



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



NRFC Webinar Series

The Role of Women in Fatherhood Programs

Transcript

March 21, 2018

Moderator:

- Nigel Vann, Product Lead, National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

Presenters:

- Linda Mellgren, Senior Social Science Analyst, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (retired)
- Kenneth Braswell, Project Director, NRFC, and Executive Director, Fathers Incorporated, Atlanta, Georgia
- Cheri D. Tillis, Executive Vice President/Chief Operating Officer, Fathers' Support Center (FSC), St. Louis, Missouri

Operator: Good day, everyone, and welcome to the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse webinar, "The Role of Women in Fatherhood Programs." As a reminder, today's conference is being recorded. At this time, I would like to turn the conference over to Nigel Vann. Please go ahead.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much. And welcome and good morning, good afternoon, wherever you are, everybody. I'm actually speaking to you today from Los Angeles, California, so it's early in the morning for me. I'm here with a colleague from the Clearinghouse who also works for Child Trends, Ms. Mindy Scott. And we're here doing a program visit to the Children's Institute Project Fatherhood program. Just wanted to let you know where we're at.

And today's webinar, as you just heard, is on the role of women in fatherhood programs. We're doing this this month in recognition of Women's History Month, and we're going to focus on the important roles that women have played and continue to play in the field of responsible fatherhood. We're going to discuss how the voices of women have influenced fatherhood research, advocacy, and public policy, and explore the role of female professionals in the development and implementation of fatherhood services.

I've been involved in this field almost 30 years now—it'll be 30 years next month—and have the honor and the privilege of working with a lot of remarkable women and have really seen the impact they've had. I think really, this is an overdue discussion. It's interesting that we're having the discussion here at Project Fatherhood, because their philosophy is that when it comes to facilitating groups with fathers, that's really something that they want male facilitators to do. And it works really well for them. I've obviously seen in other programs around the country, I've seen some exceptional women who facilitate groups. So we're going to dive in to some of the issues in and around that, and I think it's going to be a fascinating discussion.

I'll introduce our presenters shortly. Let me just move you on to our next slide, which is an overview of the Clearinghouse. For those of you who are joining us for the first time, just wanted to let you know that you can go here and find a wealth of resources, whether you be a father, a practitioner, a researcher or a policymaker. We've got a number of new products that have only just appeared in the library, so you may not have seen these yet, so I wanted to briefly mention some of those. We have a research brief on trauma-informed approaches and awareness for programs working with fathers. We have an information sheet for practitioners who work with unmarried fathers about paternity establishment. We have a brief on tips for programs around supporting fathers of children with special needs. We've got a brief and a fact sheet about whole family approaches, that are also called two generation approaches. It's a fairly new strategy, certainly for the fatherhood programs, but it's been around in terms of programs that work with mothers and children for a long while, so we've got some ideas in there for ways in which we might more proactively engage the children.

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

Toll-free: 877-4DAD411 (877-432-3411) | Fax: 703-934-3740 | Help@FatherhoodGov.Info | www.fatherhood.gov

 facebook.com/fatherhoodgov

 [@fatherhoodgov](https://twitter.com/fatherhoodgov)



And it's actually interesting that we're here at Project Fatherhood, because they do some activities with children while the fathers are in the fatherhood sessions. They have structured activities that the children engage in, and it's arranged by age groups.

We also have a brief on preparing fathers for workforce success, and one on helping young fathers with decision-making. And we also have a program spotlight on a program that we went to last year on the South Carolina Fathers and Families Center. That's a program that was started back in the '90s, with funding from the Sisters of Charity Foundation and has been led by Patricia Littlejohn ever since. And it's really a model for a statewide program – provides all sorts of great resources. So Pat is one of the women who we would certainly like to acknowledge for her work in the field. There's so many more—we can't acknowledge everybody—but we will mention a few people as we go forward here.

This is contact information for the Clearinghouse. That's got the website address, if you haven't been to our website [<https://www.fatherhood.gov/>]. We strongly recommend you have a look at our Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit, which has got tips for practitioners. You can also go to the archives for all of our webinars that we've done in the past. We have recordings there, the same as we're recording today's webinar. You can actually listen and view the slides to all the webinars. You can download the transcript and the slides. You can download additional resources from there.

We also encourage you to email us, and our email address has changed. So if you've emailed us before, the email that you see on the screen is our new email, help@fatherhoodgov.info. We also encourage you, and particularly fathers—or pass this on to fathers who you may work with—to use our helpline – our toll-free helpline at 1-877-4-DAD-411. We have trained mediators on that line who can get a father and mother on separate lines and help them discuss any co-parenting issues. They can also refer you to resources in the local community.

And you can always engage with us via [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). And you see the contacts at the bottom for our federal representative, John Allen, who you'll hear from at the end of the webinar. Kenny Braswell is actually presenting with us today, our Project Director, and Patrick Patterson, our Project Manager.

And just a quick overview of what you see on your screen, and I see that various people have already started taking advantage of the chat box on the left. We certainly encourage you to introduce yourself there, ask questions of each other, share information. If you have a question for the presenter, you'll see at the bottom right-hand corner of your screen the Ask a Question box. So please, bring any questions that you'd like the presenters to address at the end of the webinar there, and we'll respond to as many of those as we can. If we don't have time to get through all the questions, which is often the case, we will ask the presenters if they can provide some written responses, and then we post those to the website along with the other webinar materials.

You'll also see we have a Downloadable Resources box. You can download the full set of slides for today's webinar from there. You can also download the bios for each of the presenters. And then you'll see some links on the side. We've got the [Fatherhood.gov](#) website, [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), and those are the links on the left there—you can just click on.

Here's a quick overview of the webinar. As I said, we're going to be discussing how the voices of women have influenced the development and implementation of fatherhood services. You're going to hear from Linda Mellgren. She's now retired, but she put in many, many years of service with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, so we're going to hear from her first. Then we'll be hearing from Kenny Braswell, our Project Director here at the Clearinghouse, and also the Executive Director of Fathers Incorporated. And then we'll be hearing from Cheri Tillis, who is the Executive Vice President for the Fathers' Support Center in St. Louis, Missouri, a longstanding program. [It's] had a lot of success, and Cheri's been there for most of the time of that program, so she'll providing some direct practitioner tips. As I said, we'll have a session at the end where we'll respond to your questions.

So before I introduce Linda, we have a poll question that's going to pop up, I believe. Can we have the poll question, Enzo? We'd like to get an idea of who's on the line a little bit, so if you could take a minute and respond to this. You can choose up to three responses here: In which of the following areas do you think women have had the most influence in the development and implementation of fatherhood programs? I'll just give you a few seconds to respond to that.

