listen only lines so you won't be



able to chime in very vocally. You will be able to ask questions at any point during any part of the presentation.

And so all you do is there's a box here at the bottom and if you write your question and then hit the ask button directly to the right of it you'll be able to ask the question. And we'll send you a response back to let you know that we've gotten your question. It's been submitted to Nigel and presented.

And at the end of both presentations we're going to go to the questions and try to answer as many as we can. For those of you who may be looking at the screen and it looks a little bit more like this the questions will be here at the bottom.

Again you should be able to ask at any point throughout the webinar. Also finally if you have the first screen and you'd like to make the presentation slides larger you can hit the F5 button and that'll take the presentation to full screen.

And in hitting the F5 button a second time it will take it back down smaller to ask a question. So again ask questions we'll be collecting those throughout the presentation and answering them at the end. And now back to Nigel.

Nigel Vann:

And thank you very much Matt and again we do encourage you to ask questions. You know, there will be a 15 minutes or so at the end of the webinar for the presenters to talk in more detail about issues so please do send questions in as they occur to you.

And I did want to apologize I know that you did not get the slides for today's presentation until the last minute that was part of the technical difficulties that had resulted in you not yet getting the fatherhood announcement for the performance measurement training.

But I hope everybody's got those slides now in case you - well you certainly have them online later to go back to. So again our topic today is helping fathers address step-family and multiple partner fertility issues. I thought before we get going I would just briefly define multiple partner fertility.

I think we're all pretty familiar with the issue now. I first heard this term I guess back in the late '90s. I think Ron Mincy was the first researcher I heard using it but it is fairly common now and it's certainly reflects the life of a lot of the participants that you're working with out there.

I was looking at an article 2006 article by Frank Furstenberg who's been done a lot of work in this part and going back to the '70s and '80s and he wrote an article in 2006 with (Marsha Carlson) and just offered a few points that I think are worth going over here.

Pointing it out mainly, you know, that the recent trends in marriage and fertility have seen an increase in the number of adults having children by more than one partner, multiple partner fertility. Unmarried parents are much more likely to have had a child by a previous partner than married parents.

Race ethnicity is strongly associated with multi partner fertility as is mother's young age at first birth and father's history of incarceration. Any of those situations, you know, you're more likely to be having partners with children with more than one partner.

And to the extent that child rearing across households i.e. if you're trying to raise children in more than one household this is going to really - the parental resources available to each child so therefore there are important consequences for children's well being.

And that's really the point that I wanted to emphasize here before we get moving to just take this time to remind ourselves if we ever forget it that the work that we're all engaged in is about the children and so today's topic I think is really relevant here.

Too many children today as we know are growing up with a changing cast of adult characters in their lives and how their lives will unfold as they grow up are going to be shaped to a large extent by the awareness and parenting skills of those adults which is why the work that you all do is so important.

But the adults in children's lives aren't aware of the impact that they have on those children that they don't always have regular contact with their biological children if they aren't fully clear of their role as a step-parent or step-parent figure to their partner's biological children on and on and on.

In those kinds of situations children are going to suffer so the work that you do helps increase the awareness of both biological and non-biological parents, step-parents and helps them build their skill sets so that outcomes can improve for the children in their care.

And, you know, you don't need me to remind you of this but our presenters today are going to zero in on some of these key issues and give you some new insights into how you can help parents increase this awareness and increase their skills.

Just wanted to point out a few more facts which you will be hearing more from the participants but recent publication by Professor (Andrew Cherwin) he pointed out that nearly half of children in the U.S. will experience a new partner moving into the household before they're 18.

Eight percent of children in this country by age 15 have seen their mothers live with 3 or more different men. Another article by Frank Furstenberg and (Karen Gouzo) was in demography. And I think also the Journal of Marriage and Family recently nearly 8% of American men age 15 to 44 report having had children with more than one partner.

And again the sharp difference by age, race ethnicity, and income over one third of poor African American men between the ages of 35 and 44 report having had children with 2 or more mothers. Sixteen percent with three or more mothers and fathers with multiple partners do appear to be more disadvantaged than fathers with two or more children by the same partner.

And, you know, I can go on and on and on with that and we will hear more about that from the presenters. But I did just want to put out some of that as we get going here just to remind us of the fact that - the reason we're focusing in on this to try and lessen the impact on - lessen the negative impact on children.

So with that let me move to introduce our first presenter who is Dr. Kay Pasley who is the Professor and Chair with the Department of Family and Child Sciences at the Florida State University and we're continuing our trend of having presenter photos.

So you can see Dr. Pasley here on your screen. And we're certainly very privileged to have Dr. Pasley joining us today. As I was talking to her last week I realized and she actually said this that she can be viewed as the grandmother of research in this area of step-founding.

She was a mentor to Dr. Francesca Adler-Baeder who many of you know certainly on the healthy marriage side I'm sure. Francesca's done some very impressive work in the areas of healthy marriage and step-families at Auburn University and also have one of the healthy marriage grants.

And in her turn Francesca has mentored Brian Higginbotham who is now a Professor at Utah State University and for those of you who joined the June webinar on step families on healthy marriage webinar Brian was our presenter on that.

So Kay has had a direct influence on Francesca and Brian in continuing this work. Beyond that, you know, as it says in her bio she's been involved in the study of remarriage and step families since 1977. She's written extensively in this area also in free books and numerous articles.

She serves as the Chair of the Research Committee and member of the Board of Directors of the Step Family Association of America. And so again we're greatly privileged to have Dr. Pasley with us and let me pass it over to get some of her expertise.

Kay Pasley: Thank you Nigel and it's delightful to join all of the participants on this webinar. Please move to the next slide. These are the topics that I'm going to cover in a fairly brief forum because we don't have all of that much time together.

But I'm also available after the fact if you have additional questions but I'm going to try to define what I'm talking about when I talk about a step family I'll look at the



incidence of the prevalent, talk about what the literature shows in terms of some of the common issues, what we know more specifically about step fathering, and what affects it.

And then I'm going to try to make the link to some practice recommendations for us. The next slide please. There we go. When we talk about a step family I'm going to define it fairly broadly. It's a couple whether they're married or not in which one of the adults has a child or children from a prior union.

And so again they could come to that relationship either having had marital experience in their past or not having marital experience in their past. Typically the majority of our step families are come from divorce. They come from divorce into remarriage.

The minority are the ones that come from widowhood and a growing group is this unmarried group that would be part of that multi partner fertility that Nigel talked about. A couple of things I want to address here very quickly is that when we look at census data it only counts where the child resides at the point at which the census data is collected.

And children are defined as those 18 years and younger. And so I want you to know that most of the research is on step-father families after the process of divorce although there's an increasing literature sense about 2000 about these non marital step-families those that come to us through co-habitation.

Next slide okay. These are some of the estimates. Everybody always wants to know well what's the percentage of first marriages that end in divorce and how many of those will remarry and how many of those will redi-orce that kind of information.

So I offer that to you here. One of the things I want to say here is that those of us who study this phenomena are not really overly concerned with the difference in divorce after first marriage and divorce after second marriage. When we talk about the complexities of step-families that isn't a statistical significant difference.



It occurs more frequently but again when you understand how complicated step-families are I always say gee I think that's the good news. When we talk about this idea of our best estimates most of the literature from the Census Bureau and other reports suggests that we look at kids who grow up in two parent families regardless of their structure and kids who only grow up in one parent families.

So these data are of those that are living with two parents about 10% of them are in some kind of a step-family format. Of those who live with one parent a whole portion of them are also having what we call a social parent or a person in the step-parent role.

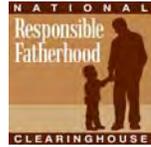
Again we're only referring to families where the kids are under 18. Now what this means however is that all of our estimates under counts step-families. So it doesn't recognize if the child is living with the single parent but only this is the other parent and that parent is remarried or has a partner. So those are all ignored here.

It also doesn't recognize step-families where the children are over 18 years of age even if they reside with the family and it doesn't recognize those children that are in gay or lesbian step-families. So we really - even our best estimates under estimates the number of step-families. Next slide.

