



W16. Fired Up and Ready to Go! Fathers Leading Positive Community Change

Wednesday, June 5, 2019
4:15 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Moderator:

- Barbara Spoor, Family Assistance Program Specialist, Office of Family Assistance, Washington, D.C.

Presenter:

- Guy Bowling, Director, Goodwill/Easter Seals FATHER Project, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Panel of Citizen Fathers:

- Michael Russell, FATHER Project Graduate, Goodwill/Easter Seals, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Damian Winfield, FATHER Project Graduate, Goodwill/Easter Seals, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Barbara Spoor: It's my honor and pleasure to introduce Guy Bowling with the Minneapolis Goodwill. I worked with Guy 10 or 15 years ago on one of the first fatherhood programs.

Guy Bowling: Thank you, Barbara. My name is Guy Bowling and I oversee a program called the FATHER Project with Goodwill/Easter Seals of Minnesota. We've been around 20 years providing services to low income fathers, 17 and up, who are dealing with educational deficiencies, employment deficiencies, fatherhood, fatherlessness, and a lot of different challenges in terms of what they come to us needing. I'm joined today with two of my co-presenters, Mr. Damian Winfield and Mr. Michael Russell, graduates of the FATHER Project.

Thinking about what we're going to be talking about today, Fired Up and Ready to Go!, that's part of the theme for this summit: Fanning the Fatherhood FIRE. We fall under the E part of the FIRE, Essential for this presentation; fathers leading positive community change.

We're going to talk about a leadership component that we have within our FATHER Project that we put together because men began to ask us how they could grow themselves as leaders? What are some things they can do within their communities? What are some things they can do within their program? So, we were pushed up against a wall to come up with an idea and incorporate that into the services we provide. Did you see the last presentation in the big room with the dads





and the children? That was pretty cool. We don't often get an opportunity to hear the voices of the fathers; maybe in our daily work, but not often when we come to these conferences. I think we need to hear from them because they keep us relevant in the work that we're doing; and also validate the work we're doing. We know the work is personal and heavy. We have those days. I want to ask all of you why you chose this workshop and what do you hope to take away from it?

Participant: I'm very new to this. I've only been in it for about two months. I taught school for 30 years and then retired. This job came to me as a father consultant. It spoke to me. Anyone who's taught at all can talk and talk and talk, and I found that being away from that I needed to go back and make a difference. I was tired of dealing with 13-year-olds, I wanted to go to a different level and see if I could make a difference.

Participant: I work with the child support program. We've done a huge disservice over the last 10 years in our office. I had an opportunity about four months ago to go ahead and restart back at my agency. The reason I'm here today is because I realized we had a terrible image. I don't know that we're a broken system, I think that we're a system that isn't necessarily aligned with the needs of fathers. We're so focused on the financial aspects of trying to go out and get that, that we sometimes forget about helping fathers move forward and become stable and have a living wage and allow them to get on their feet. We need to allow them to have a better attitude as a family, move ahead, and let their family grow.

We may or may not be needed as a program if we do our jobs well and help make that happen. I have a vision of trying to create a positive change in our community. I want to see us do bigger and better things. I want to change the image. I want to try to make more things happen.

Participant: Fatherhood's been a passion for my oldest sister for 34 years. It's only been a profession for me for about a year and a half. I've been engaged with the fatherhood program in one form or another. I spent 35 years as a corporate trainer, so that skill set brought me to where I am now. I'm from Kansas, and part of my title is statewide parent and fatherhood leadership coordinator. My work is to look at leaders within their four walls and within the community.

Participant: My name is Judith Harvey, Head Start in Selma Alabama. We're doing a restructuring of our program and trying to enhance our fatherhood. I thought this would be a good workshop for me to attend to take back some ideas.

Participant: I'm a young father that started the program in a college. They've been engaged in community, but I wanted to gain more knowledge and learn how to be a better leader, not just in my home but in my community.





Participant: My name is Calvin Price. I started out with a passion for father development due to the absence of one in my life. I've been in Bay County, working on a small scale, and now I want to learn the foundational principles of how to take it further.