[Pause]



It looks like the top three votes of the moment are going to advocacy, direct service provision and support services, followed by program leadership, and research and evaluation. I thank you for that input.

And let me now briefly introduce you to Linda Mellgren. I'm not going to read her full bio—you can download that—but she was the Senior Social Science Analyst for 38 years at ASPE, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Oh, I'm not sure if she was a Senior Social Science Analyst for the whole 38 years, but she was very involved in all sorts of areas impacting fatherhood like child support, fatherhood, marriage and healthy relationships. She managed a multisite family study of incarceration, parenting and partnering, and she led the HHS activities for the Federal Interagency Reentry Council, which is a collaborative effort across 22 federal offices to improve reentry outcomes for the formerly incarcerated. During the 1990s, she chaired the HHS Fatherhood Working Group, which was a department-wide effort to help fathers be more involved in their children's lives. I certainly remember that that had a big impact on the way we talked about how services that target families can improve fathers. And also, very importantly, she's got a Cardigan Welsh Corgi named Lily.

So Linda, please share some of your expertise with us.

Linda Mellgren: Thank you so much. And I do want to thank Nigel and Kenny and my former HHS colleagues at the Office of Family Assistance for this opportunity. I was joking with Nigel that the reason for inviting me is that I'm old, as you can see, for how I've been in the federal government. But the history of federal involvement in fatherhood really unfolded during my long career at HHS. And so, I speak from the perspective of a longtime supporter of programs and policies that focus on acknowledging the important role that fathers have in the lives of their children, and in finding ways to support and enhance that involvement.

My perspective is sort of a 60,000-foot perspective. It is on research and policy more than in the field. And I speak from a federal perspective because that's what I know. But I want to make sure everyone knows that I no longer speak for the federal government, because I am happily retired.

I'd like to start by going over sort of a thematic history of the fatherhood field, because I think it helps give some context to the role of women in the fatherhood field. In the '70s and in the early '80s, the conversation of fathers was really about deadbeat dads and absent fathers. It was a period of time where folks were very interested in the notion of the feminization of poverty, that women and children were poor primarily because men deserted them, were not stepping up to the plate, were not doing their share, especially in terms of financially supporting them. And in fact, there were papers written that said that fathers have no role, no important role, in the lives of children, except to provide material support.

Out of that conversation, however, there began to be some questioning about, who are these fathers who are not paying child support? Who are these fathers who don't want to be involved in their children's lives? And the federal government under the auspices of the National Institutes of Health, and also my agency and the predecessor to ACF, started looking at studies to examine what was going on with men in their role of fathers. That groundwork was then augmented by a number of foundations who were looking primarily not at fatherhood, but at poverty and the number of families in poverty, and poverty in low-income communities, especially communities of color. And they started looking at the notion of absent fathers less from the perspective of abandonment than of men who needed help and support themselves to support their families.

Within that context, the federal government, under then-President Clinton, who issued a memorandum to the entire federal government saying, we want to be more involved—we want to make sure that fathers are more involved in federal programs, and that federal agencies should do more to involve fathers in those programs. The president and Vice President Gore really challenged the federal agencies to do more, and there was a lot of activity that happened during that period. Agencies across the federal government started thinking about, well, how do we treat fathers, and how do we think about fathers? A lot of creative programming was done with money that didn't focus on fathers, but had a family and child focus.

From that leadership, there were expanded conversations, and in the early 2000s Congress actually passed a program, the Responsible Fatherhood Program, and its partner program, the Healthy Marriage Program, which finally gave the fatherhood field a federal program of its own. Since that time, the fatherhood program has been expanding and evolving, and now it is sort of working within this notion of changing social norms—lots of conversations about the roles of men and women, and lots of conversations about same-sex couples and what that has to do with families. There's a lot of fermentation going on in society in which fatherhood programs now need to thread their unique role and their partnerships with other social service programs and agencies.



None of that speaks to the role of women in fatherhood, but it's an important context to understand. And during all that time, there was an effort to find ground between the advocates and policy folks who were looking at the issues relating to women and families, and the advocacy groups that were looking at the role of men in families and what they had to offer children. I want to highlight in this slide, "Finding Common Ground," a couple of areas where this tension between men and women, mothers and fathers, really came to play.

One was a conversation about the competition for resources. There's always been concerns that programs that provide for poor families, and many of those poor families are single parent families headed by women and children, are under-resourced to begin with. And any conversation that was held about "Well, we should be providing programming for fathers," there were concerns that what that would mean would be a diminution of the resources that would be available for men and women.

I remember sitting around a table of a federal agency, federal government-wide meeting at the Office of Management and Budget, when we were discussing welfare-to-work programs that had been passed in the 1990s, and there was an opportunity in that program to provide employment opportunities for men who were attached to poor families. And there was great concern that if those programs focused on men, they would somehow suck all the resources out of the programs that were providing employment opportunities for women.

Concerns about safety, about physical safety—the issue of domestic violence and of intimate partner violence is very, very real. Women and children can be in very dangerous situations. The community of folks who are advocates for women who are victims of domestic violence and for children who are abused by their parents have been very, very hesitant to embrace the issue of programs for fathers. Because many times they saw those programs as potentially empowering abusers, as opposed to finding ways to mitigate the violence that might be occurring in some families.

There have been many, many conversations. I can remember the Ford Foundation convening a group called Common Ground, where leaders in the field of domestic violence and in the fatherhood field were sitting together as men and women around a table, all equally concerned about the need to make sure that children have good and important role models, both males and females, and trying to figure out how to thread that really significant issue, supporting both parents. How do you support mothers and fathers? There's a tendency to say one is more important than the other. And a lot of programs have been really struggling with the notion of how do we support mothers, and how do we support fathers, and how do we support them in their role together.

And lastly, I am just going to briefly raise the notion of some greater societal issues relating to patriarchy and feminism. No matter what I would say, I would offend someone. But I want to say that the notion of what is the role of men in families—Are men to be the head of the family and control the resources and the lives of women and children? And the feminist notion—remember that I'm old, and I remember the 1970s. One of the quotes from that time was "Women need men like a fish needs a bicycle." Those strains of thought really do affect the way we think about fatherhood programs, the way public policy thinks about fatherhood programs, and the way we sometimes formulate our research and policy questions.

