



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
ADMINISTRATION ON CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Semi-Annual Performance Report – Cover Sheet

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*\*note for 17-month projects, two semi-annual reports and on 5 month report are required before the final report is submitted. Check here if this is the 5-month report*
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# **Project Fatherhood Final Report**

**Project Period 9/30/01 – 3/29/06**

## **Executive Summary**

Project Fatherhood Children's Institute International (CII) is a five year demonstration program designed to improve the lives of abused/neglected and/or at-risk children by treating bonding, attachment difficulties between fathers and their biological children. Components of the program include group therapy for fathers, small group, play therapy activities for children, vocational counseling for fathers, assistance with community support and advocacy for fatherhood initiatives.

After the fatherhood program was completely established, the Principal Investigator and staff trained other male professionals and helped them replicate the CII Fatherhood Program in settings as varied as churches and prisons.

The clinical component of the program involved direct group contact with fathers. We demonstrated that when you remove the internal impediments fathers are able to parent their biological children appropriately. We tested the hypotheses that fathers are absent from their children's lives because of poor self esteem, social and psychological isolation, intergenerational factors, and/or external stresses.

We designed a Men In Relationships Group manual that a trained Mental Health Professional can use to establish a fatherhood group in his setting. The session themes are: 1) Introduction to father's specific parenting. 2) Understanding Child Abuse & Neglect. 3) The long term affects of Loss & Separation. 4) Distinguishing between Punishment & Discipline. 5) Normal Child Development 6) Domestic Violence 7) Substance Abuse 8) Communicating Needs 9) Rights of Passage, from Boyhood to Man. 10) Choosing a Healthy Mate.

In a group therapy setting the fathers work through areas of unresolved conflict and practice how to parent their children appropriately. The improved relationship between father and children were charted in the group notes and measured by standardized tests of fathers and children.

The recidivism rate for children in the Child Protective Services was less than 1%. The recidivism rate for fathers was ½%.

Direct services to fathers included a behavioral based job seeking component THE JOB CLUB. Seventy-Five Fathers and Mothers participated in The Job Club. We found that 85% of the fathers were employed and 100% of the fathers had a work history. Employment and fiscal responsibility are a part of our goal of a healthy father-child relationship.

Parallel children's group activities are conducted while the fathers attend the Men in Relationships Group (MIRG) group. The time father and child spend traveling to and from the session is an intricate part of the fatherhood program. We were pleased to find that the children became friends. The ages of the children ranged from infancy to adolescents.

We trained 112 professionals from 65 different churches and family service organizations. We trained the professionals by both lecture and taking them through the same process that they will take the fathers through in their respective settings. We learned that the issues of father absence were as relevant for the professionals as it was for the at-risk fathers.

We disseminated our finding through presentations at National, State and Local conferences, three fatherhood films, newspaper articles and as a model program by the Administration Children Youth and Families. (ACYF).

The Los Angeles County Department of Children & Family Services chose our fatherhood model as a funded model in its \$12 million dollar Family Preservation Program.

Over the grant period 18 fatherhood programs were started by professionals that attended the Five Day Training. Our model called for trained professionals and a mature experienced father to pair up and start a new cost effective fatherhood group to have a readily acceptable neighborhood fatherhood program. Once a father commits to the program his case is never closed and he and his children are free to return as needed throughout their life.

## **I. Introduction and Overview**

### **A. Overview of the Community, Population and Problems**

Children's Institute, International (CII) demonstration project "Project Fatherhood" will increase the positive involvement of low-income high-risk urban fathers in their children's lives. Project Fatherhood is designed to carry out the legislative responsibilities established by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), improving the quality of services provided to child victims of maltreatment and their families. This model offers fathers a comprehensive, therapeutic program in a group setting, in lieu of home based services, providing effective, efficient services in a mutually supportive environment that promotes group interaction, accountability and role modeling.

Project Fatherhood's evidence based program promotes positive, responsible parenting and addresses traumatic experiences in the fathers' backgrounds that continue to affect their relationships with their children and partners. In addition to resolving early childhood traumas, men learn basic child development principles, parenting skills, and appropriate methods of discipline. The program uses trained mental health professionals who work with fathers on a case-by-case basis to explore the relationships with their children and address their own concerns.

This funding will allow CII to expand the program and to develop a longitudinal research plan, the curricula and materials necessary for replication of the model and a train the trainer program. To facilitate replication, staff from at least 30 social service agencies will be selected to participate in an intensive training program leading to certification in the model. They will then be given ongoing support and technical assistance as they implement the program in their own agencies.

### **Why Fathers?**

CII's Project Fatherhood was developed in response to a growing local, state, and national focus on the urgent need to re-engage many fathers – particularly in urban settings – in the care and upbringing of their children. The presence of healthy, nurturing fathers has a profound effect on the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development of children. Children from fatherless homes are more likely to be poor; drop out of school;

become involved in drug and alcohol abuse; suffer from health and emotional problems; become involved in crime and join gangs and become parents as teenagers.

Despite the reduction in these risk factors when fathers are positively engaged with their children, most child welfare agencies are ill-equipped to effectively work with fathers and indeed often avoid including them in treatment programs.

### **High-Risk Fathers**

The target population for Project Fatherhood includes fathers of high-risk children who are living in metropolitan Los Angeles. High-risk is defined as those fathers who are facing poverty, homelessness, a familial history of single parenthood, violence, physical abuse, substance abuse, recent or long-term lack of employment, and/or limited experience in interacting with their children.

There has been a significant change in family structure in the United States over the past two decades. The number of single-parent households (primarily women) has increased by 40% since the 1970s. In Los Angeles, this trend has far surpassed the national average, 35% of families are headed by a single female parent (United Way State of the County Report 1999). African-American and Hispanic families in urban areas are over-represented in this population. These factors have contributed to a significant increase in family disintegration.

Family disintegration causes tremendous crises for all family members – children, mothers, and fathers. According to the Bureau of Census (1991), poverty rates in single female-headed families are six times higher than two-parent families. Research confirms that the strongest predictor of success outcomes for children in families is income level (Astone and McLanahan, 1989). However, economic factors are not the only cause for poor outcomes in disintegrating families. With the rise in single female parents in the work force, the need for fathers to increase their participation in parenting has grown dramatically, too. Unfortunately, in urban communities where poverty, violence, and chaos are the norm, many fathers are unprepared to meet this ever-growing challenge. This is particularly true in the target area addressed by Project Fatherhood.

Indeed, Los Angeles has men who come from a multi-generational history of single parent families (Astone and McLanahan, 1989). Generation after generation, young men in Los Angeles have received little or no mentorship or modeling in

preparation for their role of fatherhood. There are social pressures now for fathers to increase their involvement in parenting, yet they often have few stools and limited support with which to meet these challenges. Fathers in Los Angeles, as well as other impacted urban cities, lack confidence in their ability to parent, fear rejection from their children once they have been absent from the family, and experience sex-role conflict because they have been raised to believe that the nurturing of children is not part of masculine identity (Wall and Levy, 1994).

Without question, children benefit emotionally, educationally, and physically when their fathers are involved in a consistent, loving relationship with them. Demonstration of positive role models in childhood can prevent the cycle of abuse and dysfunction being repeated in subsequent generations. Disadvantaged, never-married, non-custodial fathers can, through appropriate intervention and support strategies, develop the confidence and ability to nurture and care for their children effectively and responsibly.

In defining both the need and appropriate intervention strategies for Project Fatherhood, Children's Institute, International staff utilized a variety of approaches, including: focus-group discussion with teens and parents who are currently receiving services from CII; focus-group discussion with community agency representatives, including school representatives from neighboring Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) schools; recognized experts in the field, i.e., "Rites of Passage" creators Ron Johnson (African American), and Jerry Tello (Hispanic), and Charles A. Ballard; and an extensive review of the current literature.

### **Fathers in Need**

Project Fatherhood will be administered through CII's Central facility, and will provide services to an urban geographic area that includes the Downtown Los Angeles, Pico-Union, Westlake, South Central, Hollywood, Mid-Wilshire, and Boyle Heights Districts of Los Angeles, encompassing more than one-fifth of the metropolitan area. This area ranks as one of the most ethnically diverse in the world—comprised of Hispanic (58%), African-American (20%), Asian Pacific Islander (12%) and Caucasian individuals (8%). Of the Hispanic population, 41% speak only Spanish, and of the Asian population, 29% are unable to speak English.

Nearly one-third of the residents of the area served by CII are under the age of 18. Rates of reported crime for this area are among the highest in metropolitan Los Angeles, including robbery, aggravated assault, homicide, and rape. The residents of the Los Angeles Police Department's Rampart Division, which encompasses much of the area served by CII, "have the dubious distinction of living in the most densely populated areas of the city, and consequently one of the most violent," according to a 1994 report made by the Los Angeles Independent Newspapers Group. There are as many as 49 warring gangs with over 5,000 gang members, including the two largest Hispanic gangs in the city (Westside 18<sup>th</sup> Street, and "MS"). Over half of the residents (53%) report that they dropped out of high school. Child abuse referrals and out-of-home placements for the target community are also alarmingly high. School provides little respite for children in this community, due to the extreme overcrowding of its elementary and middle schools, coupled with a scarcity of support services for children and/or their parents. With all of these risks factors threatening children in this area, the involvement of fathers in their lives is crucial. Project Fatherhood's vision is to establish an evidence based therapy program that results in healthy, responsible, mature and nurturing fathers.

B. Overview of Program Model

The Project Fatherhood vision is to establish an evidence based therapy program that results in healthy responsible, mature and nurturing fathers.

**Goal 1. Participating fathers will be able to more consistently and effectively fulfill their responsibilities as parents and will be able to parent their children in a more healthy and nurturing manner.**

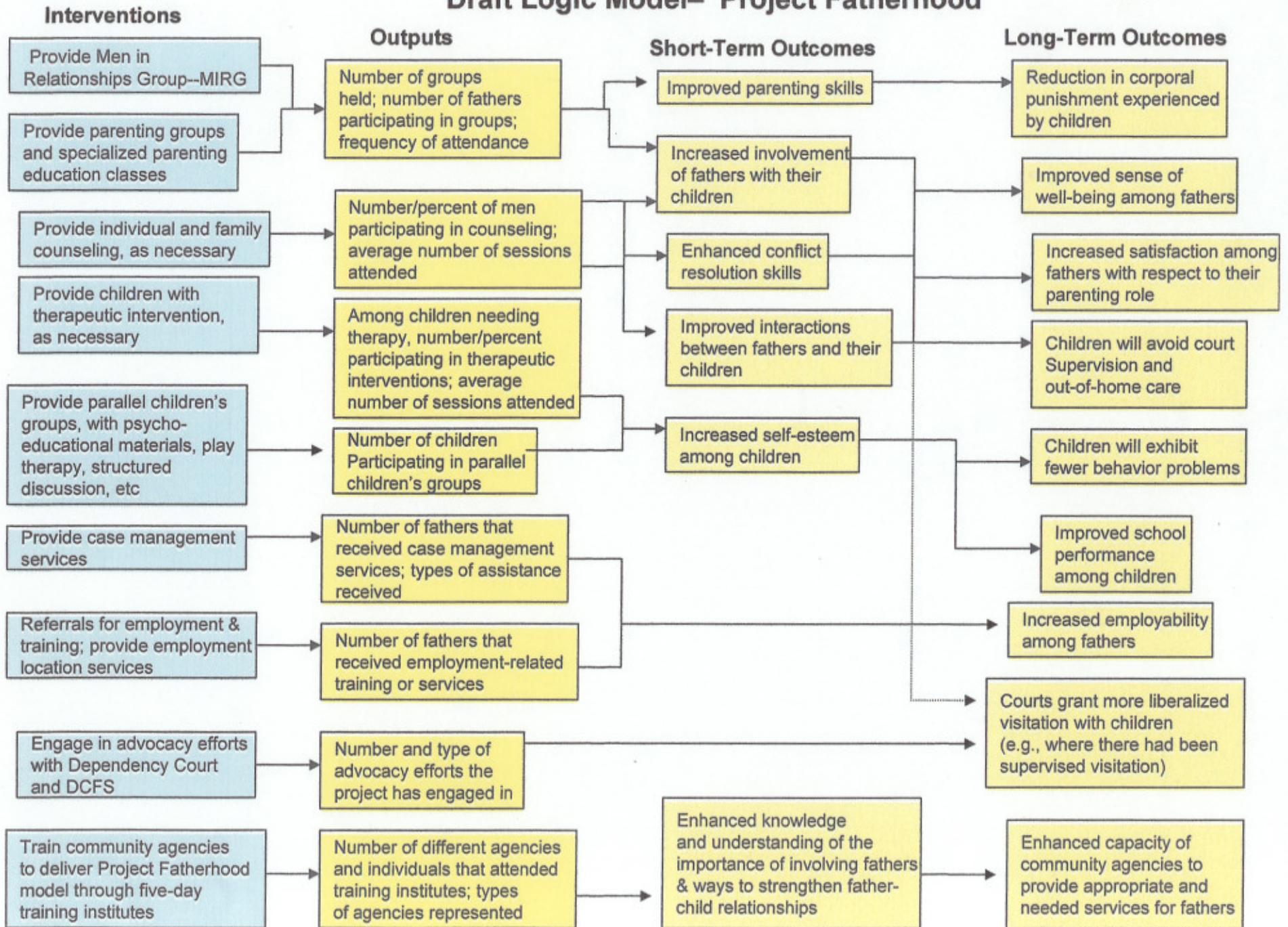
**Goal 2. Children of participating fathers will demonstrate improved functioning at home, at school and in relation to peers and will be free from abuse and neglect.**

**Goal 3. Child Welfare agencies will become better able to competently engage and serve biological fathers of high-risk children.**

The program Fatherhood Program is outlined with the following **Logic Model**. Project Fatherhood is nestled in the continuum of services at Children's Institute, International's children and their father often receive supportive services from other programs within Children's Institute, International.

# Draft Logic Model– Project Fatherhood

9-7-05



### C. Overview of Evaluation

The research designed called for traditional objective measures: The Parenting Stress Index, The Father Inventory, The Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist and clinical observations charted from MIRG participation and indirect measures like school work, employment, lack of more system involvement.

The clinical measures are charted weekly and the symptoms and behaviors are used to determine the client's level of positive social functioning. The less than one percent rate of re-abuse of children that have been neglected or abused is well below the national average for the cohort.

The training component resulted in 112 professionals trained on the CII treatment model. A demographic projection of the MIRG members and the subjective evaluation of the training are presented on the following pages.