If you look at the breath of research and there are literally now thousands of research articles on the topic the common issues or stress points seem to coagulate under these five topics. And I'm going to talk just briefly about what these are and what we're talking about here.

When we talk about merging family histories what we're really talking about is that the couple is the unit with the least history when they come to a new marriage or this new step-family situation so they're the ones that lack the history. So there is no common history but there are two separate histories that are part of this.

So their task is to build habits and rituals and rules and routines through experience together that create a family history. And that is a stressful situation. I often talk about this by equating that becoming a step-family through marriage or co-habitation is similar to moving to a foreign country.



In a new family environment the meaning of the language is different, the food is different, the customs around money may be different and the behavioral expectations are often different. New members may break the rules or make other unintentional mistakes because they don't know what living in this new country is like.

It's realistic to expect that adjusting to life in a foreign country requires time to acquire the language, to learn the customs of the new culture similarly adjusting to a new family environment takes time yet overwhelmingly the literature shows that individuals come to step-families with too unrealistic expectations.

One that an instant adjustment and that of instant love and those are commonly reported in these studies of step-families. It's not uncommon that living together before marriage is a typical way to gain knowledge about the new culture.

But there's a lot of research showing that co-habitation doesn't - does very little to help the couple anticipate the issues and resolve them in a satisfying way. So when we have these two past histories and we've got to merge them it becomes complicated.

And it's quite stressful for people or at least that's what they report. There are other common issues and one of them is the issue of resource distribution. And the literature would say that, you know, when you add more members to a family there are competing demands for all kinds of resources.

And when I think about resources I think about time, love and affection, money of course and things like space that occurs both within the household and across households. The reality is that fewer resources are actually available to individual members when you bring more people into the family.

And kids really get this and often express stronger negative feelings about it because in a single parent family that they may have been living in they got more attention. So if it was just one child and mom the child got all of mom's attention or most of mom's attention.



And now there's another person in that so the child by nature is just divided equally only gets 50% of the attention so they really the reality is they get less of what they're used to. And kids often talk about this as being unfair. However the research shows that both children and step-children do receive equal amounts of attention.

Although the level of attention overall has diminished so that if you have kids and step-kids in the family everybody's getting 10% but this down from the 50% they got before they formed a step-family. And the important thing about issues of resource distribution is there's often very little discussion about how we're going to do this before you actually become a step-family.

So couples don't figure things out in advance or plan for these to be issues in advance. They're not anticipating so they're not problem solving. Loyalty conflicts is also experienced both by children and by parents and their partners or step-father as in this case.

Recent research on the communications of step-families shows that kids often report feeling caught in between and that that's a common experience for them. They feel the term we use is they feel triangulated so that mom and step-father are arguing about something and draw the child in or the child feels drawn in whether the parent and step-parent are really doing that.

The kid feels caught. And what we know is that children are more likely to side with their biological parent than their step-parent during arguments when there are arguments between adults. And the evidence also shows that children feel triangulated between their resident and non-resident parents.

So it's not just between the parent and step-parent but it's often between the two households. And parents report feeling caught between, you know, responding to their kids in meaningful ways and making choices to respond to their new partner.

And again those are all about loyalty conflicts and this is highly stress producing for new step-families. Competing development needs is just what it sounds like. It means that the needs of a new like couple the parent and the step-parent for more alone



intimate time as an example comes into conflict with the needs of parenting children of any age.

And so those are two competing stages that have unique tasks and they vie for the attention and the energy amongst the various players in the family. When there are big age or stage differences between the two families that are being joined even more stress results.

For example a relatively new mom marries an experienced older man whose children are out of the house so you've got three competing stages. You've got the family where they're launching kids. You've got the family of very young children. And you've got then the newly married couple.

And that really complicates the adjustment process because expectations are not clearly articulated overwhelmingly that's what the research would show. The other thing that is common in step-families is this idea of interested third parties.

New step-families operate under the watchful eyes of intimate interested third parties like non resident children and step-children, former spouses, grandparents and step-grandparents. Research shows that these third parties have vested interests in the qualities and perhaps the stability of the marriage.

Nothing that is done or said remains private so children are one of the big information carriers between households but in a multi partnered fertility situation the literature suggests that it's not just children but it can be the third generation the grandparents who also are highly interested third parties.

Next slide please. Now let me tell you a little bit about what we know specifically about step-fathering from the literature and you guys are probably familiar with some of this that overwhelmingly the role is pretty ambiguous to men.

And they have difficulty with that ambiguity. Step-fathers find it challenging to determine what's best and how to do things. They're granted more latitude because the expectations are less clear which can also be problematic due to unspoken expectations and a lot of expectations are unspoken.

And so they try something out and then they get - they find out they've broken a rule or they get punished or that's their perception they get punished in some way. Initial attempts to take on active parenting can be met with resistance from children and partners.

Partners often want the man to take over the control of things and when he tries to do that she effectively undermines him by saying oh you're being too harsh on my children. It's often compounded by the lack of discussion about how and when to discipline who's children.

And thus is the reason why child rearing becomes a primary issue for step-families and often a presenting problem in or presenting issues for therapists. A typical response by the biological parent is to take the side of his or her child and this effectively again undermines any attempts by the step-parent or the step-father to exert control.

Even when the - they're trying to exert what we would call positive control and I'm going to talk about that a little bit later. Common step-parenting behaviors that we know something about is they do less monitoring you see here there's fewer expressions of warmth, fewer positive expressions.

But unlike biological fathers there's - they're not necessarily more expressive in terms of negative things so they're more neutral in that sense than a biological father. And there's just a lot less frequent communication overall. They're better at controlling which I think is important their own negative feelings compared to first or biological fathers.

The reaction of step-kids to all of this is not good. That most step-children when father a step-father attempts to limit or control or monitor their behavior is negative. They don't like it. This is even true when he exerts authoritative control step strategies.

So he is trying to take on this authoritative parenting of being warm coupled with control and that even doing the right kinds of things a lot of people advocate and that



we know is associated with good child outcomes he gets negative reactions from the kids.

So what happens is that step-fathers typically adopt this disengaged parenting style. Their less involved but that in fact is better for children early on over time than he engages more as the relationship between the step-father and the step-child improves.

But as he disengages you see more tension between the mother/child relationship which is I think very interesting. Makes a difference who we're talking about here so if it's a step-father he does things to do better. Step-parents do better with step-sons than with step-daughters.

And there is some literature that shows that when a step-father tries to control a step-child that the step-daughter is slow to erupt but once she does she doesn't back down as quickly as the step-son does. So it gets escalated negative interaction more so than step-sons.

We also know that the quality of the mother/child relationship affects step-fathering so if their relationship is good the step-father/step-child relationship is better. If the step-father and step or the mother and child's relationship is characterized by conflict and negativity then the step-father/step-child's relationship suffers.

Other findings show that for step-children and step-father families it's that conflict that affects more negativity in parenting and that's what negatively affects kids. So when there's conflict between the mom and the step-father that affects again the way in which she and he are both going to parent.

And that's what we know most negatively affects children. In a first family it's really about if there's conflict between mothers and fathers it only affects children negatively depending upon how children think about that so their appraisals of the situation.

But for a mother/step-fathers it works a little bit differently. Okay next slide. I've talked about these in what I've already said but just let me point out a couple of things here



that again the perceptions of the step-children and own children affects step-fathering.

That what parents typically do is they support their own children and the children side with their own parent so that makes step-fathering more complicated. I mention that there isn't as much communication but what seems to be important is this idea of every day talk with the step-child.

So you don't have to have deep meaningful conversations but what really makes a difference is if the step-father is talking with the step-child about did you do your homework? How are things going at school? Do you want to play softball today? Those kinds of every day talk.

The quality of the mother/child relationship I just mentioned affects what goes on in the step-father/step-child relationship so the higher - the better her relationship is with her children the better his relationship usually is with them.