From my long experience of viewing the field, I want to just raise 10 examples of the role that women have had in federal policy research evaluations and programs. There's more than 10 on there, but there's 10 issue areas. [These] are just a few of the people who really had an effect on the way the fatherhood field developed and unfolded over time. Men were involved in all of these things, too. Sometimes some of the researchers, especially that I'm going to identify, had male partners, but I'm not going to give their names, because I think today what we want to focus on is how women have made meaningful contributions to the fatherhood field, and I want to hold those women up on their own.

When I talked earlier about the fact that there was some emerging research that was done in the 1980s that was asking questions about who are these men, what are they doing, and what's going on there. There's a number of researchers that were right in the middle of what we called matched pair studies—that is, we were looking not as men apart from women but as what was happening with couples as those relationships developed and broke apart.

One of the folks is Eleanor Maccoby. She did some of the very early work on custody and visitation and spent the rest of her career working on that issue, on how fathers and mothers should be involved together on issues of custody.

Freya Sonenstein was the lead project officer at something called the Survey of Absent Parents. We only did a pilot study. It was something that was funded by my office, but it was one of those studies where we identified that when men and women report on



an event, often the truth is in-between. That is, women may say men are providing no support, men might say they're providing a lot of support, and when you compared and looked at the actual records, you would find somewhere in-between. Freya went on to do a lot of work around issues of men's sexuality, especially young men's sexuality, and has been an absolute leader in the field of trying to understand how young men conceptualize their roles as fathers and as becoming fathers.

And then Elizabeth Peters. She took all of those studies that were being done on matched pair studies and did a synthesis of that, and then became one of the leading researchers in the area of father involvement and has continued that work as she was at Cornell and at the Urban Institute.

Another area where women have had success, a very important role, is in understanding young unwed fathers. Theodora Ooms—some of you may recognize the name from her more recent work on marriage—was the project officer on one of the very first conferences where we looked at who were the young men involved in teenage pregnancies. Were they teenagers? Were they men in their 20s or in their 30s? What was going on there, and what was their perspective about being fathers?

Pam Wilson worked on creating some of the first curriculum for young unwed father programs and has continued to stay involved in the field.

Paternity establishment. One of the researchers—I'll just focus on Sara McLanahan—she was the “magic moment” person. That is, her research on the role of fathers and families led to this idea, which was well-documented in the research, that at the time of the birth of a child, unmarried fathers are often there, and they're excited, and they want to be involved, and they're not cold and distant, getting women pregnant and then just abandoning them. That is an inaccurate conception. Her work led to a major study on fragile families that is still being used today to look at what's going on with fatherhood and with couples, both married and unmarried couples.

In the field of early childhood development, two of the researchers that I wanted to highlight are Natasha Cabrera—and I have to apologize here, because I scribbled Cathy's name down and I scribbled it wrong. It's Cathy with a C and her last name is Tamis-LeMonda. We'll get the right spelling of that on the next iteration of the slides. But I apologize to anyone who knows Cathy and Natasha. They've been doing work on early childhood development in the research field and have shown the importance of fathers' involvement, especially in language development, and their work is widely cited and quoted in the policy field.

Another area where we have had a number of women who have been extraordinarily important, that's on supporting IPV [inter-partner violence] survivors and fathers and trying to work on pulling that set of issues together. Jacqui Boggess from the Center for Family Policy and Practice, and Tasseli McKay, who works for RTI, one of the contractors, and was one of the leads on the fatherhood and incarceration study that Nigel mentioned at the beginning, have both in separate instances been examining the issues of domestic violence and inter-partner violence, and coming up with strategies and ways of thinking about how domestic violence and fatherhood programs can coexist in the same space, and how fatherhood programs and other programs serving men need to be better connected to the domestic violence community.

High on my list of people to hold up is Vivian Gadsden. Vivian is at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. She ran the National Center on Fathers and Families during the 1990s and early [2000s]. She was just a master at pulling together leaders from the fatherhood field, academics, and public policy folks from across federal and state governments, bringing them together, sitting them in a small room and having them talk through and thrash out issues. Many of the policy issues that were resolved during those days really lead back to Vivian's leadership.

Mundane issues—that is, federal staff who are maybe sometimes, people say, just doing their job, but can have a tremendous impact on the unfolding of a public policy issue. I want to hold up Andrea Kane and Nancy Hoit for their White House oversight during the Clinton-Gore fatherhood initiative. They just worked tirelessly to make sure that all the federal agencies were engaged and that the progress that we made was meaningful and sustainable. Andrea has gone on to do tremendous work in the campaign to prevent unplanned pregnancy and has shown that same kind of sensitivity to how men need to be involved in the whole area of pregnancy, planning, and prevention.

In terms of the HHS initiative that Nigel mentioned, I want to hold up my partner, Lisa Gilmore, who was Special Assistant to the Deputy Secretary. Lisa was masterful at finding resources. You have to remember that during those days of the mid '90s and into the early 2000s, there was no special funding for fatherhood programs. Anything we did, we had to find funding from some place else



that had enough of a connection to fatherhood that we could legitimately spend the money. And Lisa was just wonderful at both finding resources and at helping make strategic decisions about who should be invited to the table and who should be involved in activities, both within the federal government and outside the federal government.

And then in the world of child support, which sometimes is considered the bane of fatherhood programs' existence because there's always this conflict about money, I think it's important to hold up the role that Vicki Turetsky, the former Commissioner of the Office of Child Support Enforcement, had in the area of promoting a more balanced approach to how fathers and mothers are both child support clients, and that fathers need to be heard just as mothers need to be heard. Vicki has had long roots in the fatherhood sphere, having been part of one of the early fatherhood evaluations, Parents' Fair Share, which was the first random assignment evaluation of fatherhood programs. She had been a policy analyst on that particular program and maintained an interest in how we look at fatherhood as a part of the solution, not as the problem, throughout her tenure at CLASP [Center for Law and Social Policy] and then at the Office of Child Support Enforcement.

And last but not least on this litany, I just want to hold up program leadership and mention Robin McDonald, Geneva Ware-Rice, Charisse Johnson and Lisa Washington-Thomas, all of OFA. There's often a sense that "Well, people are just doing their job." But I think we need to recognize that in the field of fatherhood and elsewhere, people can do their job, or they can do their job with enthusiasm, commitment, ingenuity, and vision. The leadership of women as it relates to fatherhood programming has really helped keep the energy and synergy going throughout the last number of decades.

Nigel Vann: This is Nigel. We do need to move on pretty quickly. Could you just do—

Linda Mellgren: OK.

Nigel Vann: —two slides pretty quickly?