## **Project Fatherhood Five Day Training Institute Recorded Comments from Trainees**

**Kojo Rikondja**  
**El Nido Family Center**

*I think this is the best men's meeting that I have been because it addresses men's issues and issues of fatherhood and I think that most men eventually are going to become father's whether by choice or by accident and I think that this program is essential in agencies, churches, all religious institutions and community based organizations that have contact with children and men who want to be involved with their families. It provides an opportunity for the women to see that men do care and society as a whole to see that men do care and to sort of turn the tide on the attitude that males in the urban communities basically do not want to have anything to do with their children and I think that this is very important.*

**Heliodoro Radillo**  
**Spiritt Family Services**

*This training and this program is very much needed throughout the communities. I see it as a source of reestablishing the fathers with their own kids or who have lost contact or somehow been affected and continue to affect all these children who later on in society have all these juvenile problems. We so label society as a lack of parenting or lack of fatherhood or a lack of one or two parents. We're easy to put labels on things but we're not good at establishing programs and this program is one that is most needed throughout the city, throughout the county, throughout the state, throughout the nation, throughout the world. There is a much needed way to look at the father figure role model instead of all these luxurious needs of other superstars throughout sports, throughout the city, throughout role models that mad dash display. What's really going on in your house? How are you being a father to these kids? Are you being a father's to these kids? Are you there emotionally, mentally, and supportive. A much much needed program.*

**Joseph McNeeley**  
**Spiritt Family Services**

*I found this training to be extremely positive. I was most impressed with the instructor's how open they were and how knowledgeable there were. It really opened up this classroom for courageous participation by all the members. It brought to the forefront a lot of the issues that are confronting fathers past, present, and future I believe. This program I can't say enough about this program. There's so much that happened within this week it's so condensed that it probably should run for the rest of the year. My impression is that from here for most of us if not all of us to get in as a client or member of a group before we actually start teaching this a little that we have a feeling and a touch for it. I don't think that we can talk enough about these topics and for whatever reason society has steam rolled over the male figure for so long and it's time for us to*

*stand up. We stand alone but together and I think with the power of one is tremendous but when more than one stands up things start to change.*

**Horacio Rodriguez**  
**Spiritt Family Services**

*I feel that I've gotten a tremendous amount of knowledge from the instructor's and in particular from the group. I think I gained a better understanding how men can relate to their children. I know that doing domestic violence groups it will be a real important tool for me because a lot of the men have a disconnection from their children especially boys so I'm going to take back and I'm going to employ what I can in those groups and also I do drug and alcohol groups so I'm going to use what I've learned here to help the men become better fathers and become more responsible adults.*

**Kenneth Lyn**  
**ABC Child Development, Inc.**

*I didn't know what to expect when I attended the group on the first day there was a whole bunch of lectures but it was an eye opening experience that you get to see yourself you get to see yourself as a male and how you relate to your kids, your peers, and especially just finding out who you are and addressing a lot of issues that sometimes people are either afraid to address or not able to. This program is definitely needed everywhere. Whatever age you are, religion, race, whatever, but I think it's something that you have to experience before you get to teach the class and I think that's something that people will learn a lot more.*

**Carlos McDonald**  
**Masonic Homes of Covina**

*I was very pleased with the knowledge that I received through the instructor's first and the classmates. It's interesting to know the roots of a problem like the lack of involvement of the male. You can see it through history and it repeats itself and I think a program like this will bring out the root of the problem and then you can address it. I'm hoping the program will be implemented in my agency and sometime in my life because it starts with one person but it becomes a group.*

**James McEwen**  
**HOLLYGROVE**

*I enjoyed learning the model and seeing how it is applicable in a group setting with everyone because there's no real space that I see where men are able to present their issues with other men because there's not really an environment for that and I think that this provides people with the space to do that. That's safe for them.*

**Rocky Hinds**  
**The Salvation Army Bell Shelter**

*I really enjoyed the training to the point where I will go out and get some fathers to come and join this.*

**William Terrell**  
**The Salvation Army Bell Shelter**

*I'm very impressed with the model. Project Fatherhood is a simple way to solve a lot of the ills of society today it seems. A lot of problems that we are having with absentee fathers and fathers that just don't understand or know how to be fathers and they need help with this and I'm very impressed with this and impressed enough to go back to my place and start a proposal for a group.*

**Lonnie Bennett**  
**The Salvation Army Bell Shelter**

*First I noticed that I will never look at father's the same again. I realize after attending this group that there's much more to being a male and fatherhood. If you're not a father you have a father and I think that we've all been affected in a positive or negative way by our fathers. It was brought out in this group. I just learned so much about fatherhood here and I know it will help me in dealing with other men that I know I will have to deal with on a daily basis.*

**Yanes Apolinar**  
**Para Los Ninos**

*I'm impressed because it's the first time I've attended a male meeting in about 30 years here in the United States. I attend a lot of meetings but sometimes I'm the only male in the meeting. This is one chance to speak like a male and that what I feel that we can express so many things that we have in our heart and we never say and we have the chance to say it. I believe in Project Fatherhood. I used to have a parenting class and I used to invite the parents.*

**Jose Mendez**  
**Para Los Ninos**

*I love this program. This is a great program. It has helped me and touched me as a father and I want to be a better father and I want to implement this at our agency and even other locations also. I'm very impressed with the staff here and I would love to imitate them.*

**Joseph Ortiz**  
**Plaza Community Center, Inc.**

*I'm pleased to have been part of the Fatherhood Training Program. I feel that it has clarified the importance and the needs for greater father involvement in the lives of their children. I feel that it addressed well the areas that need to be clarified if children are to have physically and psychologically healthy lives.*

**Ernest McRae**  
**JB Counseling & Consulting, Inc.**

*I appreciate the opportunity that I was afforded to get in-depth testimonials about substance abuse and how it affected individuals in the family as well as domestic violence and the issues of loss and grief. I think that these things don't get talked about enough and to hear people expand on it was very educational for me and again thank you for the opportunity.*

**John Weathers**  
**Healthy African American Families (HAAF)**

*I want to say thank you for this awesome group here. I want to say thank you for an awesome Director and teachers. This program has opened up for me something I have never witnessed before. As a man to share information with all you guys was awesome. I appreciate the program Project Fatherhood. I will go with my sons first of all and work with them with this program. Then I will take it and go into my agency and I will also work along with my church with this program because it is definitely needed. Thank you so much.*

**Carlos G. Arguello**  
**LACOE Head Start**

*I'm very grateful to be given to opportunity to come here. It's been great considering especially it's a group of men. I work with men while 95% women and this has been an excellent group and I feel that it has been personally very therapeutic for me listening to everyone sharing and listening to men's different perspective on things. It's been educational and its information that I will be able to take back and hopefully start a men's group and have them benefit from what I have learned here. It tells me by coming here that there's hope and I feel very confident about the intelligence and other potential that men have as parents.*

**David Rico**  
**Los Angeles County Office of Education**

*This is my second time around. I came last time. The first time was more intellectual I was busy trying to take notes and try to absorb all the information for my agency. Even though I participated it's not the same when you do it the second time around because*

*this time I came for myself. I really enjoyed it because first off seldom do we men get to express ourselves openly because of taboo, culture or whatever you want to call it and the fact that you come to do it freely without anyone judging you or anyone criticizing or laughing at you. It's really healthy. But more so the fact that I've bonded with several men perhaps I will never see you again but I know that somewhere out there you are out there and that we are all thinking good thoughts about fatherhood and hopefully this will translate into our children growing healthy and they in turn will be good role models for their children. Just that alone I think the second time around and I recommend if you can do it again do it again because it becomes more of a personal thing rather than intellectual or for my job but for me. I want to thank you and all the men for sharing there lives with me.*

**Ennio Deras**  
**CII**

*I started the Fatherhood Program about a month ago as an Art Teacher. I came just to observe and to learn about the program too. But at the same time I learned about everybody else and I really admire what you guys are doing. Thank you to Dr. Swinger for inviting me and thank you very much.*

**Jose Luis Gallegos**  
**Human Services Association**

*When I heard that I was accepted to come to the training I got very excited. I had a lot of expectations to come here and all my expectations and all my excitement was more than accomplished. The training was exciting and I don't have any words I can express myself and how this training helped me. I'm committed I'm convinced that this is the way to go we need to go and will go and I will try to help all the men that I can because this is a great need in our life.*

**Pastor Dana Everage**  
**Crenshaw Christian Center**

*Part of the problems or issues that are raised in Project Fatherhood really helps an individual come out of the Western World mindset of individualism and feeling like we are alone. A lot of men feel like they are alone because they don't have viable relationships and opportunities to express themselves in ways that are not condemning and ways that are edifying, in ways that are encouraging and I believe that the Project Fatherhood Program is a way that will not only help men be better fathers but really so that men will really learn to take their rightful roles and rightful responsibilities as men in a world that needs to understand what manhood is really about. The information that is shared in the program is very insightful. The doctor's that present the information in ways that is clear, concise, easy to understand even for individuals who are not necessarily licensed or professional in that sense of the terminology but I believe that it is something that can be used in churches, in families so that all men of all race, religion, ethnicity, and background that we can all come together as one and understand our role*

*and responsibilities and taking that fatherhood task on that would bring glory and edification to a dying world.*

**Wayne Powell**  
**D'Veal Family & Youth Services**

*I have also had the privilege of being in many men's groups many conducted fatherhood counseling sessions and fatherhood groups and also served as USA Today Black Dad's Panel and in my experience this has been perhaps the single most important training that I've had and the reason I say that is because to me this program represents a diamond in a world of darkness where the need is so great and its shining just to illuminate to let us know what exactly we have to contend with as fathers and as men. The interesting thing about this training is that what really set it aside and apart from others that I've experienced is that for the first time I came into a group where men of different cultures and different backgrounds different ages experiences but everyone had the same basic basic issues and problems that they are dealing with and this training session allowed us to do what I think is being done throughout the course of this program and that is to be able to expose ourselves and share that we all have some common basic needs and we have common pains and many of us cried and shed tears and many of us identified with each other and what we have so in that the training component was very significant. I can only imagine now what the program is going to do in terms of the other men out there because we only represent a microcosm of what actually is going on out in the world of the men that we have to meet and deal with. The other thing that is significant of the program for me was the approach that's being taken when you look at labeling and how detrimental labeling can be and the importance of Project Fatherhood to dispel that myth of how we should continue to label our children and how that has affected our children and affected us as fathers and then the open-ended approach of how we deal with each other in our sessions and so it's just so many valuable valuable things that I learned here in this training. I am looking and our agency is looking to partner with you so that we can continue the same mission that you are doing.*

**Martin Zuniga**  
**Community Development Commission**

*Gee, I don't even know where to start. This week has made an impact on me. A very deep impact because I spoke about things I've never spoke to anyone about things that were bothering me deeply. It felt good to release some of that weight that I had on my back that I was carrying. I was here I felt like a sponge just absorbing a lot and learning from every single one of you guys. Every single one of you guys made an impact on me and I realized that I'm not the only one with problems. My problems are nothing compared to some of the problems that you guys went through. It made me a stronger man. I feel like a better father. Now I can go out there and try to be a better father to my son. The only thing I wish for is that why didn't a program like this happen fifteen years ago when I became a father. I was lost and now I feel like I'm getting a sense of direction. Now my duty now is, I think it's my duty to squeeze some of that stuff from that sponge and pass it around to other fathers that I come across and it's going to start with my family, my*

*siblings because that's where it really starts at home. If you practice it at home you can distribute it to not only to your family, co-workers, your friends, and even your agency the place that you work. I want to thank Dr. Swinger for giving me the opportunity to be here and every one of you guys for taking the time to listen to me. I hope I run into you guys somewhere out there. Thanks.*

**Argelis Ortiz**  
**CII**

*When I heard about the Project Fatherhood Training I jumped at the fact that I was going to try to gain hours with great professionals and male professionals especially such great role models as Dr. Swinger and Dr. Banks visionaries and being out there on the front line and doing the damn thing. This week went pretty fast for me. It was Monday and the next thing I knew it's Friday already. I thank you and I appreciate every second of it because I got to know twenty something male father figures so now I have twenty something male father figures in my life which I can pull from and I can remember and I can experience through my work and my community. This was the first time I was ever in a Men In Relationships Group which was something else. It wasn't what I imagined. I can't pinpoint it but I can only imagine like Martin Zuniga said what would happen if Project Fatherhood was there when I was growing up because I have a good, healthy relationship with my father. I could just only imagine how healthy and better our relationship would be now if there had been a Project Fatherhood growing up. It would be even better.*

**Javier Zuniga**  
**Psychiatric Social Worker**  
**Los Angeles Unified School District**  
**Tenth Street Elementary School**

*When I was sent here as part of my training I thought, "Another training, one more time, a bunch of info to put in my drawer." But after having gone through the experiential component of the training I believe this is a necessity and a vital service needed in our community, in our churches and our schools. We have to bring in the parents. It's a population that is long neglected and we have to expand the services and reach out to more fathers and bring them in. I can't thank you enough for this training. Amazing!*

**Eugene Alper, LCSW**  
**Psychiatric Social Worker**  
**LAUSD School Mental Health**

*I'd like to echo what Javier had to say regarding the experiential component. In contrast to other trainings, this one leaves a lasting impression. It's a wonderful model for trainings as well as a group. To have us go through what the participants go through and experience it the way they do shows that we know exactly what's going to happen when we go out to facilitate the groups. We also had the benefit of learning about ourselves. And being in a room full of 20 guys and having an opportunity to talk about hurts, pains*

*mistakes and what they've learned and how they've grown. One other thing. I want to say it was also an opportunity to have a multi cultural experience. A Jewish guy from Venice, doesn't often get down with a bunch of African-American and Latino guys with what's going on in their lives. You rarely get a chance to communicate like that and that's something that will definitely stay with me.*

**William Denson**  
**Community Activist**

*People perish without knowledge. But here there was so much knowledge and caring. I look at this program as the automobile, the cotton gin or the personal computer. It can change the world. Project Fatherhood Men in Relationships Group has that potential - to change California, the United States and the world. And that's how impressed I am with the group. This is even more important, this workshop allowed me to look in the mirror and internalize everything about me to make me a better husband, father and man. This will allow me to better help others. I look at this as a historic moment and one day I'll be able to say to my grandkids, "I was honored and proud to say that I was a part of this." I have tremendous love and respect for this program.*

**Joshua Potter-Efron**  
**Community Therapist**  
**The HELP Group**

*This training has been important on many levels. In addition to motivating me to do groups with fathers, I myself have done groups with boys without fathers. It never occurred to me to try to get the fathers involved. Just because the father's aren't involved, does not mean that the fathers can't be involved. It really breaks down those stereotypes. In addition to getting groups implemented, I've also done training and I hope to bring some information back to our therapists, and use it in the individual therapy that we do. And I feel this training will carry on in a lot of different ways.*