If there's problems in the step-mother/step-father relationship that negatively affects the step - the kids in the step-family. I mentioned the sex of the step-child makes a difference and the one I really want to zero in here is the co-parental relationship with the non resident father.

We do know that when the conflict is high between the two biological parents the step-father/step-child relationship suffers and when that conflict is also coupled with frequent father/child contact so the dad is seeing this kid a lot. The step-father/step-child relationship suffers even more.

So that really says something about what we need to be doing I think about helping that co-parental relationship. We also know that step-fathers have talked a little bit about how they becomes allies with the biological fathers and they seem to do it more readily when the step-father feels secure about his current relationship with the mother.

If he sees the father as worthy and if he's also a parent himself so he's more than just a step-dad. Next slide. It'll be my last few comments here. One of the things that

we're very concerned about is that those of us who work with step-families and particularly in situations with multi partner fertility often come to it with a deficit family comparison.

That is we're always comparing them to first marriage families as our comparison or to two parent families that are stable and have a lot of bias, personal bias about that. So it says if you're not in a two parent first marriage family everything else is not as good.

So we have to as professionals really explore and get in touch with our own personal biases. I think the greatest thing we can do in practice and it takes a lot of knowing the literature so you're making the right kinds of statements is to normalize the experience for people.

That's part of what we do in a lot of psycho educational approaches is really about if you know the literature well you can assist families to set realistic expectations and not be surprised when things they expect don't work. If you know that authoritative parenting is not as effective in step-families then you need to advocate for looking at a variety of strategies rather than just continuing to articulate that as the goal standard as an example.

I also think that coaching them for time and patience is a real key because the data seems to show that it takes three to five years for initial adjustment some step-families really never adjust even 16 years later so it's an ongoing process. But I often use that analogy again of moving to a foreign country.

People seem to get that pretty nicely. Communication and problem solving is a real key if those are skills that we know work in first marriage but they - you've got to have them in remarriages or step-families because communication is more complicated and problem solving skill is an absolute must to anticipate what might happen.

So teaching skills around those two things are essential in step-family education, essential in marital education but absolutely imperative when we talk about the step-families. Other strategies that work are we coach step-families, step-fathers to befriend kids first not to try to parent them.



That means to put themselves in situations where they don't have to limit but they can do more fun things like (Johnny) needs to go to school at such and such let me make sure I get him on the bus. I'll take care of that honey. Or doing other kinds of things that provide you a chance to do fun things or things that don't have the opportunity for limit setting.

So that means staying out or chores. Now if you have to get into limit setting the research shows the best way to do it is to set it through the biological connection so you say your mother ways your room cleaned up. And I'm here to make sure her wishes are followed.

So again it's trying to set limits through the connection early on that is the longest unit with the longest history. It's the mother/child relationship that's limits about your step-child by using effectively using this existing connection.

And the other thing we talk about is effective undermining and this has to be really planned out very carefully in advance. You have to talk about it but it's when mother's setting a limit and mother and step-dad have talked about this in advance so it doesn't come as a surprise to her.

And he said oh you know I think you're being a little harsh on this. Can we just give him or her this much leeway so it effectively undermines the mother but it also sets the child up to look to the step-parent as being their supporter. Thank you for listening to my portion of the presentation.

Nigel Vann:

Thank you very much Kay. You did a great job of setting the table here and I know that I'm - Billy and Guy are really going to be able to build on what you laid out there. I particularly liked your reference to moving to a new country.

I realized as you were speaking it's almost 30 years to the day since I came to this country from England and did not anticipate how difficult it was going to be to adjust because I thought I was coming to a country that spoke the same language.



And I was going to fit right in but it took me a while. But that was great advice for folks. I also liked what you said about just the natural progression of things that kids are necessarily going to react negatively that is going to lead to step-dads to disengage a little bit which is actually good for the kids at that time.

And, you know, it's got to take time. But while that's happening it's going to lead to more tension between the mother and the child so I just think, you know, as practitioners that we're aware of that being able to help step-dads and mom's be aware of that.

We can do everybody a great service. So let me move on to introduce Mr. Billy Petty who is a contract teacher with the People of Principle Program in Midland, Texas. They're one of your - they're one of the priority area five grantees working with fathers who are incarcerated and getting ready for reentry.

And I'm sure all of you at the LAF Conference in August are going to remember Billy. He was on one of the panels with his wife talking about how the program would help them. But let me just introduce him briefly. He is the husband of LaMarque and he's a step-father to Chris and Alex.

Chris has been living in the home with LaMarque and Billy. Alex has been living with his biological father. Billy is an ex-offender from the state of Texas. He's been out of prison for five and a half years. He now works as a contract teacher as I said with People of Principle and is Vice President of Corporate Sales for an oil field service company.

And doing very well by all accounts he may share with you in the course of his presentation he just went to the opening game of the Dallas Cowboys in their new stadium. His boss bought season tickets on the 50 yard line. I think Billy said seven rows back.

He's had season tickets for 30 years there the boss does. So anyway Billy met LaMarque in a 12 step recovery program when Chris was 15 and Alex was 9. A week after their wedding they attended a healthy marriage conference together. They both continue to be heavily involved with their recovery programs.



I just wanted to read this one quote from Billy and then I'll pass it over to him. Billy said and you may remember him saying this kind of thing at the conference. Our biggest challenge was the relationship between Chris the step-son who was 15 at the time and me.

He absolutely hated my guts. In his mind I was just another jerk with his mother. Through being involved with the father programs and the healthy marriage seminars I have learned many tools in working with step-children. Chris was a very troubled young man.

And I needed to be patient with him and learn to communicate with him. Through being patient and consistent our relationship today is wonderful. He actually has been working for me for the last one and a half years. He's become a very responsible young man. So with that let me pass it to Billy to share some personal experience but also some experience working with other fathers in the program. Mr. Billy Petty.

Billy Petty:

Thank you Nigel. My name is Billy Petty as he introduced me there. And if you ever need to get in contact with me my emails at the bottom there. And basically what I would like to talk about is a little about the relationship between my wife LaMarque and my step-children.

I have no children of my own and as Kay is talking about and Nigel you also about moving into a foreign country I was completely lost and had no clue what I was doing. I had - was introduced to the fatherhood program before we started doing the healthy marriage seminars.

And it was suggested that I go to that because I had gotten into this relationship with LaMarque and she had her two sons. And in what started that and I wanted to tell a little story about how my relationship with Chris started. It did not start well at all.

It was about 2:00 one morning and I had seen Chris several times but it was about 2:00 in the morning and his mother had called me. And this was before we were married and she told me that Chris had stolen her car in the middle of the night.



And asked me if I would come over and help her out with that and I went over there that night which was probably the biggest mistake that I had ever made. First of all we were not married and I had no position as far as discipline. And him and his buddy came in from joy riding about 5:00 in the morning.

And it escalated and Chris came at me with a baseball bat. And he absolutely hated my guts and probably for the next year he would not even talk to me. There was no communication whatsoever except for when I would come over I would say hi.

But there would be absolutely no response. By going through the fatherhood program I learned a lot of what I needed to do was be patient and consistent. And we started - I had bought a house and we had decided we were going to move in together and Chris wanted no part of that.

And so we kind of just worked out way with that and was patient. He moved in with us. And a lot of it started off and I think this is where our relationship started off was the day that we were moving in is I left his mother at he apartment and Chris and I went to unload the trailer.

And we stayed gone for about four hours because we sat down and we had a talk. And I think the biggest part of this was in which I'll get in a little bit with the slides and actually let's to ahead and go to the first slide. And to me this was the best way that I bonded with Chris is and these are from the online survey that Ron had collected.

But for me it was the conversation just communicating with him. We sat down and we talked about the situation with the baseball bat and the stolen car. And what I presented to Chris was that there was two things about that whole situation that was not any good at all.

And the first one was is that he didn't like it and the second one was I really didn't like it either. And it all became about respect and patience from that point on and being consistent. I had told him that I would never raise my voice at him again.



And in the last four years I never have. We sit down and we communicate and we talk. And that's the big deal with the bonding with Chris has been the conversation and also a lot of it is having dinner together and family meetings.

