



W9. Effective Workforce Development and Employment Strategies for High Need Fathers

Wednesday, June 5, 2019
11:30 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.

Moderator:

- Damon Waters, Family Assistance Program Specialist, Office of Family Assistance, Washington, D.C.

Presenters:

- Sandino Thompson, Vice President, Public Strategies, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- Azaliah Israel, Project Specialist, Public Strategies, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Damon Waters: Good morning everyone. It's been a very eventful morning. For the past three years I have had the pleasure of working with these two individuals from Public Strategies. They've been working on healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood and workforce development for quite some time.

Sandino Thompson, Vice President at Public Strategies in Oklahoma, and Azaliah Israel, Project Specialist at Public Strategies. They also work on another project of mine. I spend about 99 percent of my time working on TANF, so it's been interesting all week to hear about the fatherhood initiatives. We do a few things on TANF related father engagement, but obviously not as much as in this room. With that, I'm going to turn it over to Sandino and Azaliah to talk about effective workforce development programs and strategies for hard-to-serve and high-need fathers.

Sandino Thompson: Good morning. As Damon said, my name is Sandino, joined by Azaliah. We work for a company called Public Strategies. We're going to talk today about workforce development programs and employment strategies, and working with high-need fathers.

It's a common theme in fatherhood engagement strategies and it's a common barrier for a lot of the fathers that we're serving within the communities we work in.

First, a quick show of hands from those who are federal grantees. You have run fatherhood programs that are funded by the federal government. Are there other fatherhood programs or representatives of fatherhood initiatives in different communities? How many government representatives or agencies present? Okay, quite a few.





Could a few of you give us a little bit of feedback on why you attended this session and what are some takeaways that you hope to gain in the next hour and 15 minutes?

Participant: To be able to bridge the gap between the employer and the employee, especially when they're trying to find a job that someone has a background in. It comes naturally to bridge that gap, so we can have more opportunities for these fathers.

Participant: Additional employment resources to support young dads.

Participant: Reentry Strategies

Participant: How do you tie your fatherhood programs to employment programs?

Sandino Thompson: One thing I hope to do today is talk about the idea of career pathways and using labor market information.

Azaliah Israel: I am a training and technical assistant at Public Strategies. We're an OFA contractor, so we help healthy-marriage and responsible fatherhood grantees implement their programs. For the first part of our discussion, I want to frame the why for you in terms of employment for fatherhood programs and then we'll transition into some of those concrete strategies that you mentioned.

I want to talk about my positionality. Where I come from in terms of the fatherhood space. I originally entered the fatherhood arena from a research perspective. I am a graduate student studying fatherhood and how it enters the policy cycle and process. I am not a man or a father, but I am a daughter and so that's the lens that I use in terms of my research and also my work as a technical assistant. A little bit about my father. He had me at a very late age. He had to drop out of school in sixth grade to start working to help provide for his family and siblings.

He had a lot of odd jobs throughout my life. He was a truck driver, worked on railroads, and he didn't live with us, so he was a non-residential father, although he only lived five minutes away. I do remember him being absent a lot, and so as a child, you interpret that as, "You're not being worthy enough or there's something internally wrong with you," but as I've grown, especially working in this field, I started to think more about the times that he was present and immediately thought about whenever he was present, he always gave me and my little brother money. Every memory I have with him is him giving us money; and, I started to think a little bit more about it and realized that his perception of fatherhood was financial provision.





That was his value, his meaning in our family. His interest in our family was to provide finances, and if he could not provide that, he was more than likely absent. So, that structures my perspective of fatherhood in the sense of traditional masculinity and traditional fatherhood. The perception is that you have to provide financially in order to be a good father. That stuck with me as I transitioned into womanhood. I do regret that my father saw himself as disposable because he was absolutely essential. I think for me personally, there are a lot of things that I can do without in life, but missing a father is one of those things that has crippled me.

Going back to my experience, the ability to provide financially is sometimes tied to self-worth and identity. In terms of the why for fatherhood programs, the first fatherhood policy we will discuss is child support. The Child Support Enforcement Office was established in 1975. It was the first explicit policy targeted toward fathers but, of course, it was targeted toward them in a punitive way in order to collect money for children.