**Daniel W. Puls, Psy.D.**  
**Psychologist**  
**Intercommunity Child Guidance Center**

*Thanks for letting me participate. This is not just another men's group. It is an emphasis on how they are fathers and how they can improve the lives of their children, that's the emphasis, it's got to be passed on to the kids. They always say, "You can give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day. If you teach a man to fish he will eat for a lifetime." That's what I think we're going to do - Teach men to father, to be fathers and in that way we can break the negative cycles that are passed onto kids. And that's why I'm excited about his program.*

**John K. Proctor**  
**Psychiatric Social Worker**  
**School Mental Health**

*I got a lot out of this program. It's an excellent education about human beings in general and excellent education about myself. I met a lot of wonderful, kind men with excellent character, with abilities to understand themselves and other people. I'll use this program whether informally with family and friends or out officially in a professional capacity. I am appreciative of this excellent program and recommend it to anyone who is a part of helping people.*

**Eric C. Murillo-Angelo**  
**Director, Family Preservation**  
**El Centro Del Pueblo**

*I was excited about coming to this training because I see lack of involvement of fathers in the lives of their children and a system that, at times has a negative bias toward fathers. This is a successful approach that addresses the core factors impacting fathers.*

**Daniel Pore, Sr.**  
**Substance Abuse Counselor**  
**Department of Mental Health**

*What I received is something that I think will equip our community with support where there has been minimal support in the area of fatherhood. It has equipped me with greater knowledge of the need to be a vital part of facilitating this program that instructs and teaches others to help fathers become better fathers. This is something that definitely needs to continue*

**John A. Abdullah-Hasan, LCSW, DAPA**  
**Diplomate in Psychotherapy**

*I greatly appreciated the opportunity to be exposed to the Project Fatherhood training. This is a tremendous benefit to the fathers in our community, and it offers a fresh, new approach to families with an emphasis on fathers, as well as children. I'm grateful to be able to take it back to the school.*

**Alfonso Rubio, M.A.**  
**Executive Director**  
**Child Alliance Family Counseling & Support Services**

*I learned a lot of insight from the group. I got a lot of personal and professional growth and plan to implement it in agencies I work with. The need for a Fatherhood program within the community, especially in the area of South Central is vital.*

**Edwin Sanchez**  
**Father of Special Need Kids**  
**Blind Children's Center**

*I was grateful to be invited. I learned a lot and it helped me talk to parents and help them and myself to be a better parent. I think that me and Carlos will form a good group to help other parents become better parents.*

**Lamar Mickey, M.A.**  
**Foster Care Supervisor**  
**Children's Way Foster Family Agency**

*At first I came out to learn the Project Fatherhood model and take it back to my agency. But what I got out of it was personal growth. With me being a new father and step father I learned stuff that was beneficial to me. I look forward to continuing my relationship with this agency and taking Project Fatherhood back to my agency and implementing it.*

**Louis G. Long, Ph.D.**  
**Child Development Specialist**  
**LAUSD School Mental Health**

*I really enjoyed this training. The tone was set by the personalities that presented the program. If you can't bond with the people, you can't bond with the program. It was effortless, and set a conducive tone to learning. I'm excited about Project Fatherhood and I think all of us are doing it all the time anyway, but to do it in a way that is concentrated, systematic and organized is helpful in every avenue. I was just brainstorming of all the ways that we could utilize this program and I thought about hospitals and identifying infants from birth and engaging their fathers in therapy. There are so many ways that we can be effectual. It was ideal in every sense of the word.*

**T. Cleveland Rush**  
**In-Home Outreach Counselor**  
**Project Impact/LA County Family Preservation**

*I'm happy because of what I've experienced. I guess I'm one more hurt soul who has experienced a lot of healing as a result of this week. This model has demonstrated that this is a program that cuts to the core of who you are. And I know that I am a freer person as a result of this meeting because I was able to share some things that I had not shared with anyone. And just that my own personal testimony of where I am right now in my tract is my impetus and my inspiration to search and find a way to share it with someone else. I thank all of you for making this program happen, and yes I am on fire and do want to share this with someone else.*

**Kerry L. Mowdy**  
**MFT Trainee**  
**Children's Center of Antelope Valley**

*This program has brought to me the power of getting a group of men together and what can happen when this occurs, an opportunity for men to be able to express themselves with unconditional regard. I learned that we've had similar experiences and can relate it to our lives. This program has the potential for healing and unlimited growth. I already knew the need for this and being here has been a wonderful experience for me, just to hear other people's stories and feel the model take hold. What I've gained from this to take into my community. Probation, parole, youths and those just out of prison, most already have children and never had a father or role models. This program has so much potential that I can't thank you enough for being a part of it.*

**Carlos Martinez**  
**Parent Mentor**  
**Blind Children's Center**

*I've been to this training twice now and it's been a wonderful help. I truly feel that if we all do something like this, then it will help a lot of men. My agency will continue working with this program and we will implement it.*

**Henry Salazar**  
**Community Gang Reduction Project, Inc.**

*This is my third time being here and the purpose for me is to get fresh ideas and take them back to show that what we're doing here helps. People can know that there are other solutions to being a better father.*

## COMMENTS FROM EVALUATIONS

*"What an impact this training has had! To share and hear what other men shared regarding Domestic Violence, Substance Abuse, Loss and crises, has shown me that we all have experienced the above and have been affected in similar ways. We can change the negative attitudes held by many in society that say that men especially those in the inner city do not want to be good fathers."*

*"As a Social Worker Therapist working in the field for 20 plus years, I have always expressed the need for a program such as this. I have conducted numerous Men's groups; Fatherhood sessions and I have never experienced a training such as this. I will leave here motivated to partner with this program in providing a much needed service for the numerous fathers in the community. Thank you Dr. Swinger and Dr. Banks and the entire staff for your commitment."*

*"It was amazing how everyone felt respected for where they came from and for where they are now."*

*"Not only is this an awesome program both doctors were awesome in the training. This program should be funded so agencies can implement this Project Fatherhood."*

*"The format was comfortable but everyone going around commenting on certain subjects was somewhat draining."*

*"As I stated this is my second time taking the training and it was better this time. It was better because I didn't have the pressure of assimilating all the information but rather soaking in the atmosphere and the bonding with other males."*

*"Given the time to share personal experiences and be ourselves works great! As men, we learned from each other, and grew emotionally. I recommend that all men be required to participate in this type of training twice yearly."*

*"It would be nice to see the group again sometime down the road to share how it has worked at their programs."*

*"Excellent Program"*

*"The training was challenging of your mind, soul and spirit. It gives a start for men to address their hurt and gives a direction for men to relate better to their children. For so long, children's role model or superstar have been sports heroes or music movie stars, when is it that children can say their "father" is their hero and role model. This training can be the first step. There will be pain involved in addressing issues but "no pain no gain."*

*"Perhaps a field trip, i.e. Museum of Tolerance."*

*"I feel that Dr. Banks and Dr. Swinger are definitely what the world needs. Men of example, courage, knowledge and most of all humanistic traits of honesty, integrity and heart. Thank You."*

*"I thank Dr. Swinger and Dr. Banks for giving me the opportunity of a life time to further enhance my educational and personal career."*

*"I will continue with my parenting classes and invite the fathers."*

*"I loved it. This was great and I hope I can share this great material as the instructor's did. I can't wait to see the fruit of this training work in my agency. I loved the support from the group and the camaraderie of the group. Thank You."*

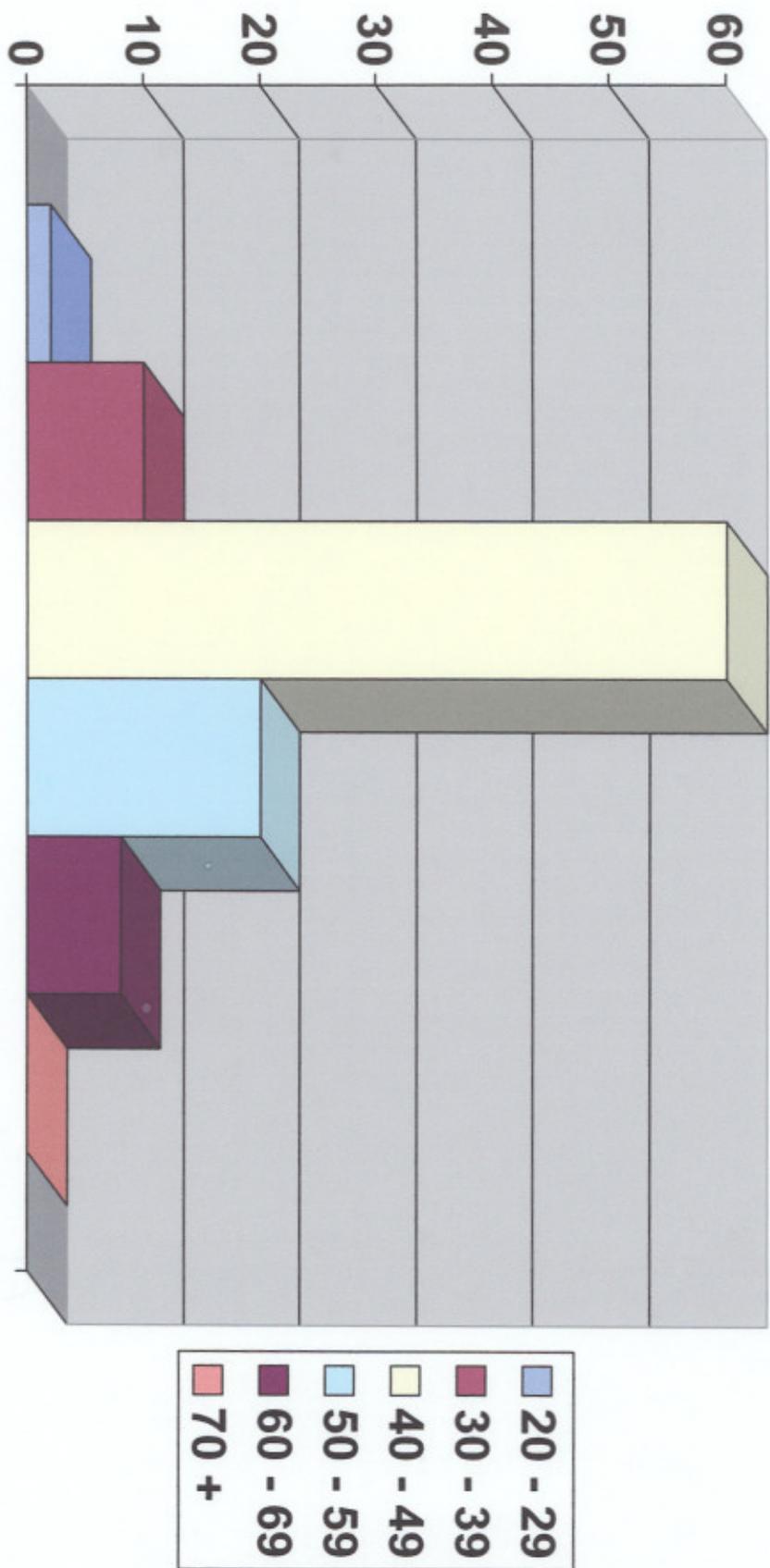
*"This has been a very valuable experience. The client's I have will benefit from any part of the training session as I have. Starting Project Fatherhood at my facility will be a major goal of mine from this day forward."*

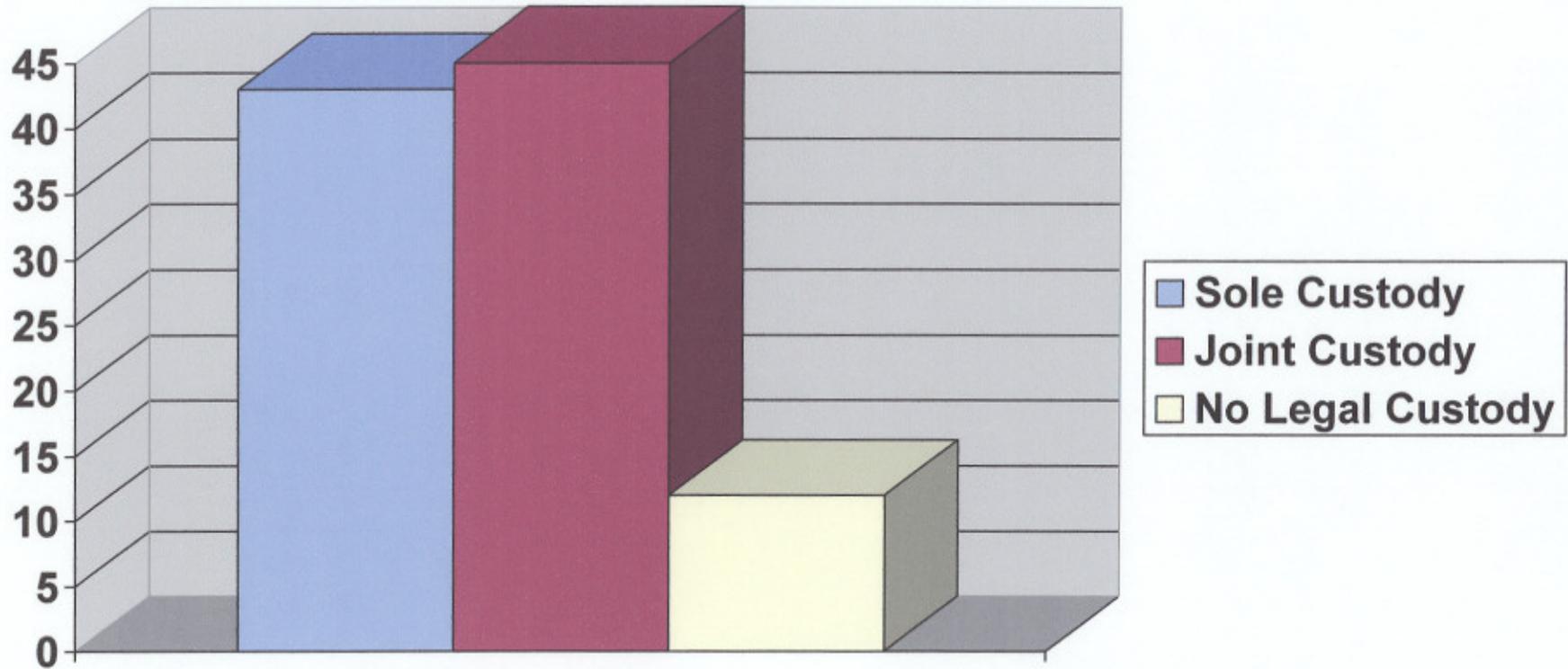
*"The program presentations use of individual personal experiences made it more applicable and understandable."*

*"I would like to get enrolled in a certificate program for getting a license of some sort to further my educational background for running such a program. Excellent Program!"*

*"I believe this was very inspiring for me, it showed me how to become a better person."*