When Chris was living at home we spent a lot of time talking as a family and getting his input. The other thing was that I would take time and ask Chris and it took me asking four or five times before he ever agreed but we got to where about once a month we would go to a movie together just he and I in trying to do some things that were fun.

And then the other one that's on there is working together and now Chris and I we work together. And I'll get a little bit more into that as we go. The other thing as far as the conversation that I wanted to put forth and the respect was Chris' self esteem was really low.

So I had to be very encouraging to him and tell him that he could do the things, you know, that anything he could set his mind to. Okay the next one, next slide is the key ones here is build a friendship before attempting discipline and being patient. And I kind of went over that.

It was just spending time with him and learning about things that he needed. The other thing was communicating with my wife and setting some house rules and methods of discipline. That was a tough one at first because if I would try to discipline Chris I was always too tough.

And we had to work on it as a team. Talk about taking part in family meetings and taking suggestions from Chris on, you know, chores and discipline and things like that, asking, you know, what he thought about certain situations.

But the big part of this was a lot of it was communication with my wife like learning to communicate and that's where our other program the healthy marriage seminar has helped us tremendously. And the other thing is that Chris' room was on the other side of the house of ours.



And I have never walked in his room without knocking on the door. It was just having respect. The next slide supports from the mom. A lot of this was her being patient with me and thank God that my wife is the most patient person that I have ever met.

That helped tremendously and the other thing is her helping me feel like that I had a decision in the discipline in the family guideline. The next slide is some advice that I would have for step-dads and the guys that I've talked to that I've, you know, that ask me questions is realizing that these relationships are going to take time.

You know, Nigel had mentioned that he's heard of some of them taking as long as 16 years and it's still not. You know, what I did was just approach things very slowly and carefully in trying to look at it from Chris' background and very positive.

The oldest step-son Chris that lived with us his real father left when he was six months old. And my wife was married before and he raised Chris for 14 years. And after they divorced the last five years the man that Chris knew as his real father which is the one that raised him has not talked to him but one time in five years.

And so when I got with Chris' mom his real dad didn't care about him and his other dad that raised him didn't care about him so like Nigel had mentioned in the bio I was just another jerk with his mom. And I just had to be patient.

The other thing that's very, very important to me is just don't argue with your wife in front of her children. Never argue with your wife in front of your children because their biologically tied together and they feel like, you know, there's an attack there on their family.

Also the next slide common complaints from step-dads go down to number five and I'm just briefly touching these because there's some other good stuff there. But the ones that really stood out for me is I felt like she relied on me to discipline the kids.

Then she would get angry at me if I was too harsh on them. So that's where we really had to sit down and communicate and set some guidelines. The other thing is I also had to communicate with my wife that if Chris and I had some disagreements that

she needed to stay out of those if those were between he and I and that we could work those out together.

Next slide which there it is again he's too harsh on my kids. They're not perfect. They're kids. And, you know, this is the thing about it is looking at it from his perspective, you know, in trying to look at the humorous side of things. I've got another story that happened.

And this was when he was 17 years old Chris was hanging around. He had quit school and he was hanging around some kids that I just knew that was going to get him in trouble. And I told him they're going to get you in trouble with the law and then they're probably going to beat you up.

And he didn't believe me and sure enough six months later they broke into somebody's car. I found the stuff in his room. It was a neighbor's of mine. I called the neighbor up and the kids - Chris came home from the kids house and had nice all over him.

And he went down and talked to the detectives and as we were leaving the police station he asked me he said how did you know that that was going to happen like that six months ago? And I told him I said Chris I was 17 at one time also.

And from that point on he realized that parents aren't always stupid. You know, and, you know, that all I was trying to do was help him and that it's real funny because that was really a growth period in our relationship. The next slide these are certain - on this slide here you have certain guides to becoming a successful step-father different books and that's all that is for your - to look something up in one of those.

Next slide okay the other thing before I get to reading this poem that I would like to talk about was the setting boundaries and being consistent with Chris especially by the time that he had gotten to be 18. He had lived with us and it almost two years ago that his mom and I was married.

And, you know, I just tried to be consistent while we were dating and we lived together for a while and I was trying to be consistent in spending time with him. Her



other son Alex he comes in and spends time with us once a month. He's from a different city here in Texas.

And a lot of that is it's just kind of hanging out together. We go to the movies a lot, go play putt-putt and do things like that. And we have had no problems with the - his father. It's just being there as a parent. And on that - with her youngest son I let the mother do the discipline when he's in town.

Because he doesn't really know me all that well. The other thing is that with Chris and the problems that we've had and worked out communication was the biggest part in setting boundaries. He had gotten to where he was pretty lazy and I set a boundary.

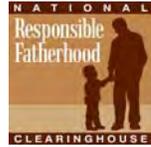
And I told him that if he wanted to live in this house he needed to either work or go to school. And we sit down as a family and talked about that with him and his mother and myself and we gave him a time period that he needed to have a job.

And he got a job, got laid off and then we had a position where I worked and we - I hired him and as of today he has been working for us for about a year and a half. He - what's really neat about our relationship today is that he still - he's real close to his mom and he calls her every couple of weeks.

But today what's really neat is that Chris calls me three to four times a week. He got transferred out to Arkansas. He's doing - being very responsible. He has his own house. He's 20 years old and he is just doing absolutely wonderful. And we talk every day.

And it's a lot of it is what like Kay was talking just every day talk, you know. He'll call me and just say hey how's it going or like this weekend he called me and said hey you remember that grilled shrimp you cooked for us? I said yes. He says how do you fix that?

And, you know, and that was this weekend and I told him, you know, how to do it because he wanted to fix that for him and his girlfriend. And, you know, you just three key things for me was communication, being consistent, being positive and setting boundaries.



And we found this poem and it really meant a lot to me and this is where I'm going to conclude on this here is it's a poem to my step-father. Today I need to say to you something from deep within my heart. It should have been said a very long time ago.

I built my walls to keep the words inside. Thinking it would hurt me to utter them to you so deserving as my childhood dreams became shattered I had to blame someone for life's cruel fate. You came into my home and became my prey.

Unjustly victimized by child's hopeless frustration I need to strike out at someone. I looked at you and saw a man trying to tear apart what life I thought was left blind to your desire to be the man trying to help me construct something from the rubble.

I need to tell you that I saw the pain in your face when I introduced you to my friends as my mother's husband. I need to tell you that I heard the hurt in your voice when you reached out to hold me and I turned away. I need you to know that I did listen so at the time I didn't even know that I was.

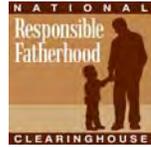
Your voice comes through the past ugly fog and I cautiously warms and protects me. I need you to know that I did care that it was my fierce pride which kept me distant not allowing me to show you that I did need you to care.

Not allowing me to cry with you when I saw your tears but mostly I need you to know that I love you all you've tried to do for me and all that you did do but only now I am realizing. And what I wanted to tell you today is that I'm sorry father and my deepest heartfelt emotions I am sorry dad.

And that is pretty much mine and my step-son's story right there. And, you know, the tools that we learned from the fatherhood programs and the healthy marriage seminars have been so instrumental in helping our family become a success and is just - it's something that I'm grateful every day for. Thank you Nigel.

Nigel Vann:

Thank you Billy. I think there's probably a few wet eyes in the house right now but thank you very much for really putting the personal picture on that and helping us



walk in the shoes of the children because again as I said at the beginning that's what this is all about.

And I think, you know, as we all heard then at the conference young Chris is a very lucky young man to have had you to come into his life and for you to be able to grow and help as you did. And we also have to thank, you know, the folks at the People of Principle for helping Billy on his journey.

So I would also like to acknowledge Ron Brewer and (Connie Alexander) and the other folks there at the POP Program particularly Ron for helping Billy put those slides together. He found a lot of that information online so thank you the whole team there.