Participant: My name is Antoine Johnson from Buffalo Prenatal Perinatal Network, Buffalo, New York. I came here because I saw in the brochure how fathers are partnering with universities and fatherhood to better engage in the community. That's one of the things that we've been trying to do in our area, and figuring out how to do that more effectively.

Participant: I'm doing these around country. There are a lot of connections at the top but there are more important grassroots level connections with the community. I want to hear about ways to keep fatherhood on the table.

Participant: Rob Youngman, Head Start. I'm here to try to find some innovative ways to get fathers engaged.

Guy Bowling: These gentlemen are going to help me facilitate this session because this is really about them and why they became the Citizen Fathers that they are; that leadership component. I'm going to tell you what qualifies me to do this work with fathers. I started preparing for this work growing up in a household with a single mom who took care of three children on some of the meanest, roughest streets of Chicago. She decided to relocate to what she thought was going to be a better place for her children in Minneapolis. She felt like the quality of life was better, the school system was better and safer, and more activities for her boys to get involved in; because we were getting involved in a lot of things that we shouldn't have been involved in at such an early age, especially as it related to violence, gangs and drugs. We came to Minnesota when I was in elementary school. My older brother had already begun to get in trouble and became involved in juvenile corrections. For me, growing up without a father was the first thing that I experienced in terms of how that impacted me. It also led me to become a father. My son was born when I was 15 and I ended up getting full custody of him at 16, up until he graduated from high school at 18. I had to jump from boyhood to manhood in addition to fatherhood all at once. I didn't know anything about the roles and responsibilities, and it forced me to grow up faster.

It actually led me to begin to see it from a child's perspective and then I became a young father and then ultimately, it led me into the work that I'm doing with fathers. Over time I got my education to gain the knowledge and the skills that were needed in order to be able to do this work as a professional. I also have been doing this work for 25 years; working with low income, non-custodial, unmarried or never married fathers between the ages of 17 and 35. But now we work with men much older than that.





A lot of people ask why are you still in the trenches? Why are you still doing this work? Dr. Wallace [McLaughlin – participant in audience] and I laugh because we don't know. There's something about it that really fulfills me, working directly with the men and providing them resources and services, and to see the transformation of them going from who they are to who they want to be. There's a lot of things in the middle that they have to overcome in order to be able to fulfill that. So, I appreciate having the opportunity to be able to now oversee a really large program that serves fathers in the state of Minnesota.

We serve approximately 1,200 men a year in multiple locations with multiple ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds. I enjoy watching them light up in a way that we heard from the men on stage, especially when you saw them with their children. I'm here today to talk about how we came to the position of developing a leadership component within our program, in addition to the services that need to become fully functional and stable; not only for themselves, but for their children. Let me tell you about the FATHER Project as a program.

The FATHER Project mission is empowering fathers to overcome barriers that prevent them from supporting their children, both emotionally and economically. Some of the services we provide are parenting support services. We have 12-week parenting groups utilizing the MDRC Responsible Fatherhood curriculum. We also use the Parents as Teachers curriculum and 24/7 Dads. We've been fortunate enough to have a partnership with child support since the inception of our program that allows us to have a collaboration with them, where they provide us services that they don't provide other programs. We've kept that partnership in place, and actually leveraged that partnership to develop others with counties throughout the state. My experience with child support is a little different in Minnesota in terms of a collaborative partner.

We offer GED. Approximately half of the men that come into our program are lacking a GED or high school diploma. We provide legal services to fathers, specifically as it relates to family law. Men looking to establish paternity, parenting time, or to get their parenting time enforced, if they're having challenges with mom not being in compliance, or they just say, "You know what, I just want to increase my parenting time," we are able to help them by having an attorney on-site through a partnership with Legal Aid. We also have Employment and Training Services. As you can see, we offer everything from job search, job skills evaluation, short term training, to placement. We also have some fun. We have father-child activities that we do where we have an opportunity to watch these dads apply the information to their behaviors with their children based on the parenting support groups. It also gives them an opportunity to show off their children.

If you noticed those men on stage, they wanted to show you that they're responsible and a lot of them will come to our programs and ask us to invite mom so she can see what they're doing;





because she doesn't think he's the dad he's supposed to be, even though he may not have been the greatest boyfriend or the greatest husband, but he's trying and learning to be responsible. So, we invite the moms, if they're still with mom, or a new girlfriend, or new wife. We hold an annual recognition dinner, kind of a black tie for them to bring their family, friends, and supporters, giving them an opportunity to be recognized for what they've done and speak about achieving specific benchmarks.