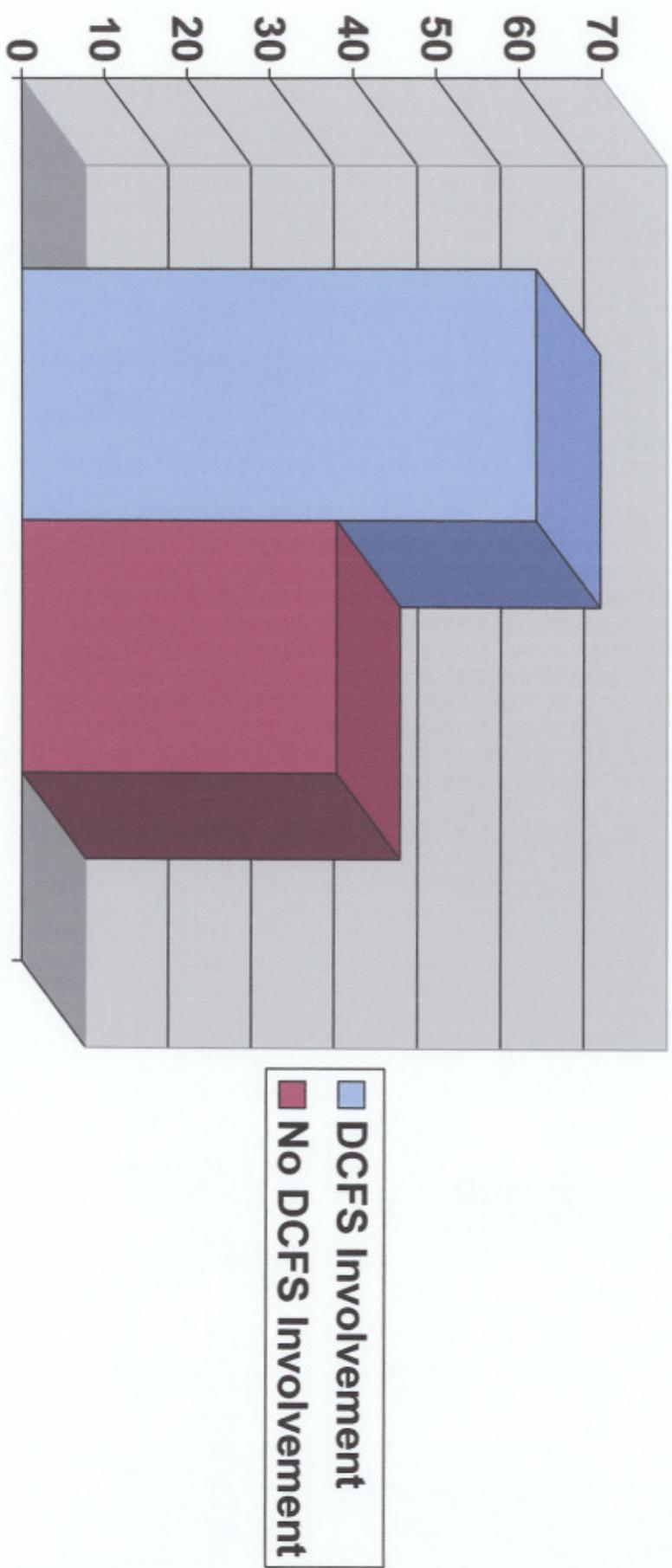
Age of Project Fatherhood Participants

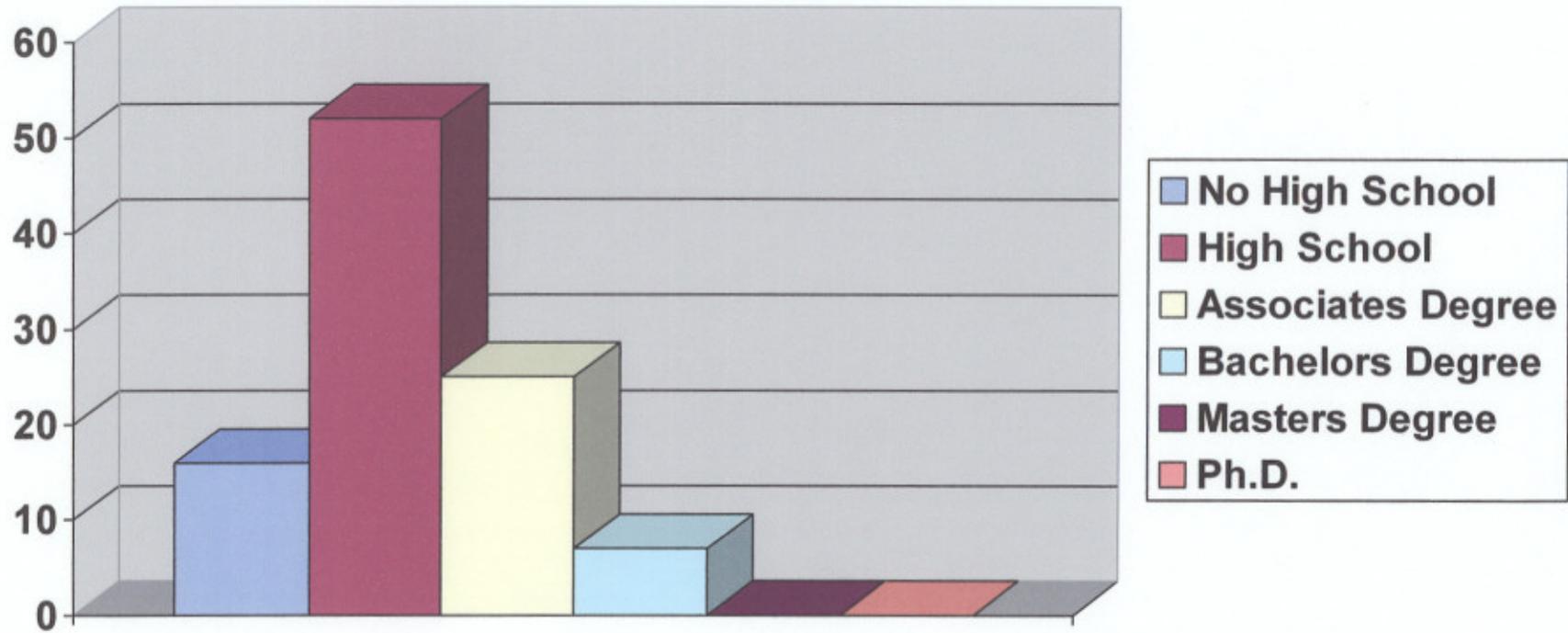




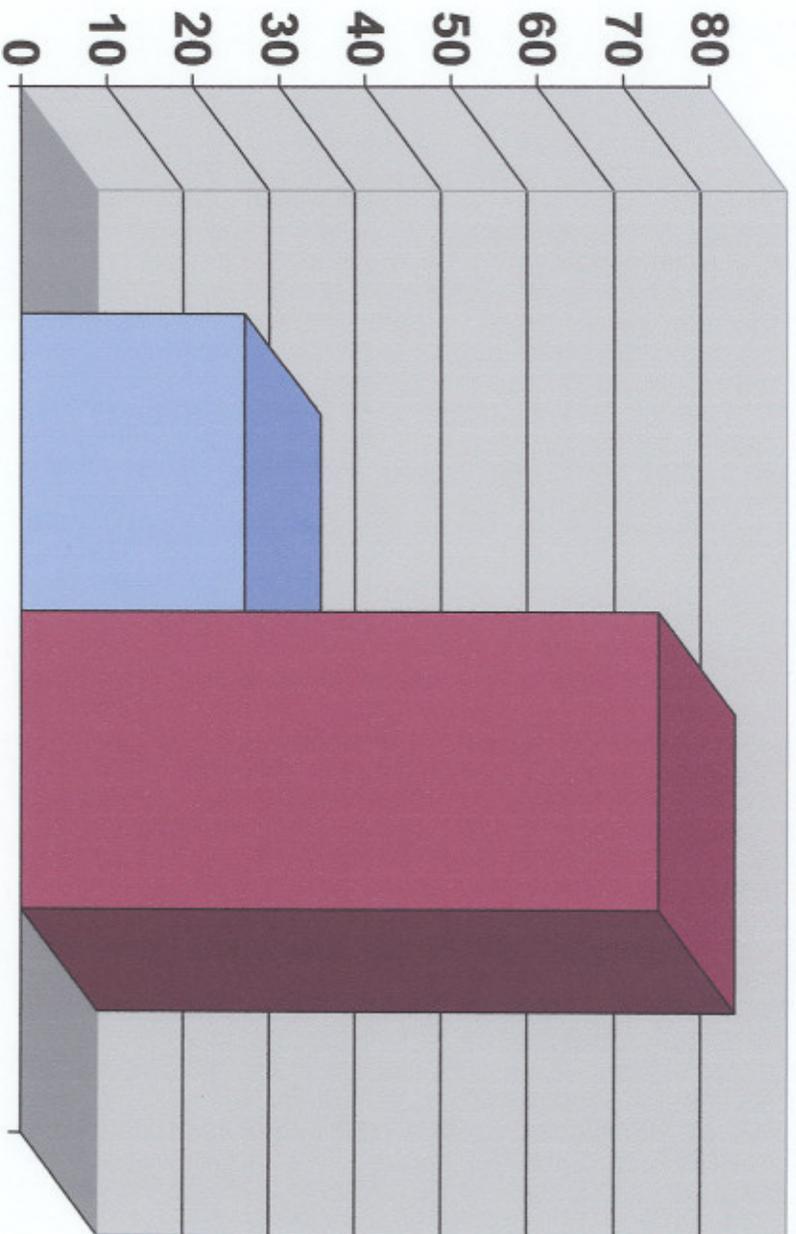
Custody Status of Project Fatherhood Participants

# DCFS Involvement with Children



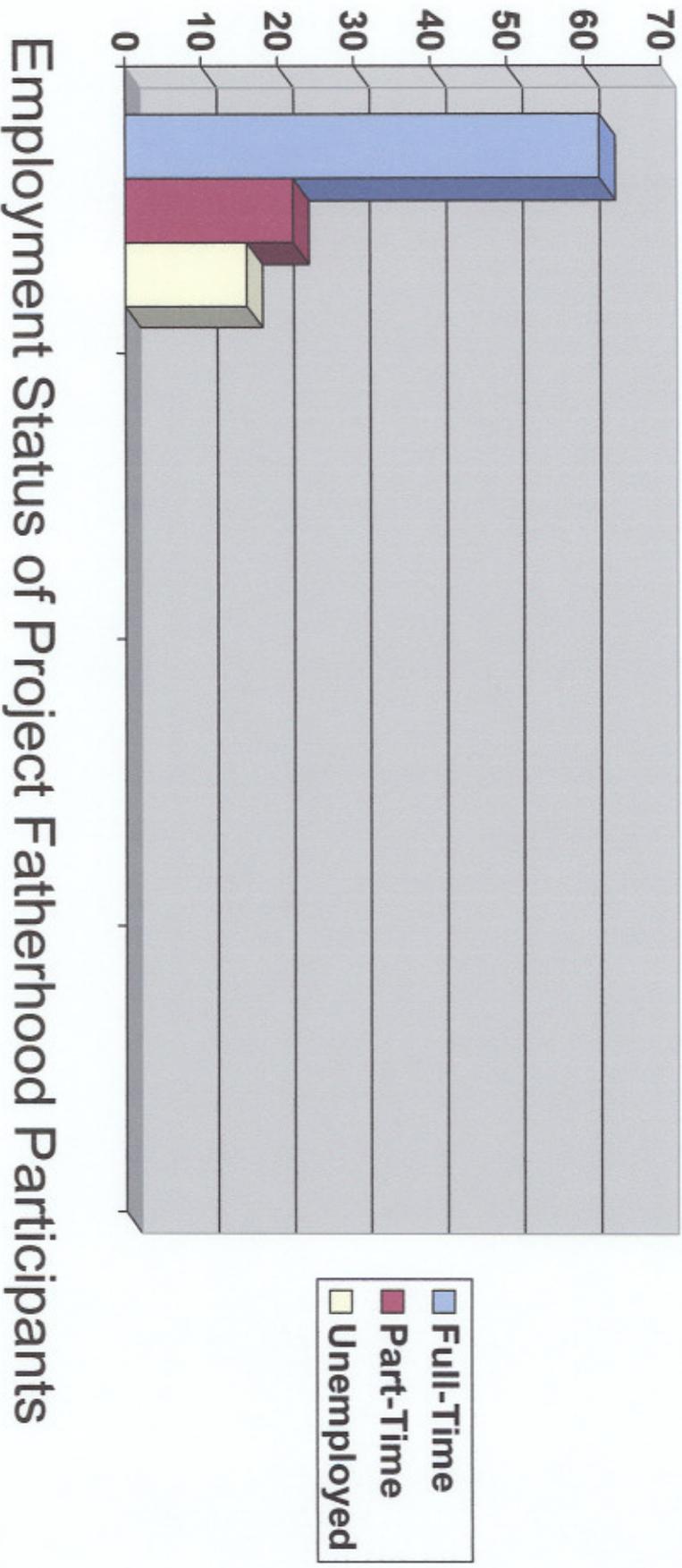


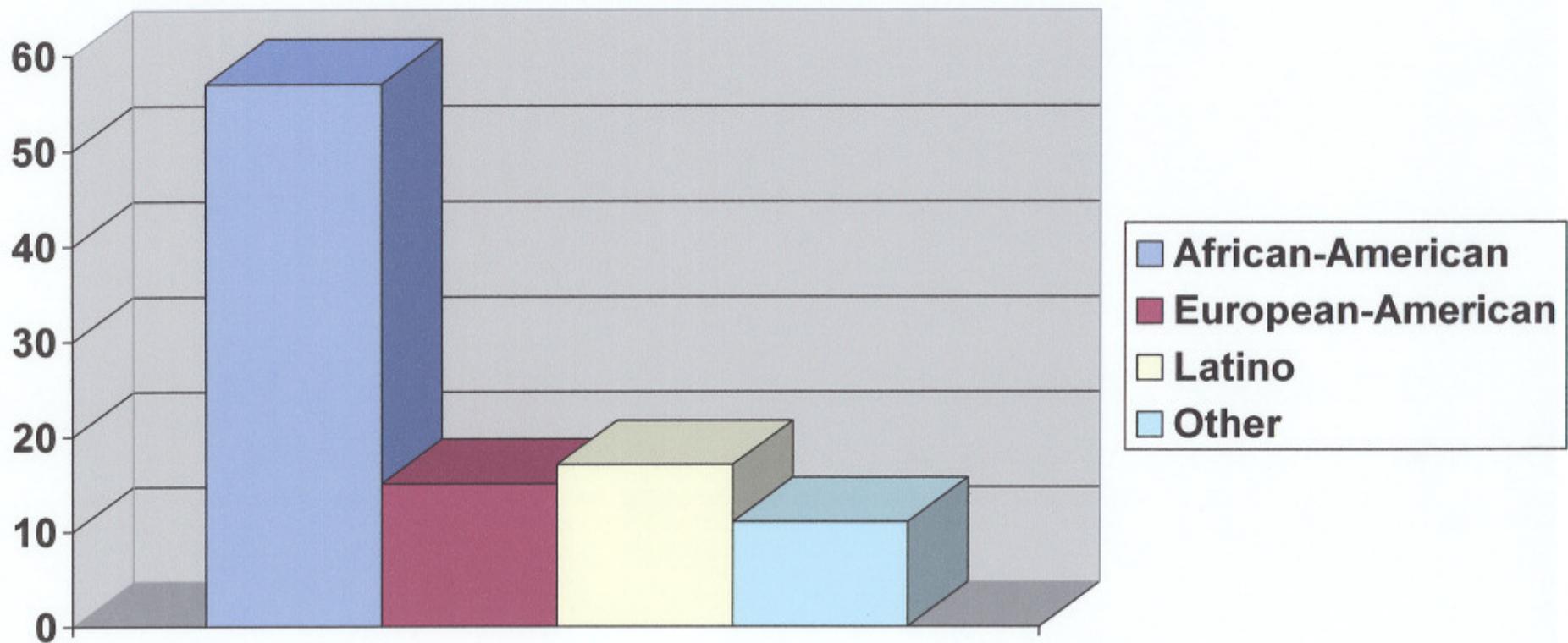
Education Level of Project Fatherhood Participants



Single Parent Home  
Two Parent Home

Home in Which Project Fatherhood Participants were Raised





Ethnicity of Project Fatherhood Participants

## **II. Project Implementation/Process Evaluation**

The core component of the CII Fatherhood Program is the Men in Relationships Group (MIRG). Participants in the fatherhood groups were selected on the basis of their children's involvement or at risk of becoming involved in the Child Protective Services System.