When we think about the characteristics or the narratives of fatherhood, the one that pops up for me is the narrative of a deadbeat father. If anyone would like to contribute, what are the characteristics of a deadbeat father? When we think about that person, what does that entail? Who is he? What are his motivations?

Participant: He doesn't pay child support

Azaliah Israel: Why?

Participant: He doesn't care

Azaliah Israel: He doesn't care. He's lazy. Maybe he has multiple children by multiple women. The scholarly term for that is serial illegitimacy where the father has multiple children with multiple women.

Participant: He's not there. He's just non-existent.

Azaliah Israel: Why?

Participant: I don't think he wants to accept responsibility.

Azaliah Israel: The problem with narrative such as that is, it's a single story and it's one dimensional. That's not how we experience people. We experience people who have negative qualities, but they also have positive qualities and I think the deadbeat dad narrative cripples us, in a way, because it doesn't expound upon the reasons behind those actions; because, we're





talking about real people. When we're talking about high-need fathers; and, when we say high-need throughout the presentation, we're talking about non-custodial, non-residential, low education, possibly criminal backgrounds. They have high needs and a population such as that is marginalized in the policy process, and needs advocates to speak up for them.

They need people who understand their situations in order to help frame the problem differently. In my research, I've looked at how it's framed in congressional hearings. One thing I noticed in those hearings is they have expert witnesses come in to help them define the problems differently, so people who are at this conference like Joe Jones, Wade Horn, and Jeffrey Johnson, testified before the Senate and The House to talk about what they were experiencing on the ground with fathers, to help construct a more accurate narrative. When we look at how that narrative changed, it changed from a deadbeat dad to dead-broke dad. Has anybody heard that narrative? What are the characteristics of a dead-broke dad?

Participant: Unemployed

Participant: Underemployed

Participant: Resource scarce. He doesn't have the resources.

Participant: He probably has mental health issues.

Azaliah Israel: The point I want to elaborate on is the fact the dead-broke dad narrative helps us because it's multi-dimensional. We're getting a better understanding of how the social economic environment that the father is in is impacting their decisions. It's not that they don't want to be around. It's an economic problem. We're not talking about a moral issue of them not wanting to be fathers, although we know that some men do fit that description, but when we lump everyone together, it hinders us from serving them. That is what transitioned child support enforcement in the 1990s. Child support has evolved tremendously in recent years in terms of helping with economic employment and parenting strategies.

I want to talk about some of the policies. The Family Support Act of 1988 is when we started to see that transition of the narrative. The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration Project was implemented from 1994 to 1996, and gave us a better understanding of what those high-need fathers were actually experiencing. I also want to highlight some of the employment issues they experienced. Prior to this, agencies didn't collaborate as much and therefore had a lot of issues with child support agencies, employment agencies, and other non-profit organizations.





The findings of that study were not as hopeful as we would have liked. They were able to increase employment for the least employable fathers, but for the most part, fathers who entered that study left unemployed. They had a lot of issues with just the partnership aspect of it. When TANF was created in 1996, they started to fund responsible fatherhood programs. Going back to the narratives, we went from prior to the Family Support Act, fathers were seen as undeserving of assistance, so we weren't even talking about them, and then we move on to the deadbeat dad narrative where they're being talked about in a punitive nature, and then we move on to responsible fatherhood and that for me is a hopeful narrative and also includes mutual responsibilities. It's not just responsibility of fathers, but responsibility of government.

I want to highlight the Partners for Fragile Families project from 2000 to 2002, again collaborating government agencies and community agencies because they have that direct line and connection to the fathers that we're talking about. That is a framework of our discussion in terms of the importance of employment. For the rest of our presentation, we are going to attempt to give you some strategies to build the employment component of your fatherhood program.

For building the capacity of case managers, the strategy that we want to highlight is transforming from case management to coaching. When I say case management and I say coaching, is there a difference between the two?

Participant: I'm a baby specialist and I work with fathers. It is mostly about resources. When it comes to case management, we have a responsibility to at least locate resources for them and then coach them to take advantage of it.

Azaliah Israel: In your perspective, you use both. You do the case management and then you transfer into the coaching.

Participant: If the case management is done correctly, it's client sensitive, so you want to set the life plan or the life goal for your client that is built through a collaborative process. I understand what you mean in terms of trying to differentiate between the coaching and case management, but good case management really should be done in a client web that is supporting.