Linda Mellgren: I think what I'm going to do is, I'm going to skip the strength and partnerships slide. That was just talking more about men and women working together and how in many of the federal programs, we're really talking about partnerships that make fatherhood programs stronger and other programs stronger. I won't belabor that point.

But I do want to mention just the fact that there's still work to be done as it relates to the fatherhood field and some of the federal programs. One is in child support guidelines, where we still need to think about how poor fathers are treated and poor mothers are treated, and make sure that those guidelines are appropriate for today's families. We have issues on co-parenting program strategies that need to be developed, more work that needs to be done on family violence, and more work on the family-friendly workplace. And Nigel, you mentioned a very important point that I didn't have on my list that I think is absolutely crucial, and that's fathers and trauma and how that plays out in how we work with fathers.

Just in closing, fatherhood programs have come a long way from being unthinkable and thought of as a waste of time in the 1970s. They are now seen as an important public policy tool to help children and families [and] communities survive and thrive, and women have been an important part of that process. And it is for men and women, and fathers and mothers working together, that the next generation of fatherhood programs will emerge. Thank you.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Linda. It's certainly a discussion that we can continue for a long while. There's so much to point out about what women have done to make these programs possible. We'll come back to some of that with the Q&A.

But now, it really is an honor for me to introduce Kenneth Braswell. This is an overdue appearance for him on one of our webinars. He is our leader of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. He's been the Project Director since 2011. He started Fathers Incorporated in 2004. His bio that you can download does not do his work justice. Prior to that, he had led fatherhood work in the state of New York. He really is one of the most influential leaders in the field right now. I'm a bit older than Kenny, and it's great to see the energy that he brings to this field. Although I've got retirement plans somewhere not too far down the road, it's great to see that Kenny's going to keep taking this forward. So, going to give the time to Kenny. He's really going to set the stage for the rest of this discussion.

Kenneth Braswell: Nigel, thank you so much, sir. I wasn't expecting you to bring age into this conversation, but we'll talk about that later. [Laughs] Also I want to thank everyone who has joined the webinar today. This is a conversation that we have quite often in



our circles. We think that it is a conversation that we should have more around the country, as it relates to the roles and how women play, as examples of the work that they've done so well in their own areas of work that the field of responsible fatherhood is still somewhat catching up to.

But what I want to do is I also want to thank John Allen, who is our current contract officer who is on the line. And Linda did a great job in talking about Charisse Johnson, Robin McDonald, and Lisa Washington-Thomas, who have been very critical in the great work that we have done over the last several years and as we continue to move forward.

And I also want to talk and thank the many women that we have on our staff as a part of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, across all of our partners, the Ad Council, Child Find of America, Child Trends and MSG. They have all done a great job. They give great voice to this work. They play critical roles in every aspect of what we do, including women who are part of the staff of Fathers Incorporated [who] do the same.

What I wanted to do was, Linda laid down a great foundation for this conversation. She talked a lot about what I was going to talk about, so it gives me some space to talk about some other things. But what I want to do is, I really want to share with you today – primarily as the Director of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse and the years of work that I've done with Fathers Incorporated – I want to talk a little bit about what I've seen in practice, somewhat what I've heard in conversation, how I've seen the role of women play out in the implementation of programs and engagement. And then what I – and what has resonated when I've done training around the country with organizations who are looking to do more of this work and had concerns about how women were integrated into their programmatic structure.

[Pause]

As Linda stated, women have been engaged in fatherhood work for decades. I don't need to continue to go over that. She did a great job in talking about a host of women around the country that have played critical roles in responsible fatherhood. So many were not mentioned that are out there in small corners of cities and towns and agencies and organizations that are doing great work with their local fathers. We know that there is a predominance of women in particular in social service circles. And so, it's a conversation that we have often in the responsible fatherhood field. I'm going to talk a little more in depth about that in the next slide.

And we also know that we have to grapple with this conversation around low-income fathers. Because as we talk about responsible fatherhood, we look at this issue across the spectrum of dads—whether they be rural dads, whether they be urban dads, dads in inner cities, dads in the Appalachians, or wherever they happen to be—we have to have that conversation. But there is a difference when we're talking about different cohorts of dads.

And then lastly, we have to address this lack of research on how effective female practitioners are in male client relationships. That's not just in the space of responsible fatherhood, that is across the spectrum of social services. As a result of these things, let's take a look at how they interact across the field.

One of the last slides that Linda had up was talking about partnerships and how we can partner, but I think it is important for us to look at where this male-female interaction takes place in support services, and how, if we're not having this conversation about the different gender roles, where we can find obstacles and problems.

So as we look across these different points of contact, whether you're talking about TANF, you're talking about child welfare, where there's a lot of conversation now about looking for dads when children are being placed into foster care. Employment services. Maternal and child healthcare. Head Start and Healthy Start, where Head Starts around the country now and the PTA are having great conversations about the inclusion of responsible fatherhood in those spaces and how critical they are, particularly in the lives of their children in the 0-5 year-old stage—you will hear a lot of conversation about that in the future.

Child support and shared parenting—we hear, and we've heard that conversation over and over, and we know what that means for both Mom and Dad and how that conversation plays itself out. Domestic violence, as Linda talked about, was something that we [were] very concerned about in the beginning of the responsible fatherhood work. And we found ways to work with DV agencies to [assure] them that as we move forward in responsible fatherhood that we were extremely conscious of ensuring that safety is always the No. 1 issue when you're doing responsible fatherhood work, co-parenting, marriage, and bringing fathers back into the lives of their children. And obviously, Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood.



But one of the things that I would say as I'm talking about this is that societal perceptions of fathers is always one of the biggest factors in these conversations, and that is really where I want to lay the foundation in my next 10 minutes around this conversation around the roles of women.

And so [pause] it starts in the conversation. As we've gone around the country and had these conversations and trainings with organizations ... that are looking to figure out how can they effectively bring both men and women into the space. We start with group activities, and we encourage organizations to assess their staff, to talk about their feelings, particularly about responsible fatherhood and what that looks like to them, because there's all kinds of conversations that come up when we are talking about fathers. We want to make sure that we understand the importance of bringing our own personal assessment to the table. Because a lot of times, the obstacles and barriers that fathers face in programs is where practitioners, not only women, but men as well, bring their personal issues to the table unresolved. A lot of times when that personal issue is moved and brought to the table, that could serve as a barrier for working with men.