The development of the MIRG group was based on the research of Henry, Kempe, Helfer and James Kent Ph.D. The above researchers found that poor parenting; (child abuse/neglect) was based how the parent was parented during the first few years of his life. Therefore, a successful treatment program must address the needs of both the child and the parent or the relationship between the parent and the child.

Initially we propose a curriculum for the MIRG but the nature of the group led us to the development of a workbook for group leaders who were already trained mental health professionals. The MIRG workbook is an evolving document that lends itself to a wide variety of socio-cultural populations and environments.

Over the course of CII's Fatherhood Program over 620 fathers have attended the MIRG groups at CII in the community. The groups meet weekly so over the five year period there have been over 3,000 groups. 300 children have participated in parallel children's group activities.

Twenty of the fathers needs individual and/or family counseling to ensure the well being of their children.

Over the course of the project all of the fathers needed some case management including referral for services, letter to the court regarding their progress, help with employment, and help with housing, meeting with social workers, probation officers, immigration problems.

The Job Club component provided direct services to 75 fathers and significant others. It is noted that 80% of the fathers were employed and during the course of the years 100% of the fathers were gainfully employed. Unemployed fathers always received help from other fathers. The following pages contain the workbook for MIRG.

## Reflections on a MIRG Meeting

by Raymond Hillis, Ph.D.

It's Monday afternoon in Los Angeles. I've been invited to sit in on a meeting of the Fatherhood Project's Men in Relationships Group scheduled to meet from 5:30 to 7:30.

I arrive a few minutes ahead of time to settle in. The room is bright, lots of late afternoon sunlight through the windows. It's set up as a square pattern of tables with empty space in the center and chairs around the outside on all four sides. My first impression is that it looks more like a meeting space or classroom than a therapy room, along with the feeling that no particular side is the "front". It certainly looks like it's designed for people to roll up their sleeves and get down to work. There is a large thermos of hot coffee on a side table, a tv/vcr setup on a cart and a stand with a butcher paper pad on it in a back corner of the room.

Shortly after I arrive a couple of members enter separately. It's my first time, while they clearly know each other well. Each greets me with a casual "hi". We exchange names. They don't seem to think it is at all out of the ordinary to find a stranger present. We begin to chat about nothing in particular. Over the next few minutes a couple more members arrive, one gets a cup of coffee. Then the professional leaders, Dr. Hershel Swinger and Dr. Ronald Banks, arrive. Ron has a pair of thick loose leaf binders with him (these appear to contain case records which he infrequently glances at during the meeting). Hershel is empty handed. They pick seats on two sides of the square.

I'm expecting someone to say "let's get started". But no one does. The casual conversation simply continues. The weather and other similar topics pass by. Conversation is friendly and warm. A member mentions concern about whether his job is secure. Hershel asks him offhandedly how he usually handles such concerns. The member replies, "I pray about it." A casual conversation ensues over how this looks.

"What do you do when you pray? Are you thinking thoughts or actually communicating with a higher power?"

"I'm talking to God."

"So it feels like a real conversation?"

"Absolutely."

"How often do you do that?"

"Every day."

Hershel turns toward the group as a whole and poses the question, "How many of you pray?"

Hands rise, one at a time, until virtually everyone's hand is up. Hershel expresses some surprise. "Everyone here prays?"

There is general agreement...yes, everyone does. A discussion ensues among the members about how this experience takes different forms for different guys. But they all do something they call "praying", and they all do it fairly often. Hershel has stepped back a bit now, but enters the conversation from time to time to invite a member who hasn't yet spoken to enter the dialogue. "Do you pray also, Mike?" And so on.

This discussion continues for 20 minutes or so. I'm still thinking someone will call the group to order pretty soon...start the official meeting. But gradually I realize that isn't going to happen. This *is* the meeting.

Now there are six or eight members present. Over the next hour and a half two or three more will arrive. The last arrival, a young man who looks still in his teens, will be just a few minutes before the ending time. (And this late arriver will be kidded good naturedly about how the group always knows when the end is near by his arrival. He'll smile a little awkwardly but seemingly feel welcome.) One mid-session arriver receives an especially warm greeting from the group. It seems he hasn't been present for a while.

Tonight the discussion moves from prayer to another subject when one member speaks of annoyance over a meeting with his social worker today regarding his visiting rights with his daughter. This strikes a chord with other members who reply empathically, some wanting to share similar experiences, others wanting to get more details about this particular event. The social worker is convinced this young separated father is drinking and isn't inclined to support his access to his child. Hershel asks him directly if he drinks.

"I have a couple of beers once in a while."

"How often do you have a couple of beers?"

"Three or four times a week. But not with my kid."

There's a discussion among the members as to whether this much drinking is a problem, whether the member is giving the straight picture (the member insists he is), and then Ron intervenes to say that the foster mother of the member's child has told the social worker that she knows he drinks...and that the social worker seems to believe her. (Clearly Ron is in touch with the social worker, and the member is aware of this.)

The member expresses dismay, insisting again that he doesn't drink much, and never around his child. Hershel notes that the member's social worker tends to take drinking very seriously at any level. He suggests that this could cause the member to fail in his attempts to obtain increased visiting rights. Some of the members agree outright, and some agree while complaining that the social worker is out of line. One turns to the member and asks him directly how important it is to him to *have* these rights. "I think you're foolish to drink at all if you really want to succeed with the system." There's

general consensus, and more than a little annoyance expressed that the system doesn't leave much wiggle room.

On occasion a member will offer a similar experience, or will offer advice to another member. Sometimes I think the advice is on target, other times not. Sometimes one of the leaders will lend balance by interpreting what he hears in that advice in terms of the advice giver's *own* life experience. "Well, you know, John's opinion is coming from what his father did to him."

Sometimes a leader intervenes with an educational-feeling comment: "Well, studies show that children who don't get much warm holding when they're very young have a harder time related to people as they get older." On these occasions the members seem to take the information in readily. And they seem to relate to it personally.

As the conversation meanders through various topics, a signup sheet circulates casually around the room. Each member signs in. On occasion Hershel or Ron will reply to something a member has said about the legal system by stating an intention to speak with someone related to that individual's involvement with the system...a social worker, a court person, a legal representative. I am impressed with how important this is, this ability for the leader to engage in advocacy where it really counts, and also to clarify a member's impressions about what has happened by offering a personal viewpoint the leader draws from his own firsthand knowledge of the legal players and events in the member's life. It's very clear the members appreciate this. It's also clear, however, that it isn't the main reason they are present. That reason has much more to do with the sense of relationship they feel with each other within the group. I notice that when a leader makes such an observation, it is connected with something like, "We have a confidential relationship in this room...nothing we say here goes anywhere else...So I can tell you this..." Clearly some of the interpretive comments offered could stir up the pot for the legal system workers being spoken about if they heard them out of context.

There's a point, as time is drawing toward the end of the meeting, when Hershel turns to the group and says, "Before we stop, how are all of our children doing?" This is the first time he has directed the process this clearly. One by one he asks each member who hasn't yet spoken about his children how they are doing. And each member gives a brief and seemingly candid reply.

At the end there are warm exchanges of "see you next week" and everyone departs.

I notice several things in this first experience of a MIRG meeting: 1) Structure is very subtle and is not typical of "therapy" groups; 2) There's a clear presence of educational and advocacy components alongside the relationship-based therapeutic process; 3) The specific topics of conversation do not come from a preplanned agenda but arise from the current outside experiences being recounted by members in the moment; 4) The "session themes" outlined in the workbook for leaders come and go during the meeting depending on their relevance to the topic of the moment rather than being presented on schedule; 5)

The members do indeed think of the group as an unending part of their lives, a process which they may take breaks from, but can always return to without prejudice.

When I reflect now upon the composition of the group I'm impressed with the extreme range of "stations in life" represented. Members range from one who literally lives – by choice - out of his car on the streets of downtown Los Angeles (at one point in today's meeting this member receives a genuine invitation from two other members to spend a few days as a house guest with either of them if he'd like to see "how it feels to live in an apartment") to a member who holds a professional level career, with the remaining members rather evenly distributed along this broad continuum. It is absolutely clear, from start to finish, that the members have two things of primary importance in common: they are all men struggling with life, and they are all fathers who are striving, within an extremely complex cultural system, to obtain or retain meaningful relationships with their children in the aftermath of painfully dysfunctional historical events.

**Project Fatherhood Mission Statement:**

Renew the biological imperative for fathers to care for their child so that no child feels like a fatherless child. And to accept the fact that the public sector will never be able to raise children as well as a family.

### ***Introduction:***

Project Fatherhood differs from other fatherhood program in its approach to the father-child relationship. Virtually all other existing fatherhood programs focus on the father's needs, with the assumption that the father's improved functioning will "trickle down" to the child. Project Fatherhood, in contrast, addresses the needs of the father and the child, as well as the father-child relationship, through ongoing therapeutic children's groups as well as individual and conjoint counseling. Many of the children are in the child welfare system and are at great risk of – or are already exhibiting – a range of emotional and behavioral problems as a result of past abuse or neglect. CII addresses the child's emotional and behavioral issues directly. This approach, in conjunction with the services for both the father and the father-child relationship maximizes the chances of measurable positive outcomes for the child and the family

Although the benefit for children in having strong relationships with their fathers is indisputable, many social service agencies have had difficulty-engaging fathers in family support programs. In most cases, it is mothers who are seen as responsible for children and who seek help for their families. Research points to an alarming rate of father absent households. Too often, fathers are regarded as resistant, disinterested or the primary source of the family's problems. Such attitudes often result in the development of "family treatment/intervention" programs that have no outreach components for fathers, no services designed to respond to their needs and no efforts concerned with the influence of fathers' behavior on the lives of their children. In fact, many social programs today appear not only to accept the concept that a family consists of a mother and her children and, by the very structure of their services, endorse the premise that fathers are unnecessary.

We believe that fathers can and do love their children and want the best for them. Many of them, especially fathers without positive paternal role models of their own, do not know how to relate to their children. Current judicial trends focus on fathers' ability to provide financial support. Fathers of at-risk children may have even more difficulty in being available to provide other needed types of support. Some even feel that their emotional or physical absence is in the best interests of their children. All children, regardless of the economic or psychosocial problems encountered by their families, need to know that they are cared for and valued by their fathers. It constitutes a piece of their developing self-esteem that is difficult to replace with substitutes. Children who feel unworthy of love or basic nurturance from one or both of their own parents have difficulty valuing them or giving unconditional love to others. Conversely, the lives of fathers are immeasurably enriched by the love of a child. It is ironic that our society has invested more resources in the provision of substitute father figures (Foster Parents, Big Brother programs, the Boy Scouts, etc...) than it has in the development of programs that encourage and support better relationships between biological fathers and their children.

### **The Theoretical Foundation of Project Fatherhood MIRG:**

#### **Summary of the Battered Child Syndrome**

Parents and others who maltreat infants and children under their care are not haphazardly discharging destructive impulses in the form of abuse and neglect. They are following understandable and predictable patterns of parent-child interactions which have been basically determined by the way they themselves were cared for in infancy. Beginning with poor attachment in the prenatal period, followed in ensuing months and years by unempathic care, unrealistic demands and excessive criticism, and punishment for failure, they develop poor self-esteem, poor basic trust, and fragmented identities. Deeply embedded identification with their parents and their behaviors, which will surface most strongly in terms of stress, lead to repetitions of the patterns of their own child care behaviors. During the earliest, most impressionable period of life, while under the exclusive care of its own family before contact is made with the wider culture, the patterns are transmitted from caretaker to child, and the potential for physical abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation are recreated for yet another generation.

*Battered Child  
H. Kempe, 4th Edition 1987*

### **Overview: Project Fatherhood Men In Relationships Group (MIRG)**

A Pilot Phase of Project Fatherhood was developed beginning in 1996 by Dr. Hershel K. Swinger of Children's Institute International (CII). Since that time therapeutic methods and procedures have been refined, and training materials have been developed.

Project Fatherhood has three major program components. First, is the Men in Relationships Group, second is the Children's Therapeutic Groups, and third is the Job Club.

The Men in Relationships Group (MIRG) is a therapy group designed to help fathers parent their children appropriately. It helps fathers of "at risk" children to become not just dads, but parents. With the help of licensed clinical professionals and a peer group of other fathers, Project Fatherhood MIRG helps men begin the process of growth and training necessary to learn how to parent effectively. Members of these groups learn to provide vital support for each member's efforts to become a capable father to his children. In the process each member also becomes a healthier, better adapted adult in the community, giving credence to the Project Fatherhood theme: "You're only as healthy as your children are."

Through the MIRG experience, the project provides a new approach to the services typically available to families by addressing the importance of the fathering role. Many long-standing and valuable programs focus efforts on children and their mothers, but fathers have historically been allowed to opt out, or have been left out entirely, of the treatment process. Dr. Swinger's goal is to increase the involvement of fathers in child rearing so they may help their children grow into healthy, responsible adults; and in so doing, they may also enhance their own adaptation and well being within the community at large.