Sandino Thompson: One of the things that I would mention is when we think about employment strategies and your employment activities, if this is a referral base, that becomes problematic because it becomes an opportunity to hand that issue off to someone else. When we're talking about it from a case management strategy, a lot of times we have this huge deluge of issues, challenges, and barriers, so we've defined what high-need is and we're talking about people who come to you with all kinds of challenges.





I think what we're trying to highlight is thinking about coaching as a strategy to start identifying the goals that we can focus on which is very client centered. What we've seen programs try and do for a lot of well-meaning reasons is, someone shows up and we want to help them fix every problem. In reality, in our fatherhood programs, especially in relation to employment, you'll be fixing for a long time before you put anyone to work. That's the thing that we want to tie together when we start talking about a career coaching approach to your employment activities and your employment services and not necessarily trying to solve all the problems.

A couple of things we run into is when people come to you and one of their needs is actual income, they don't have time for you to deal with drug issues, homeless issues, transportation issues, or cleaning up their criminal background before they can go to work. Different communities might experience different things, but generally, we're going to have to do some of those things at the same time. A coaching strategy can help you help that client prioritize what their needs are and really frame a conversation to focus on what we're trying to do, which are those employment strategies, knowing all this other chaos is taking place.

Participant: It has to be, or it's not moving forward.

Sandino Thompson: Correct. We want to highlight that language because there's a lot of conversations and also a lot of resources you can tap into that build around coaching as a model for looking at how you implement case management. It's a strategy that we are involved in, with Damon and some others in ACF, but it's a strategy that's been adopted in a lot of offices and government agencies and a lot of organizations as well. I want to highlight that idea and that dynamic.

Azaliah Israel: Then add the difference between the coaching and case management which speaks to the organizational culture. As Sandino mentioned, we do work with other state agencies, mainly TANF agencies; and, in implementing a coaching framework we found that the transition has been incredibly difficult for them in terms of a culture change going from case management and just filling out the boxes, then transferring into actually coaching them into success and self-sufficiency. I just wanted to highlight how it impacts and changes the cultural aspect in terms of your fatherhood programs.

Participant: Can you speak a little regarding comprehensive assessment? We need funders and need some sort of evidence-based assessment approach.

Sandino Thompson: There's a fine line to walk. We tend to ask all the questions we think we need to know about someone. I think what's important is to ask the questions that you actually have a response to. In some instances, it's unavoidable. You have to do this comprehensive thing.





I guess the point would be to move as far back from that as you can if you're asking questions about things you can't fix. For example, if you're dealing with people who are dealing with chronic homelessness, but you don't have resources to respond to that, how much do you want to know about it or how much do you want them to expose about the situation?

We're actually bringing up issues and introducing items that we're not going to address in our program if we don't have a response; but, we've now spent a lot of time assessing that need and dealing with that issue. When we're talking about comprehensive assessments, it may actually be that you have an assessment that will help make you aware of these things. I think specifically where you're digging in or where you're developing your individual career plan or individual service plan or whatever the case is, focus in on the things that you as a program can actually respond to.

If you could respond to all the needs they have, so be it, but mental health and substance abuse is another example. We want to know that we have people dealing with some of those challenges. In the programs I'm connected to, we have some resources for those, but we don't have mental health professionals on staff. We know that that's a challenge to people who are dealing with it, but we run an employment program. What we want to do is connect them to those services and essentially make sure that that mental health barrier is not going to be a barrier that keeps them from being able to get through a training or get to employment.

I wouldn't want to sit and focus on, or have them go through, a mental health assessment only for me to tell them that they have these challenges and I can't help them. I may refer them to an agency that does mental health work and they can help with that. I'll also make sure it's a warm referral, but I don't want to dig into mental health issues if I'm not equipped or resourced to respond to those needs. Substance abuse is another issue. We serve people that we know are managing their substance abuse issues, not just the ones who have overcome them. I want to give you some strategies and coping skills to remove that as a barrier or at least lessen it as a barrier; and, that might dictate what type of placement opportunities I may have available. I can't necessarily wait for that issue to be completely resolved before I can connect you with employment services. I'm not doing in-depth alcohol and drug abuse assessments in my employment program. If I know that's an issue, I might either connect you to someone who can deal with that and tell you that you have to go here before you can show up. I might connect you with AA or similar groups and make that a part of what service delivery looks like with the goal being, "Hey, are you participating in those activities? Are you managing this challenge?" but I'm not performing those things in house if I don't respond to them.