If you look at the questions at the bottom in the group activity, it talks about "What are some of the challenges for female staff working with fathers?" We're very clear. As I've talked about in the last PowerPoint page, where we look at all of the places that men and women intersect, and also where women are the majority in the staffing of those areas, you can understand how – when someone brings their own personal bias to the table – how that can impact the service delivery for a father who's coming in for services. And you can also understand why he may be a little hesitant in reaching out for services.

One of the biggest issues that we talk about in these conversations when it comes to women's role in fatherhood is the issue of power, race, and gender. We don't nearly talk about this conversation enough. It is an extremely sensitive conversation, because it brings up so many personal aspects of our lives. It brings to bear issues that we're all not ready to talk about but must be talked about, particularly when it comes to gender.

We know that in this fatherhood space that when you're doing support groups in particular, and there is a female facilitator, or a male facilitator, or both, there are unconscious and conscious things that are taking place in a room that everybody must be aware of if we're going to do this work. When we're talking about gender transferences and counter-transferences between men and women, you are talking about the natural instinct and reaction that women have to men and how the societal perception has played a role in that conversation, and how we bring oftentimes the anger and mistrust of systems for the clients and how they look at it.

Then we also have to deal with the sexual and erotic transference. When you're talking about men and women, it is always a reality when we come together. As practitioners and organizations who are training facilitators to do this work, this has to be one of the more critical conversations that you have, because while we like to believe that is not going to take place amongst professionals, we know that that is not always the case.

When we're also looking at practitioners and how we look at those clients, as well as how we deal with them, how we receive them, we have to also bring in to bear [sic] that when you do have personal circumstances, depending on how you deal with those personal circumstances, it may have an impact on how you see your clients the next day, or how you have a conversation with fathers in a room the next day. So we have to have these conversations, and they're sensitive conversations. And where you believe that you can't have that conversation internally, I suggest that you reach out to capacity builders and folks that are in that space to come in and help you navigate that conversation.

These are a couple things to remember as you think about those. The first thing is that all new relationships with persons in authority or positions of power begin tentatively. What does that mean? It means that when we walk into a conversation with someone in authority, there's always some hesitancy, there's some [unsureness]. That interaction may not be positive based on whatever your history has been with men, or what the history of women has been for the men that you're serving. We know that particularly African American men have a justifiable and healthy mistrust of programs that has to be addressed when they walk into the room.

That respect and trust is something that has to be earned amongst all practitioners. This is not just a female practitioner room. This is a total practitioner room. We all must do the work in ensuring that when we are serving our clientele that there's a level of respect and trust. Oftentimes when we're talking about fathers and they walk into programs, they are looking for that first. Before they're looking for service, before they are looking to be served in a particular place, they are first looking to see whether or not you are going to respect who they are and trust what they bring to the table.

Anger is another issue that we have to deal with when we're working with fathers in this space, and the frustration and feelings of powerlessness for fathers who are walking into spaces that they're unsure about. And then being clear as practitioners that we're listening to them first and not listening to respond, but listening to understand.

These are some of the critical questions that you can ask your staff. I won't go through all of these, but these will give you a great foundation to begin to start thinking about how you can address these issues of gender, these issues of power, and these issues of race when we are working with all cultures. We could be talking about our fathers in the Midwest. We could be talking about our fathers in the Southwest, where culture is a huge issue. We could be talking about any kind of father in any place, but them not understanding of who we are, it makes it very difficult to serve them.

What can practitioners do? You can do exactly what we just talked about, which is understanding the power dynamics. Understanding what is in the room, and who you're talking to, and who you're dealing with, and being aware of your own possible biases, and what are you bringing to the table and being conscious about that. There is a level of transparency that has to take place with your own staff. When you are providing or looking to provide services, particularly for dads, what and how are you dealing with those biases that you're bringing to the table?

Volunteer or cross-train with fatherhood agencies or men agencies in your communities. Those agencies will give you a good sense of what it looks like to work primarily with men. Challenge practices and policies. I would also add in there I would actually challenge culture, the culture of your organization, and how you deal with all of your clients who walk in the door, but particularly as fathers are walking into the door. Where are those things serving as an obstacle to the work that you're trying to do?

Because at the end of the day, we are family focused. We know that we have to do the individual and particular work with fathers. We have to do the individual and particular work with moms and with children. At the end of the day, we're looking at children, but we have to look at some of the nuances that particularly fathers bring to the table. And we ask that you're always empathetic, and what that means is just putting yourself in their shoes. I think that we all like to see this utopia where we can just talk about parents, and not talk about fathers and not talk about moms. And while that may be a great goal to have, the unfortunate reality right now is we do have to look at them separately, because if that was the case, we wouldn't be having this conversation today.

So I encourage and I challenge all of you to keep an eye towards child well-being and family stability. And just understand and be aware that both moms and dads bring something different to the table. We want them to be the best parents they can be. We want them to do all the things that they are capable and have the potential to do for their children, but at the same time we have to meet them where they are. If we meet them where they are, it makes us comfortable and it gets us comfortable with having a conversation and only talking about fathers. Having a conversation and only talking about mothers. Having a conversation and only talking about children. As long, as a collective [sic], we are focused on main goal, which is to ensure that we create healthy families. Thank you.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Kenny. I know you had a couple of other points you wanted to make, but part of the reason is when we have these slides, you can download the slides afterwards and you can see all the key points, and Kenny certainly covered them all there.

I wanted to chime in with a couple of thoughts here, because I noticed in the chat box, there's [an] awful lot of good things going on in there. Somebody pointed out that children need to see respectful interaction between men and women, and I think that is one of the things that a fatherhood program does. It helps fathers think about that for sure, but I think also when we have men and women on the staff of fatherhood programs, the men get to see that respectful interaction between professionals, which really has a major impact, I think.

We're just going to take a brief pause for our second poll question, if we can have that on the screen, Enzo. You can check as many of these as apply. We just want to know, if you provide direct services for fathers, which of the following roles do women play in those services?

[Pause]



Just give you a couple of more seconds. It looks like the clear leader is case management. And then we've got program leadership and recruitment. Group facilitation, we've got a good number of people saying that. And support services.

While you're finishing that up, I'm going to go ahead and introduce our final speaker, Ms. Cheri Tillis, who is the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the Fathers' Support Center in St. Louis, Missouri. This is actually Cheri's second appearance on our webinar, and we welcome you back, Cheri. She's been with the Fathers' Support Center since 2003. She's responsible for oversight of their programs, their daily operations, and 55 staff positions at four program locations. She has been a 2016 Missouri Foundation for Health fellow and served as the principal investigator on several fatherhood research studies in partnership with Washington University in St. Louis. She's represented the program at many national conferences. And with that, I'm going to pass it over to Cheri to tell us about what they do on the ground there, the role that women play, and how we can help prepare women to do this work, as Kenny was starting to talk about there.