We offer early childhood services through a partnership with an early childhood education program called ECFE (Early Childhood Family Education). Because a lot of our dads are constantly moving they don't always have a place to be with their children. We provide those services to our dads on-site using a different model; because their model is more home visiting based. We provide intensive case management. Any fatherhood program you have, working with dads with these multitude of issues, you have to have intensive case management because that's going to be the glue that connects these guys and keeps them in your program. That's one important component. We also have a mentoring piece and parent facilitation training.

What I am here to talk about is our Citizen Fathers leadership track. A little history on our leadership track. We identified these men as having control of their own social economic development and self-development. We know that in order for them to succeed, they have to have their personal stability already established. When you have a leadership component, it keeps them engaged because you establish a future and a vision for them on who they can be, based on how they came to you already motivated and wanting to be better. For us, it is important to keep them engaged in our program and have this component available for them. Progressive completion of the program goal. As dads are accomplishing these things, we continue to push to move them forward through the program so we can put them in a position where we can then offer these leadership development activities. It's not about perfection, it's more about are they making progress while they're with us? These dads can be in our program anywhere from 12 weeks to a couple of years and beyond; it is based on what they're dealing with. We try to address them. I heard earlier in the presentation that we meet guys where they're at. Many times, when you help these dads and they start seeing progress and accomplishments, and you start recognizing them for what they're doing, they immediately ask how they can help you.

That shows that it meant something to them in terms of what you're doing for them. It all starts at intake. We identify who they are, recruit them, and have outreach and engagement strategies that gets them interested in a program. We do different things to get them in. I was at a session yesterday on how to recruit and engage fathers. There's no one foolproof way, it's just a combination of efforts, and constantly being in front of them at the right time, and catching them





when you have that opportunity, then you just have to seize it. There are so many ways to recruit dads. I'm not going to get into all those strategies yet.

Once intake is complete we put them through a full two-day orientation. We go over the program, ask them if they're going to commit and stay engaged in the program, we have them sign off and say yes, and then immediately they're assigned a case manager and we start addressing what it is they came to us for.

The next step is to establish goals. We have a 30-day case plan that we review with them every 30 days. It's all voluntary, they don't have to stay. But, if they get through orientation, there's a good chance that they're going to stay. Now it's up to us to keep them there. It's hard enough to get a man, let alone keep a man. The next part is enrollment. That's where the case plan comes in. Then expectations of them once they get into the program. We provide them with a lot of services, but we only expect them and require them to do three: get a job, complete our life skills class, and complete the parenting class. The parenting class is where they learn about early childhood information such as discipline, the difference between discipline and punishment, health, nutrition, and safety.

Then they go through an advanced 12-week leadership class, preparing them to give back to the community. Once completed, they are now part of the crème de la crème that went through this program. We now want them to continue to grow and develop as a leader. We give them three options on the leadership track. They can become a Citizen Father, which these men are, and they're going to talk about what that means. They can become a parent group facilitator where we train them for 20 hours using evidence based curriculum, providing them the facilitation skills and techniques on how to run a parenting group; then once the 20-hour training is complete, we have them assist us with co-facilitating parenting groups, and we pay them a small stipend for that. The last piece is a mentor. This is where we can attach them to a new dad coming into the program, take them under their wing and walk them through step-by-step like an additional coach or case manager, without a lot of documentation; continuing to motivate them and get them through the program.

Those are three different components of the leadership piece. We leave it up to them as to what they want to do. Some do one, some do two, and some do all three. Some opt out not to do it at all, but we want to be able to make it available to them. Part of the reason we developed this was because we kept having dads come to us asking us how can we help you? What can we do? We didn't have anything for them to do. We started having them do stereotypical stuff like help move furniture, help us paint and clean up.