Participant: How well established is this idea of coaching? Is there data to back it up?





Damon Waters: Coaching is still relatively new in this area. Several studies are being conducted on coaching and human services. There is plenty literature in substance abuse, alcohol and some of the other areas; but, in this area, we're borrowing some of the concepts and really molding around fatherhood. We're relying on the findings, especially mental health, substance abuse and alcohol abuse.

Azaliah Israel: We're going to move into engaging quality employment partners for your programs.

Sandino Thompson: One of the things we focus on is the balance between the quality of your employment partners versus the quantity. Going back to funding, we can talk about funding all day because I'm a firm believer that you have to position the things that you do in order to be fundable; but, at the end of the day, I feel like you have to focus on the program that you're providing, what the needs are in your particular community, etc. You may be writing for funding that says you have to demonstrate that you have partners and the capacity.

A lot of times we tend to focus on quantity, but we don't necessarily always focus on quality of our employers. We have found over and over again that if you have 10 employer partners in your employment program, the program can be just as successful with two or three quality partners than with 10 who signed up or showed up. A large emphasis is thinking about not just the quantity of employer partners that you have, but actually the quality. We'll talk about ways of thinking about those partnerships and how you evaluate them in order to figure out who you have in the room and where you spend your time.

If you have 10 employer partners, obviously some are going to be volume hires, but some may be hiring with benefits. There's something to be said for deciding how and where you're going to spend your time so you get the most outcomes, specifically for the people that you're serving, not just working the list. What do your ideal employment partners look like? Who's already onboard with the organization? What organizations in your community have similar interests to the interests that you serve? Some of the things that have come up already is thinking about, "I should start from the bottom and work my way back up." What organizations in your community have similar interests?

Two places that we find, when dealing with fatherhood programs, are our school districts and Head Starts. They both have parental engagement requirements and needs, and both are on the frontlines of what it looks like to have fathers engaged and disengaged. They tend to have a desire and an interest in helping to make those connections. When we start thinking from an employment standpoint and from a resource connection standpoint, those are almost always places to start. We start thinking about where we can build relationships with people who would





help connect you to fathers, connect fathers to opportunities, and become additional resources in the community.

Who is already onboard with the organization? There are several fatherhood programs in the room, and I know several that either run their own employment programs or have employment partnerships. Obviously we all have workforce investment boards in our areas and because I operate in a couple of different communities in my state, I'll be the first to say some are made better than others. Those aren't always the ideal partners, but where you have those relationships, they're good places to start. The other place that we've heard about today is your local TANF and child support offices.

With those types of government resources, the benefit is we have them in all communities where we operate. They all have missions that are aligned with the idea of putting people to work. I've been in places in some communities where they're at the table and at the forefront of, "How can we help people forgive arrears? How can we work with dads to give them a little bit of space when it comes to child support enforcement?" Who's already onboard with your organization in the community? Where do you seek out those resources? What is your ideal employment partner and what does that look like?

Participant: I'm just going to say for our organization, because of that stereotypical, "Oh, deadbeat dad," we've been blessed enough to be able to have an employer panel coming in to see our organization so they can get a new perspective to try to better themselves. It takes a little bit of homework. You have to call a lot of different employers to find out what their policies are. When you get an employer panel to come in and we adopt it, it establishes a relationship, and it helps a lot.

Participant: We engage our employers and invite them to participate. We have a mix of people throughout the community.

Participant: I think one thing that works really well for us is creating an advisory council of employers that includes a little bit of our vendors that are all non-unions, so we can have preferential hiring practices because they are more flexible running background checks.

Participant: We have relationships with employers who offer entry level positions, yet still offer mobility for people to advance once they've gained experience.

Sandino Thompson: I would like for people to hear from other practitioners than just me because I want to make sure that the things that I'm saying are actually relevant to the different circumstances that you're dealing with. We start out looking at Habitat for Humanity, the food





bank, Goodwill, places like that. They are the organizations that tend to employ a large scale of individuals.