Now let me move on and introduce our final presenter Guy Bowling who is the Manager of the Father Project another one of your fellow or I would say grantees on the Goodwill Easter Seals in Minneapolis, Minnesota. And Guy is truly becoming a veteran of this father field.

I've known Guy for a good few years here. One of the joys for me of moving into this position was as I've said before getting to know a lot of new folk who are emerging in this field and coming to really help and parents. It was also a great pleasure to reconnect with Guy who's been doing this work for quite a while.

He explains in his bio he's been a community organizer in the field of family support for 17 years. He specialized in young low income responsible father to male responsibility. I particularly like the fact that Guy says I think what keeps so many of you going in this work is that he's got passion for the work.

I know you're not in this for the money. And Guy says here, you know, he's devoted his life to working with low income fragile families from culturally specific communities in their quest to identify development delivery their purpose.

And that's really what, you know, keeps us going and really helps the families. I won't belabor here but he comes doing some key work around child support reform. He received the MPCL Spirit of Fatherhood Award back in the International Fatherhood

Conference in 2000. He's recently formed a collaborative initiative with (Wyman) Reps. Is that how you say that Guy?

Guy Bowling: Right.

Nigel Vann: To develop platform for African American father's young males to identify and navigate systems that provide services for their unmet needs. And not least he's the father of two (David) 25 and (Abby Diana) 9 so let's have some of your wisdom Guy.

Guy Bowling: Thank you. Thank you very much Nigel and thank all of you who are on the line. It's truly a delight to be a part of the webinar and present some information based on the work that I've done in the field of fatherhood as well as been a part of the fatherhood movement as Nigel said for quite a number of years.

And I have learned a lot and seen a lot and look forward to presenting some of the findings as well as some of the practices that has worked for the program that I'm currently am managing as it relates to working with step-dads and dads who father kids with more than one mother.

So thanks again Nigel truly, truly appreciate it. And as you said there probably wasn't a dry eye in the house you can include me there with Billy's presentation. I truly, truly appreciated and I also agree with what Kay was saying earlier about, you know, the foreign country analysis.

And Nigel you alluded to as well as Billy alluded to as well considering that I can identify with what has been presented already in terms of step-fathers being I am a step-father in addition to grew up with a step-father so there was a number of things that I could relate to.

So I want to talk about the objectives of what I plan to present today if we can move to the next slide please? I would like those of us to come away today from my presentation which is going to be a lot of information and what is going to be in an abbreviated form.



So I want to make sure that I share with you an understanding of the father project program. I also want to talk a little bit about some of the barriers to working with stepdads and dads with multiple partners, common issues faced by dads with multiple partners and some strategies that has been effective for us in working with actually both populations.

And then I'm not going to talk about the new co-parenting court initiative because it has yet to be funded so maybe at a later date I'll have an opportunity to share that information. Next slide. So the father project is a program of Goodwill of Minnesota.

Those of you may be familiar with Goodwill. Goodwill is a national organization actually the Goodwill Use of Minnesota is an organization that's been around for about 100 years. And it focuses on workforce development by providing transitional employment services in addition to our retail side.

We have about 16 stores throughout the state of Minnesota and over 160 affiliates throughout the country. The father project mission before I actually state that and we move onto the next slide is we are a program of goodwill user sales and our mission is to - you can move opt the next slide is assisting fathers and over coming barriers that prevent them from supporting their children economically and emotionally.

Move to the next slide please. Just to give you some background information on the program, Nigel was talking earlier about the ages of the men who are at a disadvantage in terms of who experienced multiple partner fertility. And I just wanted to give you an idea of the population of whom we work with.

We work with fathers between the ages of 17 and 35 actually about 200 filers a year in terms of coming into our program and being eligible and fitting our criteria and engaging and receiving services. But I just did give you an idea of who comes through the programs.

Average guys about 30 years old, half of them lack a high school diploma; about half have some sort of connection with the criminal justice system. All of them are low income or a good chunk of them are non custodial parents and then African



American dads that come into the program we have more of them now actually well to be honest less of them now than we had initially.

Initially we had about 85% of African American gentlemen coming through our program and now it's about 65% based on the grant that we received through promoting responsible fatherhood. It allows us now to reach out to more Latino fathers in addition to our native American dads which is one of our most challenging probably relations.

But that percentage has increased significantly since we received our grant. Next slide please. And these are just some of the services that we offer. We're a collaborative model which is proven as Nigel said has been around for quite some time.

We originally started as part of the Partners for Fragile Families initiative in bringing child support enforcement and community based organizations together to focus on fathers and putting them in a position of economic stability along with understanding their responsible parenting as it relates to their children. And so a number of different things needed to be established.

Because these guys came with a multitude of issues and as a result of those collaborative partnerships these are all the services that we provide through multiple partnerships we have over ten agencies so these are the things that we do. Next slide.

I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the things that we have experienced as a result of working with step-fathers and fathers with multiple partners. We found that there's I think Kay alluded to earlier about personal bias on one of the things that initially was an issue and often times are issues that general staff attitudes that beliefs about fathers who have kids with more than one mother.

We ensure that the criteria that we establish in terms of hiring staff to work with fathers really have a general understanding and are aware of fatherhood issues particularly fathers who have more than one child and more than one mother actually with multiple children.



And some times you have staff that has personal biases against those guys and that can get in the way of establishing initial rapport in addition to connecting with him to keep him engaged into the program. And so some of the barriers that we've experienced over the years in our hiring practices when we first got started was making sure that we had the right staff.

Because if you don't have the right staff that can create tension, that can create a challenging working relationship and that also can lead to fathers not being motivated to continue to access your service. So those - that's one of the initial barriers from a staffing context that creates a problem with some of the guys that are coming through the program who are fathers with multiple moms and multiple children.

And also too another barrier we have found in terms of our service delivery system and it has to be effective. If it's not effective these guys are coming into our doors and they don't necessarily have the skill to navigate the system. So in order to have them guys be successful in navigating the system considering the fact that they have multiple issues should have to be comprehensive in a way that they can connect with, they're confident about.

That they've been trained and then they also understand the motivation that's needed to go forth and actually access the service based on the delivery system and the structural delivery system that you would need to establish. And if it's not there you can lose guys which is multiple things that they need and multiple system that they need to navigate.

And they just don't have the skill level to be able to do it. The other thing I'll briefly just talk about the age of the children in terms of the family demographics and income status and the number of partners that they have. One of the things that we have found out is that our guys initially are connected to their children in their early years.

They initially have a loving relationship. They're happy. They're excited to be a new dad. But what ends up happening is over a period of time without resources, without problem solving skills, without the ability to be able to navigate the system they lose



connection with their kid but initially they want the same thing for their children in the way that every father wants.

Be it low income fathers, be it middle class fathers, be it upper middle class, be it stabilized fathers they want the same things for their children. And one of the things that creates the barriers to working with them by the time they come into our program if there hasn't been that disconnect some of the motivation that they have to reconnect with the kids is challenging.

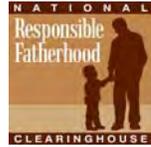
Because of the experiences they have had as a result of now being disconnected because they're no longer there in terms of being a new dad in terms of deaths the way the relationship broken down. Unfortunately they didn't have access to their kids now they're running into challenges.

So the lack of motivation that they have is significant and so for us that's one of the biggest barriers to be able to help them understand that we can too assist them in developing skills and connecting with resource staff. The other thing I wanted to talk about is their educational background.

And I talked to earlier about a lot of them lack high school diploma or a GED and only about half of our guys come in with that. Their previous fatherhood program experience that they've been in a program that doesn't necessarily meet their needs or they had a bad experience that creates a barrier in terms of trust level when it comes to the program if they've already had an unfortunate experience by working with a program that didn't necessarily empower them.

Didn't necessarily connect them with resources, didn't necessarily help them build the skills that they need to become stabilized and also connecting with their children. Some times when they come into the program that creates a barrier because they don't trust you.

So it takes a minute to be able to establish that rapport and trust level with them in order to get them to the point of achieving the success that they want for themselves as well as what you want for the program. Quarterly participation our program is



voluntary and so a number of guys who if you have that are court ordered they come in with a particular level of defiance.