We partner with the Citizen Professional Center at the University of Minnesota, Dr. Bill Doherty, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. He helped us develop the Citizen Father Project utilizing the family and democracy model; community action on a specific community issue. It flattens the hierarchy by bringing together professionals and community members, because we believe each of them brings skills, abilities and knowledge. It's an action-oriented approach. This speaks more to the model that we utilize for Citizen Fathers. It talks about the principles and the process that we put together in order to create this. Then the backside talks about some of the action items that we've done. We've made a lot of progress. I started out with approximately 35 dads over the last seven years. We developed a mission statement, a vision statement, and a brochure. It was developed from the ground up. Because we didn't know what they wanted to do, we asked them what they thought needed to be done. We came together every two weeks over dinner. We talked about the issues that we saw in the community. They said that growing up they didn't see any men or positive male role models in their communities or households. They knew they were there, they just weren't able to touch them or validate who they were because they didn't see them stepping up to come back and mentor them. They said they had challenges in their relationships, or promiscuous behavior, or becoming fathers before they were ready; they said this was because they didn't have that guidance, structure, or direction from a male. We talked about this for a year, and these dads decided they wanted to become those men. They knew they had to become polished, stable, educated, establish a working relationship with the mom that they weren't with or learn needed skills to take care of their children. They wanted to establish an action project that allowed them to present this information. They wanted to come up with a way to give back to their community. They wanted to be able to go out and share their stories about what that process was like. That's how Citizen Fathers and the FATHER Project was born.

We have probably done about 200 presentations across the country with these dads. They have done videos and have been on the radio. They have pretty much been everywhere that has requested us to come and share the stories you are about to hear. We chose six key audiences that we wanted to speak to: high school, junior high, and elementary school students about fatherhood and when is the right and wrong time to become a parent; jails and prisons; moms; dads; professionals like yourselves; and faith congregations. We chose those specifically because that's who the dads said needed to hear this information. We have had an opportunity to speak to all those audiences and we continue to. Our approach is, they introduce themselves, talk about what brought them to the program, what their challenges were, what they accomplished, and for each of these audiences created what they would take away. I don't have a video clip of our work, but it is on YouTube. I'm now going to turn it over to our Citizen Fathers.

Michael Russell: Damian and I are Citizen Fathers. Thank you for having us. I would like to have everyone give your name and your organization and if you're a parent or not.



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Participant: Dr. Roy, Father and Families. I have four daughters.

Participant: Nigel, National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. I have one boy who's 34.

Participant: Shane, Alameda County Department of Child Support Services.
I have two boys and a girl.

Participant: Judith Parity, Community Foundation. I have a 33-year-old son.

Participant: Charles Prager, Child Development and Resources, Miamisburg, Ohio. I have three daughters, 32, 29 and 27.

Participant: Robbie Youngman, Head Start Program. I have an 11-year-old daughter and an 8-year-old son.

Participant: Jonathan Hausman, Minnesota Department of Child Services. I have three boys, 23, 12, and two.

Participant: Antoine Johnson, Prenatal Perinatal Network. Newly married not a father.

Participant: Calvin Price, Father to Father, Tennessee.

Participant: Calvin Johnson, Dad Can Do It Too. I have a 6-year-old daughter.

Participant: Robertson Crawford, Fathers and Families. I have a 10-year-old son.

Participant: Kansas Children Service League. I have two boys and two girls, 11,14, 22 and 44.

Participant: Scott Reeds, New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. I have a 23 and 26-year-old.

Participant: Barbara Spoor, Federal Project Officer for 15 grants that are covering responsible fatherhood. One 38-year-old Goddaughter.

Michael Russell: Michael Russell, Citizen Father. I'm also employed with Goodwill Easter Seals. I have two daughters.

Damian Winfield: Damian Winfield, Citizen Father. I have seven children.





Michael Russell: For those of us that have children, I heard names and ages. Almost everyone in here is a parent. When you think about your children, can you immediately think of someone who doesn't have any children yet? For those of you who have children, if I was to ask you to think about them for a second, could you name something that makes you smile about them? That's a cool guy there, there's someone smiling. As we think about our children and about things that make us smile and how good we feel about being parents, I'm going to turn it over to Damian. Listen to the question he's about to ask and I would like some honest feedback from you. Damian.

Damian Winfield: Why do you think so many dads are not involved in the lives of their children if their own dads did the exact same thing to them?