The second major component of Project Fatherhood is the Children's Therapeutic Group.

Research strongly supports Dr. Swinger's vision. Children who have a positive male role model are less likely to develop at-risk violent behaviors including substance abuse, domestic violence and child abuse. And because these are behaviors that are often repeated across generations, there is a very real potential for such intervention to produce change that also can resonate far into the future.

In an increasingly complex relationship world marked by continual, dramatic upsurges in the numbers of non-traditional family homes, many fathers need help to become forces for healthy growth in their children's lives. Project Fatherhood MIRG offers weekly therapeutic group sessions that help participants develop important dimensions of fatherhood, including:

- 1) how to be nurturing parents
- 2) promoting responsible parenting as it increases self-esteem
- 3) how to work out domestic violence issues constructively
- 4) developing and utilizing critical conflict resolution and communication skills.

Assessment and case management by trained CII professionals provide the necessary tools to build healthy relationships between fathers and their children. By sharing experiences and learning new significant skills, these fathers find an increased satisfaction in their roles as parents and become increasingly significant positive influences in their children's lives.

Parallel to the weekly group sessions for fathers, children of Project Fatherhood MIRG members attend weekly group sessions of their own facilitated by licensed clinical professionals and child development specialists. This enhances the benefits in several obvious ways. It gives the children the same kind of healthy peer group support their fathers are receiving, it provides an opportunity for professional staff to reinforce new receptivity in the children to emerging father roles in their lives, and it provides an opportunity to monitor how the newly developing fathering relationship is being experienced by the children.

This combination of services to fathers and parallel services to their children makes up the total Project Fatherhood MIRG experience.

## **Process Factors of the Men In Relationships Group**

Project Fatherhood MIRG groups are built on a foundation of several key factors. These process factors provide the framework that guide the development of all groups.

### **The MIRG process is first and foremost a therapeutic one:**

The MIRG process facilitates development and growth for participating fathers by exploring the psychological underpinnings of their current behaviors. Some of the more crucial behaviors to be explored are how the father develops relationships. These behaviors have often been disruptive in their lives, and in turn, have caused disruption and uncertainty in their children's lives. By exploring the precipitants for their current behaviors, the MIRG process provides a supportive and patient environment where fathers seek out and develop new and more appropriate ways of parenting and relating to others. This therapeutic process helps fathers address issues such as early trauma, loss and separation, intimacy, relationships with parental figures and other related issues.

### **The MIRG process is group therapy:**

MIRG group therapy provides a unique opportunity often unavailable to men, and more specifically rarely provided to fathers. Fathers engaged in the MIRG group process learn from other fathers' life experiences, and are empowered by reciprocally sharing their knowledge and perspective with them. As a laboratory for healthy relationships, Project Fatherhood builds alliances and comradery amongst members. These relationships increase the likelihood that fathers will integrate lessons learned in group within their daily lives with their children. This connection between members establishes strong peer identification, mutual support, and a sense of community that extends far beyond the group.

### **The MIRG group is limited to men both as therapists and participants:**

It is a common perception among fathers that the mental health and child welfare systems are sensitive to the needs of mothers, but historically have downplayed the role of fathers. As a result, many perceive these systems as suspect and do not feel their needs are appropriately heard or met. Through working with male mental health professionals and receiving the support of other fathers, participating fathers address issues specific to them as men and as parents in an objective and therapeutic manner.

By identifying and bonding with other fathers, these men consistently feel safer addressing their personal and emotional issues and vulnerabilities without fear of ridicule or a lack of empathy. Participants confront destructive stereotypical male behaviors such as anger and hostility in a non-threatening manner and learn more appropriate ways to express these feelings.

**The MIRG process is highly individualized:**

The individualized nature of each father's participation in the MIRG process is highlighted from the outset of his involvement. MIRG staff gather relevant psychosocial information and history about each individual participant. Using a client intake evaluation, a treatment plan is developed that reflects the current situation specific to each father. This individualized approach allows the MIRG staff to respond with sensitivity and understanding to each father's unique familial, psychological and personal history. As a result, fathers establish therapeutic rapport with MIRG therapists. Without such individualized attention, the MIRG process risks imposing therapeutic interventions on fathers that are inconsistent with their life experiences.

**The MIRG process is highly inclusive:**

Demographically, the only true commonality among MIRG process participants is their role as concerned and compassionate fathers. Beyond that, they represent a diverse array of individuals, culturally, ethnically, socio-economically and chronologically. The MIRG process honors the rich multi-cultural elements of our world and recognizes that they affect how fathers live their lives. Through conducting hundreds of groups, Project Fatherhood has found that the commonality of fatherhood consistently supercedes and unifies participants beyond their differing cultural backgrounds. Diversity of experience and culture are embraced and encouraged within the MIRG process, but fathers from two different cultures are always directed to recognize the similarities they share in their role as fathers in their children's lives. Existing Project Fatherhood groups consist of fathers from the Middle East, West Africa, Latin America, as well as fathers of African-American, Caucasian and Hispanic descent. Each has shared the rich cultural legacy and traditions specific to his culture. Consistently, the strongest link and connection between all of them has been their commitment to the lives of their children. One may turn left, while the other turns right, but both are moving forward as strong fathers for their children.

**The MIRG process is an open ended one with no definitive termination date:**

Once you become a father, you remain a father from that day forward. Remaining sensitive to this fact, Project Fatherhood provides an ongoing resource for fathers and their children. The group itself does not follow a specific timeline. However, individual members proceed through a series of levels indicating their progress in the MIRG Process. This progression from Level 1 Intake Process to Level 5 Internalization and Commitment typically takes nine to twelve months. A description of this progression is explored in depth in (*section*). Many fathers who began the group in 1996, remain active members to this day. The reason is simple – they remain fathers and they remain committed to the welfare of their children. Another benefit of an open-ended group is that it allows fathers to rejoin the group at any time. On occasion, fathers resume their

participation years after they stopped attending on a consistent basis. Often they attend to seek advice in dealing with a crisis. At other times, they merely want to reconnect with other fathers, or seek some affirmation for the positive choices they continue to make in the lives of their children.

### **Children's Group Activities.**

A major component of Project Fatherhood is the children's activities that occur while their fathers are in the MIRG group. These parallel activities take place separate from the fathers group and are facilitated by child care professionals. A component of this process is the special time the children have with their fathers while they're traveling to and from the agency in which the services are delivered this. It is an excellent time for children to bond with their fathers and for their fathers to bond with their children. In addition, we realize that the children need support and intervention as much as the fathers do. In other words, therapy does not trickle down to the children, and it doesn't trickle up to the parents. Children are not the secondary beneficiaries of this program, but rather are the primary beneficiaries. One must be careful to group the children according to their developmental stage and/or special needs. The children's activities will be viewed as a therapeutic milieu rather than direct treatment, as are the fathers' groups. We believe that activities structured around play, art and games, with an opportunity to associate with trained mental health and child development specialists, offer the type of secondary or primary prevention that the children need. We are also aware that children serve as a resource to each other as a constant source of friendship and interaction among families that may move a considerable number of times. If possible the preferred providers for this service are developmental psychologists, child development specialists, art therapists, and recreation therapists. The working environment among the child care professionals is one of teamwork and open communication. In addition to the child care professionals, the children's group activities are enhanced by the assistance of warm and empathetic volunteers from the community.

The children's activities, which may include tutoring for the older children, must be structured appropriately with regard to the resources available to a given MIRG program. Note: the entire MIRG group team meets prior to both children and adult groups, and afterward the team meets for post- group supervision.

**Staff Profiles:**

The therapist for all Project Fatherhood groups is male. It is felt that men are sensitive to the needs of men. This sensitivity in the group therapist and co-leader increases the likelihood that men's issues will be addressed objectively and with awareness. Men have often opted out participating in the child welfare system as a result of how they feel they are perceived or treated. In addition, it is commonly known that men have been reluctant to participate in therapeutic programs and are often unfamiliar or uncomfortable with appropriate ways to deal with and express their feelings.

Men will be more likely to get involved in programs such as Project Fatherhood if they see that other males are not only participating in the group, but facilitating it as well. Project Fatherhood provides a therapeutic forum where men can observe effective ways of coping with emotion, learning from the therapist and other members of the group. Therapists themselves will model how to express anger, sadness and frustration and encourage group members to do so, as well. Through modeling, participants learn appropriate ways to express emotions that they have previously been unable to even acknowledge.

Participants in Project Fatherhood learn appropriate ways to deal with their emotions and with the stimuli that precipitate them. As fathers, this learning enables them to address issues that may have resulted in abusive behavior, violence or depression. In addition, by expressing concern for members in the group, the therapist is also modeling appropriate caring behavior. Through this all-male dynamic, men feel more comfortable discussing issues specific to men. Machismo, pride and other stereotypical male stances that impede internal exploration, may be set aside when fathers see other men addressing their issues in an all-male setting. This paves the way for them to be more receptive to dealing with issues such as fear, loss, inadequacy and separation from their child(ren). If these emotions are not expressed appropriately, they may emerge as anger, hostility and frustration. By providing a supportive forum to deal with these emotions, Project Fatherhood enables fathers to realize how negative emotions, or repressing their underlying precipitants, is an unhealthy and self-destructive style of coping.

**Multiple Roles of the Project Fatherhood Therapist**

The roles of the Project Fatherhood Therapist include assisting, supporting and advocating for the client. The approach in this program is not a medical model, but rather a "dirty hands" one. In other words, through facilitating the MIRG group, the therapist needs to be skilled in several areas so that he can:

- Advocate for a client through letters and/or calls to involved agencies.

- Provide the client with individual treatment if clinically indicated or make an appropriate referral so that he can receive services elsewhere.
- Assist the client in negotiating the governmental systems of Child Protective Services, juvenile probations, social services, etc... As this may be the client's first involvement with the system, such advocacy could be of the utmost importance.

By performing these multiple, but equally important roles, the therapist extends himself far beyond the typical role of a therapist. The therapist models how Project Fatherhood is supportive of the father, and how it creates a therapeutic fellowship between members and therapists. Most importantly, through this extensive involvement, the therapist is developing shared credibility within the group. Quite often the client's credibility within the social service or mental health system is compromised as a result of past histories, or conflicts with agencies involved with his case. By advocating for the client the therapist is able to enhance and reestablish the client's credibility within the system. As the father's involvement in group grows, his participation remains consistent, and observable changes are noted, he is able to reclaim credibility both within the system, and within himself.

### **Role and Characteristics of an Effective Project Fatherhood MIRG Co-Leader**

The role of the MIRG Co-Leader is a pivotal one. It is filled by a father who has participated in the MIRG group for at least one year. During that time, the therapist, with consultation from other Project Fatherhood mental health professionals, has ascertained that the co-leader has gone through the necessary stages of growth in Project Fatherhood. A primary benefit of having a co-leader is that the role is filled by an actual member of the group. Through modeling, and more importantly through shared experience, the co-leader adds credibility to the Project Fatherhood model. His experience serves as testimony to and an illustration of the benefits of the MIRG process. In addition, his understanding of issues impacting fathers, as well as his own personal experience provides a unique adjunct to the role the group leader performs.

Aside from commitment to Project Fatherhood and their child's welfare, an effective group leader should also have:

- moved through all five levels of MIRG participation (see *section on levels*)
- been an active member of the group for approximately one year
- good communication skills, and be able to relate to group members multiple levels. For example, he will need to maintain a peer relationship with other group members, while balancing his role as a co-leader.
- a committed desire to stay involved with group process, even after he has completed therapeutic or systemic goals.

- made it out of child welfare system or have made significant progress toward this goal
- demonstrated sensitivity to socio-cultural diversity amongst fathers. This criteria is critical given the racially, culturally and socio-economic diversity of the fathers participating in Project Fatherhood.
- The ability to effectively model openness and sharing for other fathers in the group. Given his role as a co-leader and group member this individual is best suited to model the process that fathers may go through when participating in Project Fatherhood.

The co-leader not only enhances the MIRG process, he also illustrates through his own example the positive outcomes of actively participating in Project Fatherhood. Many co-leaders in existing Project Fatherhood groups have overcome personal and systemic obstacles that they initially saw as insurmountable. Having worked through this process and accomplishing the goals set forth for their child(ren), they are able to encourage new fathers to remain optimistic and committed to take the necessary steps to improve their life and the lives of their children.

## **Eligibility Criteria for Participants**

### **There can be no active alcohol or drug abuse:**

Problems such as substance abuse take precedence over the father's involvement in Project Fatherhood. An active substance abuse problem interferes with the father's commitment to Project Fatherhood, as well as his ability to constructively participate in therapy. However, fathers with a history of drug or alcohol use are welcomed into Project Fatherhood. Ideally, they will have at least six months of sobriety prior to joining the group. Fathers with active substance abuse problems are required to address them before participating in Project Fatherhood.

### **Fathers with chronic and untreated mental illness:**

Fathers with active and untreated psychotic disorders should not participate in the group process of Project Fatherhood. The psychotic disorder may preclude them from benefiting from treatment, as well as disrupt the therapeutic process of the group.

### **There can be no ongoing domestic violence:**

Ongoing domestic violence has such a profound and negative impact on the child's welfare that it must be addressed prior to any involvement in Project Fatherhood. Documentation of treatment and release of information allowing Project Fatherhood to correspond with the domestic violence treatment coordinator should be granted, thus allowing an assessment of the father's progress and the appropriateness of his participating in the MIRG group.

### **Fathers with a history of pedophilic behavior are not included in the group process:**

The inclusion of a father with a history of pedophilic behavior would severely disrupt the supportive and constructive dynamics of the group process.

### **Fathers should be in a father or guardianship role:**

The vast majority of men participating in Project Fatherhood are biological fathers. However, the group is also beneficial for foster fathers, grandfathers, and others who are legally in the role of guardian. For many children, the only father figure that they have is a paternal relative or a foster father. Father figures are often as involved in the lives of these children as a biological father. Previous groups have found that extending the involvement beyond biological fathers has proven to be beneficial for all involved.

## **Evaluation and Outcomes**

A vital component of any Project Fatherhood program is the assessment of the father and child(rens) progress throughout their involvement. Anecdotes, success stories and testimonials are all important in informing funding sources and your agency to the positive impact that Project Fatherhood has on the lives of fathers and their children. However, providing objective outcome data in the form of measures and assessments will have the greatest impact when seeking both financial and professional support for this unique program.