We work with shipping companies. Are there people on your board, even if they don't employ or wouldn't be able to employ the kind of people we're serving, that have influence with vendors who do a lot of employment in these service industries? Again, not to limit where our people are but to identify and source where we can find these ideal employment partners. When we're talking about high needs, transportation, criminal backgrounds, low resources, and maybe not a lot of education, we have to start some place. These are methods and strategies just for identifying where those employers are and then we start building on those relationships. Some of the best experiences that we've had is getting our foot in the door in some of those places and then being able to come back. At some point, somebody will pop up and it will be an ex-felon who went out, started his own business and has done well for himself.

We've run into those situations two or three times. We have employers who have success in hiring people with criminal backgrounds, and they've become converts. This strategy is about looking at that ideal employment partner, trying to figure out the landscape as to where those people are and then start building relationships with those employer partners. You might start out with 10 or 15 to get down to the three or four who are really going to get on mission with you, and that's okay. The strategy is how you identify those. One other thing we try and talk about when we're talking about engaging quality employment partners is making sure that we as programs have our message together.

If I go to an employer and say, "I run a fatherhood program." What does that mean to the employer? For us, a part of that message is making sure that we're talking about this fatherhood program, the work that we do from the standpoint of what employers are going to care about. I'll give you an example of what we deal with in Oklahoma. If I want to talk to employers about fatherhood programs in Oklahoma, what I'm really coming and talking about are dads that have some of the highest needs, non-custodial, child support challenges, criminal backgrounds and not have more than a high school diploma. I obviously don't open the conversation with that, but what I do talk to them about is who the people are within those circumstances. We talk about criminal background and criminal justice. Unfortunately, in Oklahoma it is easy to make a case to an employer. Let's say a logistic company or we work with a lot of restaurants and hotels. It's easy to make the case because one in five individuals in Oklahoma has a criminal background. I started the conversation by saying you wouldn't discount 20 percent of the eligible workforce in the state. That 20 percent is who we're serving.

Second point is because I know what I do in my fatherhood program, I can talk to them about the skills and the educational attainment. We're talking about anything from a couple of weeks to





months that I'm spending with this individual. I can tell you about the person that I'm sending you, that somebody you're hiring off the street or even from an employment firm can't tell you. I know their habits, a little bit about their family and these are all things I'm having conversations with them about that I can share with you as a potential employer.

The other thing with our fatherhood programs and our employment strategies is we can talk about training. We always hear from employers "Well, I train them. I just need people." What are things you train them on? "Oh, well, they have to have an OSHA card. They have to know first aid." and my response is "Oh, my people already have that." "You can train them on it again, but that's going to be a start from scratch. If it takes the average person two or three days to go through that training, my people already have it because we were able to afford them that training," or I'm going to the employer and saying, "I can save you that time because my people already have those credentials."

The other piece that I think is important is that our fatherhood programs are resourced appropriately. We can talk about the fact that things like transportation and income, are classic barriers; but my people aren't the only ones dealing with it. If you survey an employer, they will tell you how often their employees show up five minutes late for whatever reason. At least our people have a support system in place. We're going to stick with them a while and make sure they're successful. Those are some of the things that we think are important once you identify these quality employment partners. Programs have to be able to talk about and make that case to the employers on why it's worth their time to make this investment.

Once we get our message down and we know what we're selling, one of the things that we want to focus on is identifying partners to sell it to. Once we've leveraged that board of directors and identify where those service providers are that have goals aligned with us, we talk to the food bank or someone about putting people to work. Do your current partners share your vision or are they partners because they need something that you can offer? That goes back to that message.

My message for a regional food bank, Goodwill or a Habitat for Humanity, is a little bit different than my message to the construction company or hotel chains because they don't care about some of these things as members of society; but, they still want to know how it's going to benefit them. With some of these other organizations, I can go and talk to them about how, "You have measures on how you're impacting low-income families, that kind of thing, well, so do I."

With the employers, my message is going to be a little bit different. Am I going and talking to these employers about something that they need? We talked about full employment earlier today. That is a pretty important thing that we have more jobs and we have people to fill them. Am I in the business of equipping people to fill those jobs? Can I create those opportunities? Do you





have enough employers to reach your employment goals? Setting realistic goals, not just the aspirational things.