They come in with a particular level of rebellion because they feel that they've been forced. One of the things that we do we make sure that they guys don't come into our program through any type of court order because that is an initial barrier for them to even be connected to initially.

Because they're thinking that they have to do something as opposed to being empowered to do something and so that's initial barriers. So part of the court ordered participation we don't have but there are times when they come and they have specific requirements that they have to do between probation and parole.

But the fact that we're established as a resource that they can choose based on a listed number of things that helps us in terms of our ability to work with them. The father's reception of child support, legal rights, visitation, custody systems these guys they have no idea of what they have found themselves getting into as it relates to understanding child support, understandings father's right, understanding visitation and custody and how child support and visitation and custody system are not connected.

So these guys they want an understanding often times they come into the program particularly in the state of Minnesota and some of you may have this same reputation within state as it relates to the guy's perception is that they it's a woman's state.

And so automatically they begin to think that I don't have any resources. I don't have any rights. I don't have any opportunities to do anything different about my situation.

So I come in with bump and bruises in terms of what I've already experienced in terms of not knowing how I could actually do something without my situation. I just need the information and being connected with resources to be able to do that. Next slide please. Next slide.

Nigel Vann: Did you miss a slide there Guy?

Guy Bowling: I don't think so.

Nigel Vann: Okay sorry.

Guy Bowling: Oh I'm sorry I did. Here we go. This is the slide I wanted to get to. So now what I wanted to talk to I talked a little bit about the barriers but I think I wanted to get - if you can go actually - yes this is the right stride. So I wanted to get to in terms of strategies in working with these populations.

I want to talk to the strategies that have worked for us. And I think what has been helpful for us is you have to make their program friendly. I think for us just from the standpoint of coming in our doors and the environment that we have in terms of pictures on the wall, in terms of friendly staff, in terms of the greeting of the initial connection that you make in terms of staff that are coming through the door.

It has to be parent friendly. It has to have a field that both parents are supportive, that both parents are involved in the life of children in terms of making that children successful, making that children develop in an effective way. You have to have an environment that comes across to guys as soon as they walk in that door they engage.

The other piece in terms of strategies as we all know you have to select socially competent staff and provide them with ongoing training and supervision. I think one of the things that helps our fathers the most is this we do have staff that knows exactly what their issues are, that knows exactly what their experience has been, that knows exactly how to engage themselves with the guys in order for the guys to feel empowered.

In order for the guys to feel value, in order for the guys to feel important and I think if you don't have that you have to provide opportunities for them to be trained to get to understanding so even if they come with any personal biases as it relates to the population you can begin to provide them with the information to get a better understanding of the population.



So then they can more or less be able to help them and get them more engaged into the program and establish goals and expectations in terms of how they can be successful for themselves and for their kids in create an opportunity for them to be stabilized.

One of the things that we do in terms of integration we look at the father from the standpoint individually. He's important. He's value. How do we help him in terms of his own development? The second piece is parenting access skills and also too do we provide information to them from the standpoint of helping them build skills to parent education, helping them reduce any barriers that gets in the way of them being connected with their kid.

If there are legal barriers, if there's economic barriers how do we directly address those things? And then the last thing from an integrated service model we want to established them as citizens so you understand that you need to vote. You understand that you need to pay child support.

You understand that you have an influence on your community and you have an obligation to give back to the community so that's the other piece. We want to establish and set clear goals to be achieved by the program. We want them to know exactly what it is that we expect of them in addition to why they come into the program.

Establishing a fatherhood plan with them which focuses on our core areas and our core areas are, are you paying child support? Our core areas are, are you working? Our core areas are, are you spending time with your child? And by establishing those goals in addition to what his individual goals are be it chemical dependency issues or mental health issues we have an opportunity for him to be engaged one on one with a case manager through our intensive care management services.

That really helps him feel empowered as an individual and begin to establish a plan for him and then establish objectives in terms of how he can accomplish that plan and then we check in on him on a monthly basis to see where he is with that plan. If it's not working let's reestablish what the goals are.



Let's reestablish what the objectives are to get to the goals but I think with that one on one intensive case management that is a critical piece in terms of helping him move along and continue in terms of the goals established for himself and how to achieve them.

And then the other piece as Nigel knows you have to have a peer support parent education group because we believe that we can best learn from each other through other individuals that have the same or similar experiences in addition to culturally common and trained staff to facilitate these discussions using designed curriculum that focuses on the core issues that these men face.

Because we realize one of the critical components of our program that these guys are experiencing challenges in terms of they've got multiple child support orders. They've got multiple partners. They have a number of different skills that they're still in the process of developing on how to communicate as well as connect with their kids.

One of the ways to support them as they're going through this process of growth and maturity they have to be in a position to be supported by other men like themselves. And so we know that's the most critical component of what we do to have that peer support be it staff, have that peer support be it guys in the program.

And then have information specifically focusing on the issues that they're experiencing. And then I think the last piece which is extremely important in terms of strategy that work for us provide service referral component through collaborative partnerships preferably on site in our office based on a number of services that are provided earlier in our office.

We work with guys as it relates to the issue around child support but we work with gentlemen as it relates to the issue around parenting time or visitation. We work with them as it relates to GED. We work with them as it relates to parent education. We work with them as it relates to early childhood education.

And all those things and also in addition to that we have mental health and chemical health counseling but all those things are on site. We like to say that it's down the hall

as opposed to up the street because what works for these gentlemen who don't have the skill set to navigate the system is if it's like going shopping.

I always use this analogy for males. We like to go one place to get everything be it the shoes, the belt, the pants, the tie I mean the coat, the briefcase whatever it is. We want to go to one particular place to get it and we understand that about these guys in terms of coming in.

What the number of different experiences, coming in with the lack of trust of our programs, coming in and just without information or coming in with bad experiences as it relates to the relationship that it no longer intact. And the thing about it is we want to be able to have them in a position where we engage them by accessing services that addresses the barrier to put them in a better position to be stabilized as well as being involved in the life of their kids.

We want to have everything on site so it's better that we have all of our services here so they can connect right with the folks that they need to address some of the issues that they have because we realize that the one stop shop approach is very effective.

And also too it prepares them to go out into the community to be able to begin to navigate systems on their own. Next slide. Actually you can move past that slide next slide. And I just want to say thank you for allowing me to have this opportunity. I'm wide open for questions.

But I really truly appreciate this opportunity to share this information on some of the things that we have faced in terms of being a program around for ten years working with this population and working with a number of gentlemen who are step-fathers as well as fathers who have multiple mothers.

And some of the challenges that they face and how we address some of those issues based on the services that we have here, based on a program model that we have along with the collaborative partnerships which have been proven to be most effective in helping these guys address a number of those issues.



Nigel Vann: Thank you very much Guy. I just wanted to ask you Guy, did you mean to skip slide eight or did you want to go back and say a few things about...

Guy Bowling: I can. I didn't realize that I had missed slide eight so we can go back to slide eight. Oh okay and my apologies to everyone. Some of the things that we found out in terms of common issues faced by these dads of multiple partners is that they have a strained relationship through with the mother.

As a matter of fact and then what ends up happening is based on the strained relationship, based on a lack of information and based on a lack of confidence to be able to identify resources and connect with resources they end up having little access to their kids because they don't know what to do.

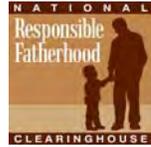
So these are a number of different issues that we listed while working with them over time that have existed and then the other thing that they feel like after the relationship breaks off they don't - they're not able to identify resources. They're not understanding in terms of how they can resolve the situation.

So they end up just doing nothing which then creates a wedge between them and the relationship with their kids and then they just develop a mentality that says well I haven't been around for some time. My kids probably don't need me. I don't feel I have anything to contribute considering what my circumstances are.

Based on the fact that I may have experienced some challenges so I'm not able to be in a position to provide for them economically not looking at the emotional aspects of it. And they feel like I shouldn't just be involved. So that's one of the things too that we have run into in terms of a common issue.