Project Fatherhood routinely uses several measures assessing outcome data for participating fathers and their child(ren): These measures are administered at the outset of the father's involvement in Project Fatherhood and readministered at six month intervals throughout his participation in the program. Any staff person utilizing the following measures should be clinically trained and qualified to both administer and interpret these diagnostic tools. The measures administered are as follows:

### **Parenting Stress Index (PSI)**

The PSI is completed by the father and measures dysfunctional parent-child relationships. This measure also predicts the child's future psychosocial adjustment and focuses its intervention into high stress areas. The PSI is supported by extensive research linking scores on this measure to the observed interactions between parent and child, as well as to a child's attachment style and social skills. It is designed for parents of children 3 months to 10 years.

### **16 Personality Factors (16PF)**

The Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF), is a self-report questionnaire that provides detailed information on 16 primary personality traits. The 16PF's strength is that it emphasizes the respondent's strengths. This is done through the measurement of personality styles such as warmth, intelligence, sensitivity, and self-discipline. In addition, the 16PF assessment is a reliable predictor of normal personality and helps project an individual's fitness for a variety of occupations. The latter is of extensive benefit given the emphasis that Project Fatherhood places on the father securing and maintaining gainful employment (*see Job Club section*). Other benefits gained from utilizing the 16PF is its ability to provide Fatherhood staff with a measurement of neurosis, anxiety, adjustment, and behavioral problems.

### **Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL)**

By having the fathers complete, and Project Fatherhood staff interpreting the CBCL, group therapists gain valuable insight into the children's competencies and behavioral and/or emotional problems. Fathers provide via the CBCL information on the 20 competence items that cover such facets as their child's activities, social relations and

school performance. Readministering the CBCL at six month intervals highlights the change in the father's perception of his child's behavior.

**Fatherhood Inventory:**

This 32 item inventory is completed by the father to assess their fathering practices and relationship with their child. Questions regarding activities, interactions, and an understanding of their child's emotional state are some of the items assessed by the Fatherhood Inventory. Ideally, when readministered at six month intervals the father will report an increase in his level of understanding and relationship with his child.

**Utilizing Other Measures:**

Project Fatherhood staff should not limit itself to the administration of the aforementioned measures. If it is clinically indicated to administer other measures to gain further insight or treatment interventions for the father and/or their child(ren), then such measures should be utilized. As with all measures used in Project Fatherhood, staff should be clinically trained and qualified to administer and interpret the outcomes.

Lastly, Project Fatherhood staff should remain sensitive to the potential difficulties that fathers may have in reading and completing the questionnaires. Literacy and comprehension may be issues for some fathers and staff should offer the option of having the father complete the forms with the assistance of the staff reading the questions and recording the father's responses.

### **Rules for Participating in the Project Fatherhood MIRG Sessions:**

At its best, a Project Fatherhood group unfolds in a seemingly informal and organic manner. As fathers' feelings of comfort and trust deepen, they participate more fully in an open exchange of discussion and intervention. At times, group members may become boisterous and emotional as they vent their frustration openly. Yet, all the while, they remain receptive to feedback from group participants and therapists. This informal and organic approach is achieved through establishing and adhering to the rules and structure that are the framework for all Project Fatherhood groups. Some rules were established to provide structure to the group process, while others are aimed at ensuring that fathers become accountable, assuming responsibility for their lives and the lives of their children. As they become more responsible, fathers are more willing to engage in and benefit from the intense therapeutic process of Project Fatherhood MIRG sessions. The rules of are as follows:

#### **1. One group member speaks at a time and others will attend to what he is saying.**

One byproduct of the openness and candor that develops among members in Project Fatherhood is the tendency for numerous individuals to contribute during group sessions. Such participation is strongly encouraged. However, this can result in several members speaking at once which can be disruptive to the therapeutic process. When this occurs the therapist maintains group structure and moderates participants' contributions, so that the group can benefit from each participant's input. This results in constructive dialogue and, more importantly, each member feeling that his comments were received by all participants. During a typical Project Fatherhood MIRG session, numerous comments are made. Each one has the potential to be meaningful to all fathers and should be heard, interpreted and applied when appropriate.

#### **2. Group members will support one another and provide feedback in a non-confrontational and empathetic manner.**

As group members become more familiar with the group process and one another, they typically are able to support each other and provide feedback in a constructive manner. However, this develops over time. Each father's life experience and current situation is vastly different from the other members. Through the common thread of fatherhood, they recognize the importance of mutual support.

On occasion, fathers will adhere to opposing viewpoints on an issue. This diversity of opinion should be embraced so that constructive dialogue can occur. Fathers who feel they have been negatively confronted, or not supported by the group when addressing an issue, are less likely to participate in the group process. This seriously impedes that

father's potential for growth in the group. It is the task of the therapist to encourage group members to respect the diversity of opinions and experience, while embracing the commonality of their role as fathers.

### **3. Negative generalizations about women are not acceptable.**

As fathers in the group typically put it, "You can talk bad about your own woman, but you can't talk bad about women in general." Many fathers are involved in the child welfare system as a result of unhealthy relationships with their child's mother, so this rule often prompts a variety of responses. Even though a father may feel he has reason to view the child's mother in less than favorable terms, focusing on this negativity is of no benefit to the child or the father. It only serves to detract from his addressing the true precipitants for past decisions in relationships. By developing a healthy perspective on women in general allows the father to make appropriate decisions with regard to a partner, as well as to address his own role in past unhealthy relationships.

### **4. Negative generalizations about the child welfare or legal system are not acceptable.**

Given the significant role that the child welfare or legal system may play in the father's life, it is important to defuse the potentially hostile and detrimental relationship between him and "the system." Often fathers share legitimate concerns regarding their interactions within the system. After facing perceived roadblocks and setback after setback, many fathers offer rational arguments for their frustrations. Despite these concerns, the group and therapists should direct the client to learn ways to work with the system, rather than against it. Whether the father has a positive or negative relationship with representatives of the system he will still need to navigate the system properly. This supportive process can result in fathers developing constructive relationships with representatives of the system and in doing so, aid him in achieving the goal of reunification or more liberalized visitation with their child.

### **5. The father will accept responsibility for his relationship with his child.**

Fathers new to the MIRG process often assign blame for their relationship with their child to a wide variety of sources. From the child welfare system, to the legal system, to the child's mother, each is occasionally labeled as the precipitant for most of their current problems. Assigning blame in such a manner is not constructive, and thus not a part of the MIRG process. Fathers are encouraged to accept responsibility for their relationship with their child. This enables them to look at past decisions and how those decisions have impacted their relationship with their child either negatively or constructively. When a father realizes the influential role he plays in his child's life, he gains an increased sense of empowerment. This realization not only encourages the father to face up to challenges that in the past may have been avoided, it also allows him to embrace the enriching relationship that he is developing with his child.

### **6. The father will ask for help and guidance with his problems or concerns.**

As fathers become more comfortable in the group process they will seek assistance and guidance from the group for a variety of their problems. This helps fathers identify the group as a valuable resource, and it also builds a sense of community and reliability, both from the therapists and from participating group members. Initially, this is fostered by consistent support and a non-judgmental stance from the therapists. Group members also contribute to this process by sharing unsolicited testimonies regarding how they benefited from the guidance provided by the MIRG process. Witnessing these interactions new members become increasingly comfortable asking for assistance. Be mindful, however, that this process is not abrupt or imposed but unfolds naturally as trust among group members develops.

**7. All communication in the group remains confidential, except for comments alluding to possible risk to self or others.**

For many fathers, their participation in Project Fatherhood marks the first time they have been able to discuss many aspects of their life. Life experiences such as sexual and physical abuse, substance abuse issues, past indiscretions, and personal fears or insecurities are shared often group members. These aspects, as well as a history of maladaptive relationships are viewed as the underlying dynamics that contribute to the decisions they have made in their lives. Many of these decisions have been unhealthy and have complicated their life and the life of their child. Through feeling safe in a confidential environment, these fathers are able to address many issues for the first time without fear of other family members or members of the community finding out.

The exception to this rule is what's commonly known as the Duty to Warn (*see tarasoff*). Should a father divulge information that indicates a risk of harm toward himself or others, the therapist is mandated to report this to the authorities, and to the intended recipient of the threat. It is important for new therapists to read (*reference*) for a more extensive explanation of Duty to Warn before conducting their first Project Fatherhood group. The importance of understanding this issue should not be underestimated.

**8. Fathers will discuss their issues about their family of origin as they impact their ability to sustain healthy relationships.**

Family history plays a determining role in how life is experienced and in the decisions one makes throughout his life. These family of origin issues are often traumatic and can be marked by periods of neglect, parental absence or instability. These patterns of family history usually impact the father's parenting and relating style in a detrimental manner. Project Fatherhood directs fathers to focus on family of origin issues. This provides fathers with valuable insight into the experiences and patterns that have complicated many aspects of their lives. Addressing family of origin issues also minimizes participants' tendency to displace responsibility onto others, and instead, focuses each father on his role to improve his life and his child's life in a proactive manner.

## **Follow-Up Activities and Case Management**

In addition to the therapeutic and advocacy services provided by Project Fatherhood staff, a key component to the Men in Relationships Group are the Follow-Up Activities and Case Management. These extend beyond the role of therapist and often entail maintaining contact with group members between sessions. These support services convey to the father the level of commitment from the Fatherhood staff, and can elicit a similar commitment from them as well. Some examples of follow-up activities and case management are listed below. However, based on the rationale and logistics of your agency you may find that additional services can be provided, or that some of the activities listed below fall beyond the scope of your agency's capacity.

### **1 –MIRG members will receive “*We missed you.*” letters following an absence.**

Project Fatherhood members are forwarded *We missed you* letters when they are unable to attend a session. The purpose of these letters is to remind of them of their absences, as well as encourage them to attend the following week's group. An additional benefit from these letters is to extend the opportunity for them to contact Fatherhood staff should they require feedback or support.

### **2 – Supportive phone calls are made to members to discuss their absence, as well as other issues as needed.**

As with the “*We missed you.*” letters, group members receive a phone call from Fatherhood staff when they are unable to attend an individual session. This often results in the father discussing with Fatherhood staff their reason for absence, whether it be logistical or personal. Often times, fathers convey that personal and/or familial events have disrupted their ability to attend group therapy. As such, this phone call provides an ideal opportunity to provide crisis intervention in lieu of their return to the group process.

### **3 – Individual therapy is provided to group members from Fatherhood staff.**

Although the group format of Project Fatherhood is the catalyst for significant change and growth for participating fathers. At times they may feel uncomfortable addressing deeply personal issues in a group format. Individual therapy provides the father with the opportunity to address concerns that have arisen during the group process, or that they have been seeking to resolve for quite some time. When clinically indicated following consultation between Fatherhood staff, it may be suggested to a father that he participate in individual therapy. In either circumstance the inclusion of individual therapy conveys to group members the level of commitment to their child's well being. This service is also provided to others in the father's immediate family when clinically indicated.

**4 – Letters and other communication by Fatherhood staff are provided to social workers, mental health professionals, and/or the courts on behalf of group members.**

This is a significant component to the case management that fathers receive in the Men In Relationships Group. Initially, such communication merely conveys the level of participation in Project Fatherhood. However, with consistent attendance and a greater understanding of the father's commitment to the welfare of his child(ren), the therapists are able to provide a more extensive account of the progress the father is making in group therapy.

**5 – Cards are sent to fathers for special occasions or losses.**

Cards and correspondence are sent to fathers and their family to acknowledge a significant event in their lives. When appropriate fathers receive holiday, birthday and congratulations cards from the staff at Project Fatherhood. Letters and sympathy cards are also sent when members have experienced the loss of a family member. The impact of such correspondence is significant in that it extends their connection to the group beyond the confines of the scheduled session.

## Session Themes – Project Fatherhood

*Parents and others who mistreat infants and children under their care are not haphazardly discharging destructive impulses in the form of abuse and neglect. They are following understandable and predictable patterns of parent-child interactions that were basically determined by the way they themselves were cared for in infancy. Beginning with poor attachment in the prenatal period, followed in ensuing months and years by unempathetic care, unrealistic demands, excessive criticism, and punishment for failure, they develop poor self-esteem, poor trust, and fragmented identities. Deeply embedded identification with their parents and their behaviors, which will surface most strongly in times of stress, lead to repetitions of the patterns of their own child care behaviors. During the earliest, most impressionable period of life, under the exclusive care of an infant's own family before contact is made with the wider culture, these patterns are transmitted from caretaker to child, and the potential for physical abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation are recreated for yet another generation.*

*Reference: Bryandt Steel, M.D.  
(The Battered Child, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1987)*

Four basic themes are presented throughout the Project Fatherhood model. These underlying themes are factors in why people abuse and/or neglect children. Given the goals of Project Fatherhood – to improve outcomes for children and enhance a father's capacity to effectively parent his child such themes form the foundation upon which this program is built and are interwoven throughout the entire Project Fatherhood therapeutic process. Addressing each of these themes throughout a father's involvement in Project Fatherhood enhances the outcomes for both father and child.

### **Poor Self-Esteem (PSE):**

One of the underlying issues for many fathers in Project Fatherhood is persistent feelings of poor self-esteem. Such feelings evolved gradually over time and have often been repressed and projected onto others. Too often these are passed down from caregiver to child, thus replicating a vicious cycle from generation to generation. To the father his child may be viewed as an extension of their about themselves. All of the anxiety he feels internally is projected onto the child. Prior to the child's birth parents may hold the expectation that the newborn will counter his or her own feelings of being unloved. In short, the child is placed into their lives to provide them with the love they feel they never had. However, this dynamic is one an infant and child cannot negotiate. By their very nature babies are totally dependent and helpless, and often unable to provide the stereotyped "love" the parent so strongly desires. Given the impact that poor self-esteem has on abuse and neglect of children, Project Fatherhood has made this theme a core issue throughout the group process. The resolution of past issues, improved

relationships with their child, and a better understanding of their lives as fathers and as men, all contribute to improved self-esteem. Once this is understood the father is better able to disrupt the vicious cycle, and develop a healthier one built around the commitment, support and love he has for his child.

**Intergenerational Component (IC):**

The Intergenerational Component suggests that due to intra-psyche conflicts the parent that abuses their child feels they are “getting back” at their parents for their abuse of him. As an adult, their internalized helpless child takes out their repressed feelings of rage and aggression on the helpless infant. Or following theories of conditioning learning, the abuse happens merely because it is what the parent learned from their parents. In short, they know of no other way to respond to their child. They were abused as children, and as adults they feel they will respond to their children in a similar manner. By openly addressing their experiences of abuse and neglect as children, Project Fatherhood helps fathers uncover those experiences that have negatively impacted their capacity to parent effectively. The outcome of this is twofold: First, the father is able to begin the process of resolving past issues of abuse and neglect. Secondly, he works to ensure that more appropriate and supportive parenting styles are developed that will eventually be passed down to their child.

