



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



NRFC Webinar Series

Working with Child Welfare Agencies to Improve Outcomes for Families Presenter Responses to Additional Questions

July 19, 2017

Moderator:

- Nigel Vann, National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC)

Presenters:

- LaRon Burris, Fathers Engagement Project, Washington State Children's Administration, King County, WA
- Penny Putnam-Collins, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Fairfax, VA
- Alan-Michael Graves, Director, Project Fatherhood, Children's Institute, Los Angeles, CA

This document includes questions submitted, but not addressed, during this NRFC Webinar. For questions addressed during the webinar, please refer to the Webinar Transcript. For more information contact the NRFC via email at info@fatherhood.gov.

Submitted Questions

What has your experience been in working with the mothers of children involved in the child welfare system? (Because if the dad is non-resident, and the child is in the child welfare system, it means they have been taken away from the mother or other caretakers.)

Alan-Michael:

Our program makes it clear to fathers from the start that a positive relationship with the mother is essential! There are several reasons, but most of all we focus on what is best for the children. Our staff has been trained in "Parenting Beyond Conflict," a program to help parents move on from conflict and develop positive co-parenting relationships. We encourage both mothers and fathers of children in the child welfare system to participate in our program. We have shared information on our program model with the courts and child welfare, and they have been very helpful in making referrals and encouraging both parents to participate.

LaRon:

The Fathers Engagement program does not work with mothers directly. When a child is removed from the home by Child Protective Services (CPS), a CPS worker will work with the mother or other caretakers. If the father is present or located, he is referred to the Fathers Engagement program. At that point, my only focus is to help him navigate the child welfare system and become a viable placement option for the children if the mother is not able to provide a stable home for the child. The mother should be following her dependency recommendations as well.

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What has your experience (if any) been with resistance from fathers to becoming involved with the child welfare system?

Alan-Michael:

Some fathers are resistant if they have experienced “system bias” from workers that are rude, and the fathers perceive that they are only concerned with the mother’s point of view; some are afraid that the child welfare system will “turn them in” to Child Support; others suffer and are resistant when there is a lack of father advocates in the child welfare system.

LaRon:

There is always a certain level of apprehension with fathers who have children involved with CPS. There are several reasons for this, but mostly it comes down to trust issues concerning how they perceive state systems. The goal of the Fathers Engagement program is to help alleviate barriers like this through education. Regardless of how a father feels about the child welfare system, he must learn to work with them to have any hope of getting his child out of that system. I tell fathers, “This is not about how you feel about CPS, but how you feel about your children and how hard you are willing to work for their safe return home.” The Fathers Engagement program is not in the business of resistance; we are in the business of reunification.

Questions for Alan-Michael:

Who are some of your strongest partners that assist your organization with resources?

Alan-Michael:

Some of our strongest partners are the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Homeboy Industries, Children’s Law Center, Kaiser and Cedars Hospitals, and the West Angeles Church of God and Christ.

In addition to child welfare, what other systems are you connecting with?

Alan-Michael:

We work with Child Support Services, Probation, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS).

Question for LaRon:

I’m a new fatherhood specialist. The fathers I serve are not well educated about online services. What training do you know of that will help them access and navigate the internet to find resources?

LaRon:

The best way to help anyone who is uneducated is to encourage them to get educated. The Fathers Engagement program does this by encouraging fathers to teach each other (“each one teach one”). Someone in the group usually knows about resources or what to do, and they can help fathers who are struggling find the resources they need. Also, your local library may have free tutorial classes for learning the basics of web searching.