Participant: You don't have anyone to show you what that looks like. It's more of a fear going into something you don't know about. Fear is hard for a man.

Participant: Afraid of failure.

Participant: You're talking about something called the father wound.

Michael Russell: Please explain.

Participant: It's that space in a man that is a boy They're lacking something.

Participant: In Nigel's session this morning, he had a quote that said children are not always good at doing as they're told, but they never fail to do as you do, or what they see. It's hard if a child's never been told that's not the thing to do, he only follows examples, he hasn't been taught by others.

Participant: There's a phenomenon that's starting to come out, and mom's need to stop saying in front of us, especially for boys, that "I'm his mom and his dad". You have to keep in mind that you're telling a young son, his father isn't needed.

Michael Russell: We have one more question for you. What are some of the barriers dads face that prevent them from playing an active role in their child's life?

Participant: Barriers with the mother.

Michael Russell: Explain.





Participant: Either they're no longer together, and now this builds a wedge between their relationship with the mother; or the mother tries to keep the presence of the father away from the child out of spite.

Participant: Navigating the child welfare system.

Damian Winfield: Can you talk a little more about that?

Participant: About six years ago I had a father come through the program. He was doing the work that he needed to do and was ready to go to college. We go into court with him and the judge was asking him questions and he was nodding. Everything was okay. As we turned to leave he had a couple of questions that didn't get answered. He didn't realize that he had to ask those questions within that timeframe; and didn't understand what it meant to go in front of a judge. That's when we realized we didn't do our job well enough.

Participant: There's a ton of them. When we go with physical location, sometimes it can be difficult for people, the fear that's there, the unknown, never having had a model. They don't know what to do. I think that right there for me is the biggest one, in family court sentences and the navigation.

Participant: I've heard throughout the last couple of days the term deadbeat dad, and honestly, there's nothing that breaks me down worse because more than anything I've learned is, there are many more "beat dead" dads who've been beaten down by the system, than there are deadbeat dads that are out there. We don't reference it that way, or think about it that way, and we don't recognize that that's what happens to people who are trying to navigate the system, that they've been beat dead. When you talk to the dads they talk about the fact that being beaten dead is the only thing that's going to ever stop them from ever trying to be a dad to their children.

Participant: Homelessness. We've had a couple of fathers come through this past year that literally didn't have a home and were fighting to get custody of their children, so we had to help them get homes.

Michael Russell: In order for them to have a place for their children to go.

Damian Winfield: In order to get custody.

Participant: They can't even get visitation.





Michael Russell: This is nowhere near exhausted, we could be here for hours doing this. We co-created the Citizen Father Project and excelled at it. We have grown as fathers in our own lives but that wasn't enough for us. We wanted to find a way to give back. Now we're giving back to our community as part of the Citizen Father Project.

Damian Winfield: Again, I'm Damian Winfield. I've been with the FATHER Project since 2004. What brought me to the FATHER Project was I was 15 years old when I had my first child. I had no foundation, no positive influences in my life or in my neighborhood, no structure, no direction, and no models to follow. My dad was married to my mom but never in the picture. I'm a second sibling of four. I wasn't paying child support and got pulled over by the police and they told me my driver's license had been suspended due to non-payment of child support.

I was an angry little boy. I was scared and felt alone. There was a moment where I went into survival mode and self-preservation. I hid the pregnancy for eight months, telling her never to come around. I treated her really bad. Since being with the FATHER Project my accomplishments have been, well, I'm 47 now and have seven beautiful children and five grandchildren. I have my driver's license and insurance. I've completed all of my parenting classes with the FATHER Project. I had an advocate, Mr. Dwight, may he rest in peace. Mr. Dwight was also an influence on the streets under a different name. When I got to the FATHER Project, I met Mr. Dwight again and he was a totally different person with positive influences. Mr. Dwight pulled me in and said he was never going to let me go. He said he was going to make sure I got everything I needed. With Mr. Dwight as my advocate, I completed my construction skills classes and all of my parenting classes. He signed me up for any class and course that he thought I would be able to complete that would benefit me. I got my driver's license back and insurance. On top of that, I went back to school and got my GED. From there, I went to Brown College and got my associates degree in graphic design. I was also working at a hotel and window cleaning at the same time. I really pushed myself because I had built this brick in my life by avoiding child support. I wanted to be in my child's life. Over time, I impregnated three other women in addition to the one I had already had a baby with. I had to work on communication skills. It was important to me because my dad was abusive. I come from Gary, Indiana. I experienced all this trauma in my family that was scary to us as little ones. I'm the second oldest. I was there, I saw it all. My dad was very abusive, had no structure, was scaring us and he didn't even know. He didn't know because there were no classes, there were no father anything for him at the time. Over time, I had to learn how to forgive him. I was angry when I was 15, but I realized why I was so angry. I wanted my dad. Even though he was abusive, wasn't around, on drugs, was wherever he was in the streets, I wanted my dad. I realized that when I got to the FATHER Project. They showed me why I was so angry. I had no foundation, no structure, no male role model to follow. Going through the FATHER Project made me realize that dealing with anger, dealing with social issues, financial issues, self-building issues graduating from