**Social and Psychological Isolation (SPI):**

For many fathers in Project Fatherhood, social isolation and limited relationships, both familial and social, further contribute to their remaining entrenched in unhealthy parenting styles. However, such isolation is not without reason. Many develop from their experiences in fragmented family relationships. The ensuing untrusting outlook is translated into the current family situation. The outcomes of this are numerous, such as the father having no close friends, limited help or contact from extended family, and no significant involvement with traditional supportive institutions. Thus, limited employment, no involvement for self or child in community or academic activities and strained and untrusting relationships with child welfare systems are common. By integrating fathers in a supportive group process Project Fatherhood works to counter the isolation that has been present throughout the father’s life. Fellowship between members, sustained and consistent clinical support and guidance from program therapists and their child’s positive experience in the children’s therapeutic programming gradually counter the issues of their past and provides a corrective experience that will be positively passed on to their child.

**Stress Component (SC):**

*Consult with Dr. Swinger and Dr. Banks*

In addition, there are ten secondary session themes covered throughout a father’s participation in Project Fatherhood (*see below*). For the purposes of this curriculum, each theme will be presented separately. However, it is important to note that these themes are not identified as separate in the MIRG sessions. The MIRG process is open-ended and

ongoing, so each individual session is not organized around a single theme. Rather, the sessions presented here are interconnected, and portions of any number of them may arise during any given MIRG session. It is the MIRG leader's ability to help members explore these four themes on a recurring and personal basis that is vital component to a productive group process.

Here is a brief introduction of the sessions covered in this section. Their corresponding primary theme(s) are italicized.

## **PROJECT FATHERHOOD SESSIONS**

**Introduction and Rapport Building:** *PSE, SPI*

**Child Abuse and Neglect:** *IC, SC*

**Loss and Separation:** *SPI, IC*

**Distinguishing Between Punishment and Discipline:** *IC, SC*

**Normal Child Development:** *IC*

**Domestic Violence:** *SC, IC*

**Substance Abuse:** *SC, IC*

**Communicating Needs:** *SC, IC*

**Rites of Passage: From Boyhood to Man:** *IC*

**Choosing a Healthy Mate:** *IC, PSE*

## **Training and Community Agencies**

We developed a Five Day Training Model to expand the model to at least twenty agencies and twenty-five fatherhood groups during the grant period.

The Leadership Training Manual is used by the trainers to take the professional trainees through a intensive version of what they will guide the father through when they return to their agency or organization.

Each day the first half of the day is spent with a three hour lecture about the topic of the day. Day one we begin by describing the fatherhood program and the goal of the training. In the afternoon we use a structured background interview and have the trainees interview each other to gain “trust and rapport”. By the end of the fifth day the group members are committed to the program and the process.

The following pages contain the outline for the Five Day Training. Comments from trainees were presented previously.



# **CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL**



*Working with fathers to improve the lives of their children*

## **PROJECT FATHERHOOD MEN IN RELATIONSHIPS GROUP (MIRG) 5-DAY TRAINING INSTITUTE**

**June 13 – 17, 2005**

Children's Institute International  
711 South New Hampshire Avenue  
Los Angeles, California 90005  
(213) 385-5100  
Email: [hswinger@childrensintitute.org](mailto:hswinger@childrensintitute.org)



# **CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL**

## **PROJECT FATHERHOOD MEN IN RELATIONSHIPS GROUP (MIRG) 5-DAY TRAINING INSTITUTE**

**June 13 – 17, 2005**  
Children's Institute International

### **TRAINING PRESENTATION:**

**Hershel K. Swinger, Ph.D.**

**Ronald W. Banks, Psy.D.**

**Rafael C. Angulo, MSW, ACSW**

# CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL

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## PROJECT FATHERHOOD 5-DAY TRAINING INSTITUTE

June 13 - 17, 2005

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# CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL

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## PROJECT FATHERHOOD 5-DAY TRAINING INSTITUTE

### TRAINING SCHEDULE

June 13 – 17, 2005

#### **Day 1: Session 1**

***Monday, June 13, 2005*** – Objectives: (1) To become familiar with the overview and rationale of the Project Fatherhood program; (2) To present a context and background for the subsequent training topics.

- |   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| • Coffee and morning refreshments   | 8:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.  |
| • Lecture: Overview and Rationale for Fatherhood Program                    | 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. |
| • Lunch   | 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. |
| • Interactive Group Discussion<br>(afternoon refreshments will be provided) | 1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.  |

#### **Day 2: Session 2**

***Tuesday, June 14, 2005*** – Objectives: (1) To learn about bonding, separation and loss (including father absence) and how this impacts child development; (2) To discuss these issues in group format.

- |   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| • Coffee and morning refreshments   | 8:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.  |
| • Lecture: Bonding, Separation and Loss (including father absence)          | 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. |
| • Lunch   | 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. |
| • Interactive Group Discussion<br>(afternoon refreshments will be provided) | 1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.  |

#### **Day 3: Session 3**

***Wednesday, June 15, 2005*** – Objectives: (1) To learn about substance abuse and its effects on family interactions; (2) To discuss substance abuse and interactions in group format.

- |   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| • Coffee and morning refreshments   | 8:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.  |
| • Lecture: Substance Abuse and its Effects on Interactions                  | 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. |
| • Lunch   | 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. |
| • Interactive Group discussion<br>(afternoon refreshments will be provided) | 1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.  |

**Day 4: Session 4**

***Thursday, June 16, 2005*** – Objectives: (1) To learn about intra-familial and community violence and how it effects child development and family interactions; (2) To discuss intra-familial and community violence in group format.

- Coffee and morning refreshments 8:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.
- Lecture: Intra-familial and Community Violence 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
- Lunch 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.
- Interactive Group Discussion 1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
(afternoon refreshments will be provided)

**Day 5: Session 5**

***Friday, June 17, 2005*** – Objectives: (1) To discuss program implementation; (2) Evaluation of the relevancy and overall quality of the training institute.

- Coffee and morning refreshments 8:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.
- Discussion regarding implementation 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
- Group Luncheon and Wrap-up at Children’s Institute International 12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.











# CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL

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## Project Fatherhood 5-Day Training Institute

June 13 – 17, 2005

### INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHIES

*Hershel K. Swinger, Ph.D., Training Program Leader* is the Senior Vice President Emeritus of Clinical Services at Children's Institute International (CII) and a current professor of Counselor Education at California State University Los Angeles. He has over 30 years experience in developing programs and treating individuals and families involved with violence and substance abuse. Through Project Fatherhood, Dr. Swinger is demonstrating male-specific interventions, which will reduce intra-familial, gang and community violence. He has served on many national and local boards of organizations designed to treat at-risk children and families. Dr. Swinger is a nationally recognized trainer and expert in the areas of the cultural aspects of intra-familial violence, community violence and drug abuse.

*Ronald W. Banks, Psy.D.*, is a licensed clinical psychologist and has served as Coordinator of Project Fatherhood with Dr. Hershel K. Swinger at Children's Institute International (CII). Dr. Banks has over 20 years experience working with at-risk children, with a particular focus on incarcerated males of color and issues of violence among African American males.

*Rafael Carlos Angulo, MSW*, is a practicing therapist at the Pasadena Mental Health Center and currently serves as the facilitator for CII's Spanish speaking Project Fatherhood group. He has over ten years experience in providing therapy and social services to children, adolescents and families.

*Fernando Hernandez, Ph.D.*, is a professor of Teacher Education and Counselor Education at California State University Los Angeles. In addition, Dr. Hernandez has over twenty years experience in providing therapy to children and families. His areas of emphasis are working with children and families, with specialization in multicultural and urban issues.

# CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL

## Project Fatherhood 5 Day Training Institute

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### Internet Resources

National Fatherhood Initiative	<a href="http://www.fatherhood.org">www.fatherhood.org</a>
Fatherhood Education Institute	<a href="http://www.fatherhood-edu.org">www.fatherhood-edu.org</a>
The Fatherhood Coalition	<a href="http://www.fatherhoodcoalition.org">www.fatherhoodcoalition.org</a>
National Center on Fathers and Families	<a href="http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu">www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu</a>
National Center for Fathering	<a href="http://www.fathers.com">www.fathers.com</a>
Welfare Information Network	<a href="http://www.welfareinfo.org">www.welfareinfo.org</a>
Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	<a href="http://www.mdrc.org">www.mdrc.org</a>
Child Trends*	<a href="http://www.childtrends.org">www.childtrends.org</a>
Latino Fatherhood	<a href="http://www.latinofatherhood.org">www.latinofatherhood.org</a>
Families and Work Institute	<a href="http://www.familiesandwork.org">www.familiesandwork.org</a>
National Center for Strategic Non Profit Planning and Community Leadership	<a href="http://www.npcl.org">www.npcl.org</a>
Fathering Magazine	<a href="http://www.fathermag.com">www.fathermag.com</a>
Family First	<a href="http://www.thefamilyfirst.org">www.thefamilyfirst.org</a>
American Coalition for Father and Children	<a href="http://www.acfc.org">www.acfc.org</a>
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services	<a href="http://www.acf.dhhs.gov">www.acf.dhhs.gov</a>
Safer Child, Incorporated	<a href="http://www.saferchild.org">www.saferchild.org</a>
The Center on Fathers, Families and Public Policy	<a href="http://www.cffpp.org">www.cffpp.org</a>
The Fatherhood Project	<a href="http://www.fatherhoodproject.org">www.fatherhoodproject.org</a>
Father Matters	<a href="http://www.fathermatters.com">www.fathermatters.com</a>
The Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization	<a href="http://www.responsiblefatherhood.org">www.responsiblefatherhood.org</a>

\* To download a copy of **Charting Parenthood A Statistical Portrait of Fathers and Mothers in America** go to: [www.childtrends.org/PDF/ParenthoodRpt2002.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/PDF/ParenthoodRpt2002.pdf)

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**PROJECT  
FATHERHOOD**

**JOB CLUB  
EVALUATION**

**Project Fatherhood  
Job Club  
Evaluation Comments**

“There are a lot of areas I need help.”

“It was very helpful. I got a lot out of it.”

“I definitely would like to participate in future workshops and or projects – Please feel free to contact me.”

“I truly believe this is a very much needed workshop that a whole range of people could benefit from especially individuals such as myself who have spent a large portion of their lives in jail and as a result constantly face overwhelming obstacles in the working world and aren’t prepared to interview or search for jobs.”

“I liked the interactive exercises.”

“I think this workshop should be expanded.”

“I learned perseverance, endurance, love, is what I learned in the workshop. I have expanded in understanding from today’s growth.”

“Excellent presenter and enthusiastic about topic presented. Could make a longer presentation to cover other topics this presenter has expertise on.”

“This was a very empowering workshop. I feel as though I was given tools needed to assist the youth in getting jobs. The exercises were especially helpful. I would like to have these types of workshops at the Pico Youth & Family Center.”

“I have an upcoming job interview and this class was a great learning experience.”

“I would like more on building self-confidence because of long time gap, job skills and age.”

“I hope that I’m still able to handle job stress.”

“People in rehab have a limited attention span.”

“I feel that each group should have more than one session. Deborah was an excellent facilitator.”

“I liked the interviewing job part the best. It helps my interviewing skills very much.”

“The presentation was excellent and if I had the opportunity to come back I would and that coming from me is rare. Good Job!”

“Next time have a decent lunch hamburger, french fries, and frankfurter.”

“I liked the interviews interaction.”

“I really enjoyed the “overcoming obstacles” section. I came away with many answers to my questions. Tony was also very insightful with his previous experience.”

“I would absolutely like to spend more time on the Job Club training.”

“I wish the training was longer.”

“I would like to spend more time on criminal records.”

“I would like to spend more time on gap in employment.”

“The workshop was excellent and helpful.”

“I felt that I learned a lot of good techniques that will help in the future.”

“I would like more information on sealing criminal records.”

“The class was great. Debra and Tony were very helpful.”

“I would like more concrete examples.”

“I thought the soft skills portion of the program was unique and presentation was professional.”

“The training was very good.”

“I would like more information on back door communicating.”

“Please extend this class into 2 or more parts.”

“I would like to come back for more information. Thank you.”

“I would like a second visit to get better at skills.”

“It’s made me have a more positive outlook on going into the workforce. Thank you.”

“We need more time on this topic.”

“Very helpful and good. Each topic could have been stretched. Thank you very much.”

“Very good class! Deborah and Tony were very cool!”

“I would like to learn more on soft skills.”

“I would like to thank you for the opportunity to let me participate. I received a lot of info of this Job Club.”

“I would like to learn how to speak about own qualities.”

“Please continue to prepare us!”

“I would like to go to the Job Fair in April, 05.”

“If you keep the grant, please call me. I think I would be a good facilitator.”

“I would like to attend the Job Fair April 22<sup>nd</sup>, please keep me notified. Thank You.”

“I really am grateful and I will use all that I’ve been given.”

“I would like to spend more time on job search, job opportunity. I felt wanted and respected.”

“I would have liked to spend more time on this topic. It is essential information for humanity. This program has potential.”

“I would like to learn more exercises how to respond for employment. I would like to acknowledge you guys for this day. Thank you.”

“I would like to spend more time on this topic because this is excellent. Thank you for letting me come here to learn.”

“I would like to spend more time about soft skills. Deborah was excellent in everything she showed us about soft skills and other skills. Thanks Deborah.”

“I pray that God will bless you to keep up the good work and to bless others as they have done for me. Again Thank you.”

“I would like to spend more time on criminal records. This fast track Job Club is very very helpful and I want to do this again very very soon.”

“I would like more information on soft skills and filling out an application. I think it was and excellent program and I for sure will be back if I have the chance. Thank you for your help.”

“I would like more on communication, social, and confidence.”

“I would like more on soft skills. Deborah is a very fine teacher.”

“I think this is a very special subject that all individuals can benefit from and apply to their professional lives.”

“A positive history for my experience to learn how to apply for a job. Thank you.”

“I liked the networking icebreaker exercise to open up. Thank you for the opportunity to come to learn these job skills.”

“Maybe you should have three workshops on the topic. I’d like to thank you for today. I feel more educated, a lot more confident that I will be successful. I learned a lot. Thank you.”

“It was very informative information that I needed to know. Thank you Deborah.”

“I would like more soft skills. Keep it moving Deb!”

“I would like to spend more time on job retention. I thought the workshop and Deborah were fantastic.”

## **Advocacy**

Over 60% of the father's had children that were under court jurisdiction. The fathers were usually the non-offending parent. Project Fatherhood provided these fathers with the support they needed to free themselves and their children from court supervision.

We always wrote progress letters to Child Protective Services and the Court. When necessary we testified in court and supplied the Court with the results of our psychological assessment of the fathers and children.

We have written "character references" for fathers who were seeking employment, job training, and an apartment to rent.

Community awareness and the advocacy for fatherhood programs were carried out by fifty conference presentations, four television shows and videos. The Fatherhood Model was presented to over 5,000 conference attendees.

Through our advocacy efforts the County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services now Fatherhood programs as a part of its Family Preservation Program.