Cheri, the time is yours.

Cheri Tillis: Well, thank you so much, Nigel, and good afternoon to everyone who has joined us today. I do come to you from sunny St. Louis today, and I am just so happy to share the work of Fathers' Support Center with you all. Some of you are maybe familiar with the organization. We've been around since 1997 and opened our doors in 1998. But what you may not know is that the agency was the idea of two nurses that worked at a large hospital here in the NICU unit. They saw oftentimes that there were services for the mothers, however services for fathers that presented in their hospital were far and few in between. So Mr. Sullivan, our founding CEO, often tells the story about how he was actually doing some work with the state of Missouri as well as George Warren Brown school of Social Work at Washington University here in St. Louis, when he was approached by these two nurses to begin the organization.

Fathers' Support Center opened its doors in 1998, and one of our first program facilitators was a nun by the name of Sister Carol, who is still with us here today and presents our parenting curriculum at our main location. She's been with the organization for 19 years now. I would say that from its inception, Fathers' Support Center has had the input of women and the idea to provide services to fathers.

I want to also lay out for you the services that we are able to provide here at the organization. We are most known for what we call our Family Formation Program, which is a six-week fatherhood curriculum-led program. Our participants are with us Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. for the entire six weeks, and we follow up with our clients for an entire year where we offer them services and referrals to assist them with obtaining the goals that they set while they were in the class.

We also have a legal clinic that practices family law and assists our clients with navigating the child support system, so that they are well aware of their rights as well as some of the information they need to know about their rights to visitation and being able to sire and raise their children.

We also provide within our array of services transportation assistance as well as employment placement and credentialing of each one of our clients. We often seek out opportunities for them to be able to provide for their families, so they can be seen as a viable resource to the mother as well as their children.

And about three years ago, Fathers' Support Center began providing a new program which was called our Parenting in Partnership. We would work with the mothers of the children through our family bonding outings. More often than not, when we would have people come over and visit and see what our services were, they often would say that "Hey, we need these services for moms as well." Three years ago we were able to add a mothers' program as well, which was on the exact same six-week cycle as the fathers' group. We provide about a hundred hours of motherhood curriculum to our participants and that additional one year of follow-up, where they are able to meet with our social workers and employment placement staff to make sure that they too are improving upon their education, improving upon their understanding of how important they are to their children, as well as their parenting skills.

Initially, the program was also set up to make sure that parents who were never married have the opportunity to develop co-parenting plans, so that the child can see both parents and have the opportunity [to] be raised by both mother and father, regardless of their relationship status. Within that program, we put in just a few tweaks, such as daycare assistance, considering the



moms were usually the custodial parent. We also provide some stipends and incentives for their participation, as well as an entire year of mentoring services to the moms through volunteer mentors that we're able to use.

Oftentimes, when people find out that I work in fatherhood, they're very surprised that I've had such a long career within this arena. And [I've] actually had the pleasure of joining the staff in 2003. We were a much smaller staff then, about eight employees, and we served about 150 participants per year. I'm very happy to say that now we have about 55 employees and we serve, on average at the agency as a whole, about 900 participants per year through all of our programs.

I have played a part in just about every position here at the agency. I like to joke and say I haven't been in accounting much, but I do budgets, and I haven't actually been the CEO. I have been with the agency for 14 years now and been able to have my hands in case management as well as managing programs here at the organization. I don't think I would trade that opportunity in for anything. It's been a special blessing to serve those who have come through our doors.

Oftentimes we're asked if we are a project, and let me be very clear: Fathers' Support Center is a not-for-profit agency. It is a standalone. It is not a program of another organization. So we are a fatherhood agency here to serve. We currently have four locations, and we offer both day and evening classes.

What you see on your screen now is our organizational chart that has our staffing structure. I wanted to have some type of impactful way to show you where women serve in the organization. On this next slide, you will see that the arrows indicate positions where women are in positions of service here at the organization, and you see that's in just about every capacity here at Fathers' Support Center.

We definitely value having a mix on our staff team because as you know, you don't have a crystal ball to find out who your clients are going to receive from. We have participants that are willing to share certain things with our male staff, but when they have the opportunity to talk with some of our female staff who serve as social workers or case managers or family therapists, sometimes other sides of the story will come out that they may or may not have been comfortable sharing with the male staff here.

As you see, we have 30 female staff at Fathers' Support Center now and 23 male on our staff. We try to keep it sort of balanced, however now we are a little lopsided. Oftentimes we will hire in one-and-one as positions are open here at the agency, but as always, when you are hiring, you always go for the best candidates.

So some of our positions here at the agency where we've had both male and female as our facilitators—of course, in our men's class, we like to have a male facilitator who has either experienced some of the same things as the participants or will understand and can relate to the stories that they bring to the table and are able to offer the insightful input to situations. However, we also have female facilitators who do our parenting. We also have male health and wellness for reproductive care curriculum [where] we've had female staff teach with male staff. We also have employment placement people that go through resume writing and how to find jobs, which is often helpful because [the] majority of times when our guys are going out on interviews, they're usually sitting down with maybe a female who works in HR, and it's helpful to get them to a level of comfort so they're able to easily share. Here at the agency, we also have women who serve on our legal team, and of course in our social work department.

Some of the general things that come up is, oftentimes in this arena, we talk a lot about absent fathers, but sometimes we don't touch on the fact that some men have not had a positive female role model in their lives. We've heard through our classes and our clients that they were very appreciative of some of the input that our female staff have been able to bring in dialogue through some of the curriculum materials.

I know that in the past, I've had clients who have lost their moms through adoption or they have not been sired by moms because of more fatal things that have happened through different types of traumas that [have] occurred in their lives. Men who have received the services here sometimes say that this is the first time that a female has addressed him by his surname and been respectful and had a respectful conversation with him. I know that there are some things that are being mended through the positive relationships that we are able to have with our clients.

Of course, there are practical tips for females who are working in this arena. As Ken mentioned in his part of the presentation, you have to make sure that you maintain healthy boundaries. Men may take messaging the wrong way, or they may think because you



are being nice to them that you are somehow romantically attracted to them. You will have to make sure that you are very clear about what your role is in the organization, what your role is with that client, so that those things aren't misinterpreted.