Brown and doing so many different things with the FATHER Project, kept me grounded and involved. Mr. Bowling must have seen something in me.

At one point, the funding was running out at the FATHER Project. I was picked to go to D.C. with Mr. Bowling, and to talk to some people at the state capitol about how important dads are and how important the funding was for us. Something I said must have sparked them because we got millions of dollars, and through that, Guy Bowling hired me as an outreach liaison to go out and bring in more dads.

My journey with the FATHER Project has been a long one. It's been exciting, rewarding, and it's been trying all at the same time. When I look back at the FATHER Project, being around these positive dads kept me accountable, helped me with the structure and the foundation that I was looking for. I was looking for a way to show my children that I do care and that I wanted to be in their lives. How do I do that? There were no father programs out there accepting someone like me at the time. When I heard about the FATHER Project through child support, I went over and there was a woman named Ms. Bill that took me in like she was my mom. There was no way I could let her down. At the same time, I was thinking about my mom and what she went through without my dad, and there was no way I could let her down either. So, the FATHER Project has really helped me out a lot and kept me grounded at the same time. It has helped me give back to the dads that really need this. It's so easy to obtain if you just focus and dedicate yourself to it.

Michael Russell: My name is Michael Russell and I have three children. My oldest son was stillborn and would have been 16. The second oldest just turned 14 and my youngest is 10. What brought me to the FATHER Project was DNA testing for my youngest child and where to go from there as far as rights, responsibilities, etc. In the FATHER Project, one of the first things I learned, and it was a challenge, was communicating with mom. What do I do when I find out the results of the DNA testing? In addition to that, it was February 2009, and I was coming off the employment bubble. Despite my background, I couldn't find work. My background was clean, I was educated, but still had challenges with work. In addition to that, housing and transportation were issues. Going to the FATHER Project, I was able to go to the parenting support groups, and the support groups covered everything from communicating with mom, discipline versus punishment, activities to do with children, and health and wellness.

I completed the parenting support groups, and through the partnership with child support I was also getting the DNA testing done. Child support actually wanted to help facilitate the DNA testing. Once the DNA testing was done and showed the child was mine, I started learning about my rights and responsibilities. How you go about navigating through the system in order to get those rights. I learned that, at least in Minnesota, just because you are recognized as the parent on the birth certificate, it doesn't mean you actually have any rights to your child.





I had a legal right to pay child support. I didn't know that. Like most men I thought if you signed a birth certificate, you're done. The FATHER Project offered a lot of support and education for me. They helped me deal with employment. Since going through the FATHER Project employment piece, I never had to worry about gaining employment again. I've always been able to maintain at least two or three jobs and possibly build a career. In addition, I was invited to be part of Citizen Father. I was hired on funding for the PACT study and was promoted within the FATHER Project as a case manager. Goodwill supported the FATHER Project even when funding wasn't granted, and moved me to do career specialist training in education.

I help those as I was helped when I came into the program, covering their basics, coming up with their fatherhood plan, working through what they're going to do within the program framework, etc. The reason I stay connected is because the FATHER Project has always stayed connected to me. It has always given back to me. It's never over promised and under delivered. They've always been transparent with us. Staff are always honest and open about what's going on. They have compassion and care. I see myself being a part of the project as long as it exists.