And then as well as a good majority of these guys who are coming into our program and that's why I wanted to give a back drop of who the profile was in terms of men who are participating in the program. A lot of them are coming with incarceration history and illegal drug use.

And so at that time before they actually go into prison or when they come out of prison or even when they're in prison they don't have a relation with their kids going



into or even going out of. And then they have no idea on what skills they need as well as how to develop a relationship with their kids.

And so again they find themselves in that situation and anything initially until they connect with us and a lot of them have multiple child support orders especially those guys who are experiencing children by more than one mother. A lot of times they have multiple child support orders.

So they have to address each order and those orders could be in different counties. Those orders could be in different states. But once those orders begin to start charging them it affects their ability to function if they want to work, if they want to take care of a new family and that ends up being a challenge for them when they come into the program.

Because we have to address each one and then establish a relationship with the county child support office to put him in the position to be able to pay for the most part and put him in a position to have a reasonable child support order based on his level of participation in the program. And some times we can have a great relationship with the county in terms of the child support piece.

But the county that we work with is specifically to the fathers in our program and we don't have a relationship with all of our counties. And each county is different so often times we run into challenges in working with guys that have multiple child support orders.

But we do our best to try to resolve it and have our child support folks start with their child support to see what's best in terms of establishing orders or even resolving situations that puts them in a better position to be stabilized to support himself and his family.

And then at the same time we see that the rates are increasing as it relates to the fathers who are having children by multiple women particularly if they were young and they had sex at an early age and they became a father at an early age.



They for the most part they end up having more than one mom and that ends up creating a challenge. You know, I just was speaking to and then at the same time we end up seeing that these guys are not necessarily marriage material. I mean a number that we see that come into the program if they have multiple partners and it's a high prevalence among African Americans.

And then just a decline because the moms don't want to marry them because it just diminishes the likelihood of marriage because there's an unwillingness among one partner to assume responsibility especially the responsibility of children born out of a current relationship.

And so that ends up becoming a challenge for these guys as it relates to that issue in terms of coming to a relationship when they already have kids outside of the relationship or outside of the marriage. And so that's one of the other issues that the gentlemen face in the program.

And so with that I think that was my last slide but I'm open to questions. I appreciate again the opportunity and I apologize to everyone for missing that earlier slide. But my opinion I think that in order to be effective in working with this population is it's a model.

That you have to have that has the infrastructure to be able to address the multiple barriers that the guys experience that come into your program to get an understanding about how to work with them. And then how do you address those barriers?

And how do you engage the guys again to want to develop the skills that's needed in order to access their resources, to utilize the resource in order to stabilize themselves and their families depending on the situation they're in with the number of children.

Nigel Vann: Well thank you very much Guy. Yes I think you did an excellent job of really sort of laying out the fact that this is central to the work that everybody's doing. You know, the population that most folks are working with through these grants is exactly how you just described it.



And the range of services to help folks is what you've laid out. You know, that's why you're doing all these different things and it's just so important. I think one of the points you made, you know, about and I think Kay made this point too that you've got to have all the staff on board.

And one thing that Guy just did he really pointed out to us how staff need to have an understanding whether you're actually on the grant or whether you're with the agency in the capacity or partner agency but everyone needs to have an understanding about what the life structure is of the folks that we're working with.

And what the myriad issues are that we're trying to deal with so it's just so important to keep that in our minds. You have a staff we need to be focused on that so we can help the parents focus and that's where I want to go a little bit when we move into the questions.

And also I just did want to point out for those of you who were at the conference, you know, if you were in the fatherhood section you saw Guy's panel with some of his fathers. And we really saw there with those guys the results of Guy's program.

So thanks again for that Guy. So let us move to our Q&A section here. We have had a few questions come in. The first one said, we received an email from FAML I that's the organization FAML I stating that can a reauthorization is in trouble and the person is asking is this legitimate?

And I did quickly check with (Lisa Washington Thomas) who in the myriad of responsibilities she has in LFA is involved with TANUF and she said as I suspected, you know, if we don't have any information that there's any trouble with TANUF at this time so I'm not quite sure where that came from but anyway the answer is no on our end.

The next question I'm not quite sure what this person is getting at. I think Kay I'm going to direct this at you and see if you have a take on this. But the question is, would the issue of resource distribution apply is a new child is brought into the picture even without a new partner?



So I'm guessing this is perhaps talking about an adoptive child or a biological child who comes back from another situation but have you got any take on that Kay?

Kay Pasley: Well I was even just thinking about families that have an additional child. Any time you add one more person to the social system it puts a different set of demands on the resources and they get divided further and further. So if grandma comes to live with you, you have less time and attention for kids.

You know, if you have another child visiting periodically coming in and out you have a lot less time attention resources so absolutely it affects whether you change your new partner or you just got somebody coming and going it changes the resources.

Nigel Vann: Okay thank you yes. Here's a question let me point this one to you Guy. This is, it's talking about the group process really. It says how beneficial is it to have a group focused on bringing step-dads together or maybe step-family couples versus dads with multiple partner fertility issues and connect to them with each other versus having a wide blend of experiences in the group?

So, you know, what's your sort of take on that? Should we have specific groups with similar experiences or is there an argument for having a wide blend of experiences?

Guy Bowling: I think I agree with the first point you made Nigel about having a group with similar experiences because I think a wide range of experiences may not be as engaged in the group in terms of the information that's being delivered as far as what's helping them and what's helping them develop skills that they can go and ultimately apply or change their behavior.

I think what has worked for us is a peer led support group that we have in terms of not only do we have the curriculum that focuses on the material that's specific to the core group but also at the same time you have the facilitator that also have the experience that also is able to deliver their curriculum also specifically to the support group that they're a consistent guide.

Because I think our approach is not as if we're the leaders and we're the experts. Our approach is that we provide the information specific to the population and what ends



up happening is we all not only learn from the information we learn from the facilitators.

In addition to that we also learn from one another so I think with having other folks in the group that has the same or similar circumstances I think it creates more cohesiveness within the group. There's more rapport within the group and then at the same thing I think the impact is astronomical because they're learning from one another.

So it's not one particular method that works but there's an alternative in terms of options as far as what you can do. Then it's up to you to be empowered to select one based on the options that's been provided by a number of individuals who were part of that discussion.

Nigel Vann: Yes and I think really that's a question that we could talk all day about. I mean there's a lot in there. You know, I think we do want to be careful of having a group where everybody comes from the same experiences because you really want to help guys and couples, you know, sort of stretch their horizons a bit.

And we do that if we have other perspectives in the room. But I also think when you've got specific issues it helps to have other people who have been there, done that. What would your take be on that Billy in terms of, you know, just sort of a program helping guys with step-parent issues? Do you think it would be useful to have a group just of guys who are step-parents or as a more general discussion?

Billy Petty: Well I think it would be really great to have a program for just the step-fathers. I think especially with like all the statistics that Kay was talking about with - I mean if you look at today the divorce rate in America today most families have step-parents than probably biological parents. And I think it would be a great program to have.

Nigel Vann: Okay great. Yes and so obviously, you know, it's hard based on how your grant works but if you do have the option, you know, if you're aware that you have a number of step-dads in a group it might be worthwhile thinking about ways to have just a separate session with them.

Guy Bowling: And that doesn't mean Nigel that you can't still address the issue. And that doesn't mean you can't provide the information but if you've got gentlemen in the group who have same or similar experiences without necessarily being a replication of the experience but have an idea about it.

It's just helpful as it relates the support that is received within a group in addition to providing information. So that information is specific to something they may have not been able to identify with but ultimately could possibly connect as it relates to other guys in the group.

I think it could be helpful. But I think at the same time part of the group dynamics is you want to keep the guys engaged to a process that they can connect with. And I think that at the same time you also can generate new information.

And it's just an establishment of alternatives based on that new information if you need to take certain skills or you need to apply different behaviors. I think it could be helpful for you to have a broader range of information as opposed to a broader range of guys within your group.