We have urban communities represented, we have rural communities represented, more dense populations, and sparser populations. It's important to say that if your goal is to put 100 people to work that there are 100 jobs and you know how that's going to happen. It's important to be able to do that market research. Do I have enough employers to reach my employment goals? How can I find additional partners if I need to? Working with trade associations or labor associations. If I have one relationship with a hotel operator, I can now go talk to the hotel association that exists in my community and I can leverage that resource.

Are your employers making every job in their organization available to you or just select jobs? Somebody hit on entry level and I think there's a double edge sword. We're putting our people in a box and we don't want them to be in that box. We work with high-need populations, people dealing with a lot of challenges, but they're capable. They have high potential. They're capable of a lot more than where they're at, so we don't want to limit them. One of the things that is important is talking to employers. I think by getting the foot in the door leaves it open for opportunities for advancement. The key to that is really what you do with your programs to equip the people that you're placing there to advance. How can you show employers the advantages of working with you? We hit on a couple of those earlier. You have to take a strength-based approach within your community. One thing that is important is to come up with a system. Once you identify and assess the quality of your employers and who you're working with, come up with that system.

What is being handed out is a tracking sheet. We're talking about tracking employer engagement. For us, we use three classifications: a willing employment partner, a supportive employment partner, and an engaged employment partner. This really can apply to any partners. Willing employment partners you have a relationship with because you've been operating your program in your community and it has value in your community. They are the people you can go to and say, "Hey, we're writing for this piece of funding," or, "We need a letter of support." They'll say, "Oh, yeah, we know you, we'll do that." When we start talking about employer partners, willing employment partners are the people who will pick up the phone when you call, and they'll tell you if they have some jobs or if they can send someone over. It's someone who's interested in what you're doing but haven't made any particular commitment. Think about the partnership development, this employer partnership development is moving people on this continuum. We want to take willing to supportive. What we think about when we talk about supportive is those who have displayed an interest and a commitment, but their support is voluntary or conditional. They will say, "Hey, I really need to put some people to work. I'll call you when I need someone." Or if you call them, [they might say], "We can take a couple of people and we'll see





what happens." They're not just picking up the phone, but they are saying that we have this commitment to what you're doing, this level of engagement.

What we're trying to do is take those who are willing to supportive which is, "Let me identify a commitment that I can get you to make." Then we want to take those who've made a commitment and get them to be engaged. Engaged is me saying, "What are your employment needs? Where are your biggest gaps? Where are your biggest deficits and then how can I help you fix those?" Those are the people who call you before you call them. Think about they're calling you and saying, "Hey, I have a job that's getting ready to start and I need five people. I know you guys are training people here. Who do you have?"

The goal is to move employer partnerships to that level. This tracking tool is just a tool to be used to hold your staff accountable, hold your programs accountable to where we're spending time, and are we moving those individuals to that engaged level? When we were talking earlier about quality versus quantity, this is where it comes into effect. If you don't have a lot of engaged employer partnerships that are calling you on a regular rotation or showing up to your classes to see who's in the room, then it's hard to maintain that quantity if you don't have quality, and to maintain that quality takes work.

Without going into a lot of detail, the basic idea is to identify the areas of emphasis. You have the source. Do they provide benefits? How many jobs? What kind of opportunities do they have? How frequently are you going to contact them?

If you serve 10 people and you know what their interests are, how do you find the employers that have the interests that match the people. Which employers in that group are hiring? What's the frequency? We set that out and we say, "Frequent, infrequent, inactive." We have partners that we might call once a month. We've got partners we might call once a year. Setting that frequency allows you to hold your staff accountable. A lot of times, we'll say things like everybody is responsible for placement. You probably heard "If everybody is responsible, nobody is responsible." We'll put a staff person's name next to that employer. Who's responsible for that contact and what does frequent mean? Frequent is once a week. That means we're going to engage with this person once a week. We look at these lists. We set goals and we set objectives and then we come back and say, "How did do we?" Then we can go back and say, "Why aren't we getting more referrals from Walmart? They're the biggest company in the world. We know they're hiring people. Why aren't they hiring our people?" We can identify those issues, and if it's something we can't fix, we move to the next person on the list. This is a tool. This is not rocket science. We gave you the basic gist of it. One challenge is getting the employers. The other challenge is making sure you have somebody to send them when they call you and understanding the difference, understanding how you forecast your needs. Collecting this information and





having a tool that tracks it allows you to say, "Oh, I have three job orders. How many people do I have ready to go to work?" When I'm looking at that information and I'm tracking where my people are in a program, I can now tie this to summarizing information in my spreadsheet and say I've actually got more demand for jobs than I do for placements.