Guy Bowling: We said it takes a man to be a good father, we can learn to be good fathers, we have to relate to women better for the sake of our children. Together we can do it. What we would normally do if we had more time is we would speak specifically on why we came up with these key messages and what they actually mean to Michael and Damian. For the sake of time, I'm going to have them each take one. Damian, one of the messages we came up with was, we believe that we have to relate to women better for the sake of our children. It took us a while to come with that message and what we wanted to convey to audiences such as the one here today. Why do we believe that, especially considering the fact that you manage multiple households?

Damian Winfield: We have to learn to let go of our egos and our pride and listen. We have to rewire our brains and change the way we think about women and respect them. How do you want your daughter to be treated? You should be that man. I have three daughters. I watched my mom be abused by my dad and a few other men growing up. Being a child, I felt defenseless. I was her son and I couldn't help her. Growing up those things stuck with me for a long time. I can remember the slap and hear that stuff like it's right there. I felt like I was going to end up being like my dad. There were some situations where I was losing it. I was going a little too far. I didn't put my hands on anyone because my mom would always say, "Damian, whatever you do, don't put your hands on a woman." She did that for a reason. She said that because she knew I saw what had been done to her. Now it's my turn to defend them. I think hard and long about that and I know I don't want that to happen to my daughters, or anyone else in my family. The best way to deal with it is not be that guy. Apologize to the woman that you already hurt. I tell a lot of dads that they're going to have to break their pride down and say they're sorry, and be authentic about





it. It will definitely help them get over that hurdle. And maybe at some point, she will let you start seeing the child. Be apologetic about the pain that you put women through. Go back and say I'm sorry. Some of us don't even realize the pain that we put them through; some of us think we're so perfect that we just can keep walking and not go back and patch up what we broke.

Guy Bowling: Michael, one of the other messages on here is we truly believe philosophically that all men can and will change. Can you share a little bit that this is something we can learn to do?

Michael Russell: We can learn to be good fathers. We all have something we can learn from one another and we have to be prepared as fathers to step up and be a full-time parent if necessary, whatever the sacrifice. For example, the mother of my children has had numerous dealings with child protective services. As the father they try to get the children to me during that time, because I'm the more stable parent; I have to be ready for that call anytime. I'm currently the custodial parent of my youngest child because the mom at the moment has some challenges she has to work through. This past weekend she had some challenges with her significant other where they had to leave at midnight. I have to have stability to be able to say, "Okay, my daughters are now out of a home and it's after midnight. They've been put out and have to go somewhere." I told them "Well, you can come with me, with your father." If I'm not stable, I'm not in a position to do that and that creates additional challenges. We have to be well rounded and ready as fathers to step up and take that load because you never know when you're going to get that call saying, "Hey, you have to have your children with you now."

Guy Bowling: I want to say that we know that since we put this together, we've watched men transform over time. Part of the reason they transformed to get to this point is they have those resources in place to address those barriers. Once they get over those barriers and once they begin to feel as if they're making progress, they begin to get their self-esteem back, they begin to get their confidence back and it continues to build. The next thing you know, they want to continue to do better.

We can't do this by ourselves. When we talk about recruitment, some of the best men to recruit for your program are the men that have already been through the program. These are only two of the 25 Citizen Fathers since we developed this component. They're polished, they're established, and they can present. Their passion supports the work that we're doing. It contributes to the field overall to put these dads in a position of leadership and know that you can grow these dads; but, you have to have a process in place, and you have to have a component within your program. You have to begin to think about what that could actually look like.





It helps with engagement. It contributes to other things. A lot of our dads start with giving back to our program. Then they go and join an advisory committee or a task force because they realize somebody cares about their voice. They can advocate not only for themselves, but for other fathers. They can be engaged in their community and then realize they can make an impact, because they have in this role.

The last thing is we've expanded this leadership component to our other sites and other rural and suburban areas where we have the FATHER Project. It has really jump-started programs. It really says, after these dads get through all this stuff, now what? If you have a place for them to give back and it impacts your program, in addition to the community, they can't wait to sign up.

I think in order for us to be successful, we have to stabilize these men and eliminate or reduce those barriers that prevent them from being involved with their children. Then you have to have an opportunity for them to give back civically. I think when you have that you can grow leaders.