We also focus in our orientation to our staff on appropriate dress and how you should carry yourself, as well as how you should meet with staff, how you should safeguard as far as the places where you meet. If there's an opportunity to sit at a table or a desk, to be across from each other and to communicate appropriately, not using a lot of jargon, and not becoming too familiar and comfortable with your clients, but making sure that they understand that you are in a social service position to help them to work on their goals to achieve good parenting skills for their children.

The other thing is we show empathy, but not sympathy. Every now and then, you may get a client who thinks that he's going to be able to manipulate one of the female staff. In that regard, we also train to making [sic] sure that as we're showing empathy to situations that we're not easily taken in by the stories, but instead focus on how we are to help in those situations.

I have come to the end of my presentation, so I would like to also add that as an agency, we are always open to work with other organizations that have staff that are new or have just been recently introduced to the field. At Fathers' Support Center, we also have some models of replication that we're able to share across the country. Here you have my contact information.

[www.fathersupportcenter.org, 314-333-4170] I would be more than happy to speak with anyone who has questions about that. And thank you so much for being on the webinar today.

Nigel Vann: Well, thank you, Cheri. You certainly bring a wealth of practical experience and we really respect that. From my perspective, I think a lot of what great programs like yours do is that they do keep the target of child well-being at the fore, and you do that by empowering fathers and helping them work with the mothers of their children. I think that one of the clear messages for me is that by having women involved in fatherhood work as well, we have role models for the parents. It's not just the children do better when their mothers and fathers are involved and working together, but fatherhood programs do better when we have the voices of male and females involved from the research side, the leadership side, down through the various services provided in the program.

We've got a good chunk of time now to move to our question and answer section. And I'm going to invite now my colleague Mindy Scott from Child Trends and also on our Clearinghouse team. Mindy and her team are responsible for a lot of the information that you see on the website. They're currently updating the statistics on there, and it's quite a relief for me to have Mindy here. She's been monitoring the questions, and that's usually hard for me to keep up with. So Mindy, we've got some good questions for some of these presenters here?

Dr. Mindy Scott: Yeah, hi everybody. This is Mindy, and happy to be part of today's webinar, and we've got lots of good questions, lots of good discussion in the chat box too that I think has generated some other questions that we can present to the speakers.

The first question we have is for Kenny, but also Cheri and Linda. If you have additional comments, please speak up. But first, a question came in about whether there are places that women specifically can go to be trained on how to work with men and fathers.

Kenneth Braswell: You know, I'm not aware of places other than the Clearinghouse being a great resource to share what we've already done in this space. If you're looking for something a little more in-depth, then I would point you to Fathers Incorporated, which is our agency, and I think my contact information is on the bottom of the screen or in the back of the PowerPoint. [fathersincorporated.com, 770-804-9800] So be more than encouraged to give us a call, and we can work that out with you.

Dr. Mindy Scott: Thanks. And Cheri, given the large number of women that you have on staff, are there specific trainings that you provide that are unique for your women staff?

Cheri Tillis: We do. We have a menu of trainings that we provide. But with our female staff, we often focus on the appropriate boundaries, as well as some of the cues that they should look and listen for while providing services to them. Oftentimes, especially in our trauma work, you want to be careful with some of the assumptions that you make or not make any assumptions at all, and make sure that you're listening. So lots of motivational interviewing and things of that nature.



Dr. Mindy Scott: Great, thank you. Related to that, we had a question on—the concept is that in early childhood and working with co-parenting, programs discuss the importance of reflective practices with their staff. And there was a question of where that fits into some of the training and guidance you've been talking about today, about having staff think about their experiences and their potential biases. Just wanted some clarification on where reflective practice might fit in to some of this training.

Cheri Tillis: So our co-parenting work here at the agency, let me put this out there: it is extremely difficult. When we come into the picture, oftentimes there have been rifts within the relationship that we sometimes know nothing about. However, our goal is simply child-focused. We want to, first off, provide both parents with good parenting information and curriculum through the program. We also focus on, with each one of the groups with the mothers, to teach them how important the father-child relationship and then vice versa with the fathers. Then they go through a series of sessions with our family therapist, where they meet both together and individually. Then we begin to work on the actual plan, coming up with some agreements that both parents can buy into. And then we move forward from there, getting things filed with the courts and so forth. So the entire approach takes a child-centered approach, and it does not necessarily unfairly focus on one parent over the other.

Dr. Mindy Scott: Great, thank you. That's really helpful—

Kenneth Braswell: And I just want to add that about the reflective training. We have a curriculum at Fathers Incorporated called What About Dad? It was designed and developed with Dr. Stacey Bouchet, who was the Executive Director of Women In Fatherhood, and we put that training together to express exactly this—that is, to begin to start getting agencies, not only women but men as well, to reflect on their own issues that they bring to the table in doing this particular work. We'd narrowly focus on addressing fatherhood issues, personal fatherhood issues and issues of gender, and how we bring those pieces to the table to effectively do that work. And so, if that is something that you're also interested in, please give us a call.

We also have a couple of documentaries to address things like fatherlessness, the challenges of co-parenting with nonresident parents. We've done some extensive work in that space, and I would encourage anyone who is looking to engage in the work of responsible fatherhood in your agencies to seek out that kind of training.

Dr. Mindy Scott: Thank you, Kenny. Kenny, something you mentioned during your presentation was about the lack of research on the female practitioner staff relationship with male clients. There was a question about whether there is research out there or what the current research does show about female facilitators and if they can be as effective as male facilitators. I think one of your questions that you raised that we could talk about a little bit more is whether there are any advantages of having a female staff person offer some parts of fatherhood programming. What are your thoughts on that?

Kenny: Yeah, I don't think there is any research out there that has been done on the dynamics of having women engaged in fatherhood programs or vice versa. Most of what we know is anecdotal, based on practice, and based on what we see in the field. We try to look at what works best amongst, particularly at the Clearinghouse, what is working best amongst our grantees, how the grantees are faring with particular issues, and then the broader social service spectrum.

I think that there is definitely an advantage ... because I think the biggest place that this conversation raises [sic] is when we're doing support groups—when you're talking and sitting in front of the room full of men and you're dealing with their more personal issues—and that is whether or not men are comfortable talking with a level of transparency with a woman in the room, given their own personal biases they might bring to the table. I think that some of that has to be the agency's own discernment in being able to know the men that they're dealing with and trying to figure out a way that you can begin to incorporate that conversation. And also understanding when you have to step out of the room. There are some times a conversation will take a turn on both ends. I've been in a room where it has been both myself and a female practitioner, and the conversation has turned in an area to which I say, "You know what? I'm going to walk out of the room, because I think that this is a conversation you should have amongst yourselves." So I really do believe that there is an advantage to both perspectives in a conversation from both men and women, but I think the onus is on the agency to have a level of discernment to understand when to do what.