Nigel Vann: Absolutely yes because I think, you know, one of the key things to this whole group work is that what you're doing is you're helping spark more awareness, new ideas in folk. And so by hearing the perspective of people who are not necessarily where you are it does that.

And you may be there at some point right so. Here's a research question so let me direct this at you Kay. This question is, does the research show any difference between the strategies or practices that work with step-parent when younger children or older children are involved? So, you know, is there a difference in age? And you alluded to this a little bit in your presentation but if you just have anything else to say to that.

Kay Pasley: Absolutely and in fact it's one of the things I effectively omitted in some ways. Let me just say this that as children age they gain more experience and knowledge about what living in a family is all about so the older they get before the first family ends and they go into another family the more experience they've had.



And then the more they know about what it's like and of course older kids have more voice than two year old has, more understanding so they're also more likely to speak out about any changes that occur. The research does show that adjustment is much easier when the child is very young particularly two or younger.

By the time the child gets to be six it becomes more complicated and even if the child is six when a remarriage or a re-partnering occurs you'll often see particularly for young women when they reach that preteen area and meno occurs and young men when they reach that preteen area things that have been going well often surface that don't go so well.

And we would find that in first time families so it's not just the step-family issue. But in step-families it becomes embedded in other issues like is it just about that we're a step-family that's what you'll also find when you work with these individuals.

They'll want to say is this unique to us or is this common to other people? Adolescence is the most complicated for step-families and in the sense that again more voice, more experience. They're likely to say don't sit in that child that's my real dad's chair.

Or they're more likely to say you can't tell me what to do you're not my real dad. And they're also because of all of that they have more options. They can leave the home early. They can stop going to school. They can act out in different ways than a two year old would.

A two year old you can corral. A 16 year old is harder to do that with so absolutely it's more difficult the older the child gets. The strategies remain somewhat the same and particularly with adolescence if you come on too strong too quickly you're setting yourself up for failure.

And so I think Billy's example is just prime about that. It really means taking a back seat, starting it slow, supporting the mom in her efforts to parent her own child giving her the support she needs without taking control and laying down the law. Because that really doesn't work with adolescents.



Nigel Vann: Yes very good advice thank you Kay. There's one more question. We are getting a bit tight on time here but there's one more question. It's a fairly long question so I don't know if we can address it fully but let me at least direct part of this to you first Billy.

The question is what sort of advice or guidance might you give to a dad or new couple about engaging with the other parent when that other parent wants to stay involved?

So I'm thinking particularly of a situation Billy with your younger step-son Alex who is still with the biological father. But what sort of advice would you give to other fathers in that situation who want to engage with that father who has the contact with the child?

Billy Petty: Oh as far as my youngest step-son Alex and I pretty much leave the communication between his father and his mother between them. And I just - I pretty much stay out of it. And when Alex comes to town I spend time with him. And in the five years that we've been together I have never talked to his real father.

Nigel Vann: Oh really okay.

Billy Petty: Yes I've never once had any communication with his real father. I leave that between Alex's mother and him because, you know, that's their child. I pretty much stay out of it and just try to be, you know, the best step-father I can when he's in town.

Nigel Vann: Okay. Now in terms of Chris you said that his, you know, that the biological father's been long gone but the - there was another father until he was 14. Has there been any contact with him at all?

Billy Petty: That's Alex's father and he raised Chris for 14 years. And when that divorce happened it was like he divorced the son that he raised for 14 years also. He contacted him the very first Christmas and then the last 4 years has never talked to him.



Nigel Vann: All right.

Billy Petty: And there has been - there's some resentment there on (Chris') part and Chris and I we've talked about it. And, you know, and we talk about his feelings and any - he has sitting down and written his dad a letter.

He just hasn't mailed it yet. He hasn't felt the right time to mail it to tell him how he feels about. You know, because that's the only father he ever really knew and he just pretty much abandoned him when the divorce happened.

Nigel Vann: Yes so we've got all sorts of different situations. Well I'm going to go to Matt in just a minute to do the poll question but then I do want to come back to each of you just briefly and so if you could just sort of take a minute to think about this.

But I'd like each of you just to give us sort of a really a one or two sentence because we are almost out of time. But just a piece of advice for practitioners in either how you really helped or raised the awareness of parents of what to expect in step-parenting situations or multiple partner fertility.

So either how do you help parents really see this or how do you offer some intangible just sort of one nugget that you could leave people with. So I'll let you guys think on that for a minute. And Matt if you could just take us through the poll questions?

Matt Crews: Yes absolutely. Most of you are already familiar with this section. You have six options, strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, or you strongly disagree or no vote. And the question is, I have a better understand of research concerning step-families? And I will give each of you a minute to answer that.

All right poll question number two the advice and suggestions of ways to work with step-fathers was helpful to me. And again you have six options and the no vote is at the bottom if you are with that. All right. Give you guys a couple of more minutes.

Poll question number three. I have a more complete understanding of issues faced by fathers of children in multiple households. Once again I have a more complete understanding of issues faced by fathers of children in multiple households.

And our final question before I go back to Nigel. In general the information presented will be helpful to me in my work with fathers. I'll give a couple of more seconds. All right thank you all for your participation and I'll throw it back to Nigel.

Nigel Vann: Okay thank you very much Matt. And I do realize we are right on time here. Let me just remind you one more time for the healthy marriage grantees that you do have this training on performance, this webinar on the performance measurement training on Thursday.

And for the father grantees you have it on Monday and the father grantees will receive the information on that later today. And our next webinar will be Thursday, October 27 and it will be focused on using the internet and modern media to enhance your fatherhood program.

So with that I would like to give each presenter just the opportunity to leave us with one short nugget of advice for practitioners in terms of how you address these issues with parents either in raising awareness or helping them deal with issues. And, you know, just one or two sentences and Guy if you could speak up a bit we did get a comment that someone couldn't hear you very well.

Guy Bowling: Okay.

Nigel Vann: Whoever wants to go first.

Kay Pasley: I'll go first. I think we just need to caution people that licensed step-families or multi-partnered fertility families are much more complicated than we begin - than we even think of. And if you assume that if the family assumes that it's going to be like a first time family they're setting themselves up for some real stressful and negative situations. So it's really knowing they're complicated and being prepared for complicated family life.

Nigel Vann: Yes absolutely thank you.



Billy Petty: Yes this is Billy again. And I think the one thing that's really important for practitioners to know and other people also is that keeping the line of communications open and realizing that these children have feelings.

And giving them the opportunity to share their feelings instead of just being disciplinarians and, you know, but letting them get their feelings out. I think that's the one thing that's really important because they go through such a traumatic thing through the divorces and new relationships with step-parents.

Nigel Vann: Absolutely you know that's what this root is all about you're right we're trying to help parents get their feelings out and understand that yes so wonderful Billy. Okay Guy you get the final word.

Guy Bowling: All right. Hopefully everybody can hear me. I think the piece of advice that I would give to practitioners is one of the things that we live by and that's to have the ability to identify where that parent is and then meet them where they're at.

As Dr. Pasley was saying very common with the number of different complicated issues and challenges and each of those need targeted approaches to helping them deal with them. I just think you have to be patient. I think you have to be diligent.

And I think you have to be supportive and at the same time I think you have to have the capacity to be able to address them be it within what you do or a connection with those folks who can do that for the participants.

Nigel Vann: Great thank you very much Guy. And I think, you know, with what you all said there really underlined the work that people are doing which is to help parents really understand that they're not in this alone. Other people are dealing with the same issues and here we are as a group to help each other deal with this.

You'll see that the screen you had in front of you a minute ago reminded you. You can send us any comment and we're particularly interested in ideas you may have that you'd like to see for future webinar topics just email us to the address on your screen. And we look forward to talking to you next time. Thank you very much everybody.



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NRFC Technical Assistance Webinar
Helping Fathers Address Stepfamily and Multiple Partner Fertility Issues



Operator: Ladies and gentlemen that does conclude the conference call for today. We thank you for your participation and ask that you please disconnect your line.

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