Sometimes, it would be the other way around and that's when we'll say, "Well, now is the time when I want to focus on those high volume employers. Maybe I want to go more for quantity. When I'm in this situation, I'm actually going to focus on quality." That's the purpose of the tool and when you start thinking about your employer partners, if you go back to your community and think I have a lot of willing employers, most of us can probably find them. How many do I have who are supportive? How many do I have who are really engaged, who are really committed to what we're doing and how do I move people along that threshold?"

This handout is talking about career pathways and labor market information. The first part I'll bring up is labor market information. We talked about how you message. One of the things that you can do to message and identify is figure out what your local labor market information looks like. It comes in a couple of different forms. We've put forth different methods or means of finding labor market information. One is the Bureau of Labor Statistics. They push out unemployment rates, and things of that nature. Another is looking at chambers of commerce or other regional groups. Whose job is it? Is the focus on economic development? Why is that important? Because it will help you identify where those needs are. A lot of times, we will start a program based on our passion or we'll run our programs based on our passion, but it won't necessarily be backed up by what we know. We want to do a program; we're going to train and put a lot of people to work in the healthcare field. If the healthcare field in your region is oversaturated which happens, because for 20 years we've been hearing about it, we know what the barriers to entry are and there will be opportunities, but they're probably not going to be as near as plentiful as the service industry. I bring it up because we automatically think, "No. Healthcare is better." Well, if people get stuck in the healthcare field at that entry level, those jobs are very difficult and hard to maintain.

It's actually difficult if you're in a community with an expanding service sector which is, by the way, one of the fastest growing sectors in the country regardless of your industry or your focus. It's a lot easier to tell people how to navigate that and move up and move along in that space. Labor market information is critical to us being able to confirm our assumptions. We use resources like LinkedIn and Indeed to see where the jobs are, what people are hiring for, and what they're posting. Then census.gov and the American Community Survey are great resources for confirming what the needs are.





What this will help you do is match your conversation and your program offerings with the employer partners that you're running into in your community; really being able to speak their language and identify. A lot of times you can use these resources to find out who's employing. What I'm giving you on the front side is what we talked about as a career pathway, there's a lot of literature, and a lot of studies about different employment models.

This is basically our interpretation of pulling two particular models that had been studied. One is career pathways which is talking about advancement and thinking about advancement from the very beginning and then the other is thinking about sectors and about your employment services that's focused around sectors. What we've done is create a pathway as a tool to be able to communicate with our program participants and help them understand what it takes and identify where they are.

We talked a lot about barriers that people face, but how do we communicate where we're going? It is okay to start at that entry level job because that's not the end goal in mind, but based on your circumstance, based on your level of education here is where we are. We also highlighted the value of the services that we're providing and the value of you being consistent in that practice. What's important here is that we've identified earning potential at each step along the way, so people know what they can expect.

When you start to put that on a map where you can look at a couple of different industries, somebody will come to you and tell you, "I want to do this because I heard it's really good pay." That's probably true, but what does it look like two or three years from now? As hard as it is that we have people able to look that far out into the future, we think when you can give them tools, at least we can start talking to them. We can talk about the benefits of working that goal and focusing on that next step.

We ought to make sure to identify what's necessary to advance. We can incorporate that into our programs and then make sure that we're focusing on those goals and keeping people focused on what's necessary to move ahead as well as what's necessary to get the job. The last thing is just using labor market information to reinforce what we're saying. These things that you see at the top are actually the statistics in the community in Oklahoma where we work and it's our outcomes. Forty-one percent of the people we've placed are in food and accommodations and I can give people a wage rate, so they know what to expect. Thirteen percent are in transportation, 36 percent are in construction, and 9 percent are in manufacturing, but we're also able to tell them this is what the job forecast looks like in the community. We're equipping our sales with that information, but we're also giving that information to our program participants.





There are a couple of things that we've seen people do to incorporate employment services into their fatherhood programs. One is to get specific employment content or curriculum or even training elements and pull that into the core curriculum as your basis for what you do. Combining soft skills and work readiness as a program component. If you have a fatherhood curriculum you're working with, a lot of them are based on the same ideology and methodology as the soft skills and work readiness skills people need; incorporating communication, goal planning and decision making. The key is to treat those workforce partners the same way you would employment partners.

You want to focus on the ones who are not just willing, but the ones who are actually engaged with your outcomes or their outcomes. Then integrate the comprehensive employment component into your program. The goal is to always bring all those things together as much as possible even if you're working with partners.

Try to integrate these with community colleges, career techs, and vo-techs if you can, but just making a seamless one for the program participants and making sure that there's no opportunities for people to fall off.

Response to a question [question was inaudible]

A great strategy for engaging employers is involving them in your interview preparation. Most civic-minded corporate leaders, from presidents of companies and CEOs all the way down to your counterparts like to do these types of things because it makes them feel, "Let me get out and just go meet some people and I'll talk to them. I'll help them interview."

Response to a question [question was inaudible]

There are a couple of things we do to help our people prepare for their interviews. One is the commodities that you can identify within your program. Things like pins. Clothing is one that's obvious for us. We usually assume the people have low means and they may not have a suit, or the right clothes, needed for an interview; but, things like pins and haircuts makes them feel good and helps them get ready. Another one is their resume. We do a lot of work around job search. In 2019, you do not job search or even really apply for jobs with a resume; however, anybody coming through any of our programs are going to leave with a resume. Why? Because it gives them that message. We've talked about your program having a message. It's important for participants to have a message too and so we tell them, "This resume is actually more for you than it is for the employer." You need to know everything on here. You need to know how to talk about it. Describe those gaps. Focus on that. Anything that you can give people to take with them, we've seen as a big benefit. One of the things that we've seen working with youth populations is the need for soft skills training, it's never too early for those conversations. Any kind of career exploration. When we take all the labor market information and present it in a way





where I can talk to someone about their opportunities and these different industries, those are conversations that are never too early.

What we hear a lot from our work readiness programs is people walk out and say, "I wish someone would have told me this in college. I wish someone would have told me this in high school. I wish I had heard about this earlier."

Participant: My question focuses on the I-we component. I know there's often a lot of challenges in the usual space. Is there a timetable? I'm thinking of a father who may have just gotten out of prison. He owes tens of thousands of dollars in child support with no job or career waiting for him. Do you put him right into job training?

Sandino Thompson: That's a difficult question to answer based on the audiences here because in some instances, you have to actually help people figure out how to navigate that until they're ready to deal with it. I'll say that because sometimes child support is going to be too much. You actually have to find something else to do until you're able to deal with it. Ideally what happens is, and this is community by community, you have a relationship you can build with the local child support agencies or with judges to get some relief. If we're in the fatherhood business, that has to be a top priority if that's the condition that they are showing up with; because, the alternatives are quite grim. It's almost impossible for someone coming out of prison to go to work, work hard and go through all the steps being an ex-felon, finding a job, probably a job making much less money, then give all that money away to someone who won't let you see your children.

I think the key and the goal for us is to understand how critical it is to be able to articulate the need for that relief because otherwise, there aren't many other options than to go underground, at least until you can get yourself stabilized. The key for us as fatherhood programs is to really focus on those relationships and make sure that we can find, if the agency doesn't work, the judge.

At some point, we're saying, do we just want people to go right back to jail? If not, we have to give them some relief, some space. I also think there are policies that if we can educate ourselves in our communities, and those policies, one of the biggest things that fatherhood programs can do is be a resource for helping people navigate those environments. We have family law judges from the state court system come and talk in programs. What that does is build an automatic rapport. You can use the resource to leverage that. Meeting with a family law administrator before their case reassures them they are not there to punish them, and are there to just talk to them about the system. One of the biggest things we can do is be a resource.





Fanning the Fatherhood FIRE: A National Fatherhood Summit
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Damon Waters: Thank you to our two presenters.



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