Dr. Mindy Scott: Thanks, very helpful. Linda, there's a question for you, kind of twofold, on thinking about women in research, and what some challenges in that role as a researcher might be. But also thinking about how women in research, or even policy advocacy, can help to move the conversation forward and bring together agencies where there might be tension, there might be the

challenges of addressing fathers as well as mothers. What role can women play in research and other fields to help move that forward even more?

Linda Mellgren: I think that women have played a tremendous role in bringing the fatherhood field forward in the policy and research field by their presence, their active presence over the last four decades of doing that work.

Part of it is when the drumbeat, either from men or women – and it comes from both – say “the fathers don't have a role, or their role isn't as important as mothers, or we don't have resources to serve fathers and mothers.” You just sort of think of the whole set of excuses or rationales that are given – it has been women staff and women policymakers who have joined together with their male advocate counterparts and have said, “No, this is something that men and women have to do together, and this is something that is important for the best interest of the child.” I think that many of the women who become involved in the fatherhood movement do so because they see the effect of fathers not being involved on children and how detrimental that can be.

There's not a magic bullet. There's not a magic formula. But I think that women are in various positions of responsibility throughout the government at all levels, and having a powerful woman advocate working together with the male advocate is the best way to move programming for fathers forward.

Dr. Mindy Scott: Great, thanks for that very insightful view. One question that came up—there's a little bit of discussion in the chat box, and I think Linda you first raised this—was about how to approach fatherhood and fatherhood programming in the context of same-sex couples, and if there's advice on handling some challenges that it sounds like programs are having supporting same-sex couples. And there's some potential critique that by supporting fathers, you're not necessarily fully supporting same-sex couples or parents. Any of the panelists have thoughts on how to do fatherhood work with same-sex couples?

Cheri Tillis: At Fathers' Support Center, we have had some fathers in the program who had children by women, and then they chose an alternate lifestyle. We actually don't alter the curriculum much because at the end of the day, the children need the same things from adults. They need for adults to provide. They need them to show love, care, and concern. When we've had individuals like that, they have also been able to bond with the groups, just based off of the fact that they are walking a similar road in parenting and not necessarily focused on what their sexual orientation is.

Kenneth Braswell: I just want to echo what Cheri just said. We do the same thing. At the end of the day, what we're trying to encourage is healthy parenting. So those skills and those things that you bring to the table in order to be able to do that is [not] respective of gender. As long as you are training individuals to be the best parent they can be, from whatever lifestyle they tend to choose, that is the result that we ultimately want to get.

Nigel Vann: We're just looking to see if we have any more questions that we haven't addressed here. I see there was one about—we're not quite sure what the question is, but it's about the voices of women in fatherhood. I would point you to the work that Jacqui Boggess has done at the Centers for Fathers and Families and Public Policy. There are some pieces on their website where they talked to women and got their input, particularly low-income women, on child support and the fathers of their children. It's quite surprisingly positive about the fathers of the children, which you don't often hear.

And of course, Stacey Bouchet—Kenny mentioned she was for a few years head of the Women in Fatherhood, Inc. organization, and they have a few reports that they did with Jacqui, but I don't think any of those got published. But there is some work and you can get in touch with Stacey or Jacqui to talk about that.

We have a couple of more questions, but we are getting a bit tight on time, so I'm going to ask the presenters if they can respond to those later, and then we will put those on the website for you.

So we've just got a few minutes now. I want to invite John Allen, our Office of Family Assistance leader, to say a few words, and then I'll come back to each of the presenters and give you each a brief moment to leave us with a final thought or a key takeaway from the discussion that you'd like to leave with people. First of all, John, have you got anything you'd like to say?

John Allen: Yes, I do. I just want to thank all the presenters for sharing their experiences in the field and bringing forth some of the important pieces about balance in parenting, and that means both of the parents, father and mother. And thank you for bringing across the best practices and the promising practices in those areas.



I want to thank the Clearinghouse for putting together such a timely webinar. Thank you, Nigel, thank you, Mr. Braswell and staff, for putting this great webinar together to inform the field. I think it's just a great move for really bringing forth the women in fatherhood and the big contributions they have to the practice. So just want to thank everybody, and let's keep moving the work forward. Thank you very much.

Nigel Vann: Thank you, John. So again, let me just come back to the presenters real quickly. And let's go ladies first, because we always have to respect the ladies, but we also have to respect the fathers we work with. Either Cheri or Linda, final thoughts?

Linda Mellgren: This is Linda. I think my final thought is that children need all the loving adults around them that society can muster. At the end of the day, that's the importance of the fatherhood work, and women can play a tremendous role in encouraging that work, or they can stand in the way of that work. I think that's part of our task is to find out how we can encourage men and women to work together to support children.

Nigel Vann: Thank you, well said. Cheri.

Cheri Tillis: Yes, I echo those thoughts, and just also as long as you have practitioners that understand the importance of healthy families and they bring to the table their whole self and give a hundred and ten percent, our families will do better, inevitably.

Nigel Vann: Thank you. And let me just add that I just want to say a word for all the women that I've seen doing such tremendous work with fathers in all sorts of capacities out there. I've been amazed sometimes to see a female facilitator in a prison with male inmates for instance, and just have them eating out of her hand. I've seen that two or three times. Somebody said earlier, it's about earning the respect of the fathers, and you don't automatically get that by being a man. You have to have the skills.

So, let me give the final word to Kenny.

Kenneth Braswell: So I have two thoughts. One is I want to bring your attention to some of the great work that's being done in New York City, particularly with Alan Farrell, as they begin to start looking at infusing a conversation of fatherhood into the schools of social work in New York City, so that there is more of a robust conversation as social workers are being trained to do this work—that there is a very intentional conversation with them, and focus around the responsible fatherhood. There is some work—they are in a couple of colleges now. Look at the New York City Fatherhood Coalition. I believe it's taking place inside of their child support enforcement office. You can find more information about that.

And then secondly, I would like challenge us to begin to start consciously thinking about equalization of conversation. And what I mean by that is, as we talk about the infusion of the perspective of women in the work of fatherhood specifically, that there also has to be a conversation of fatherhood in the work of motherhood as well. As we continue to raise the perspective and conversation on this end to ensure that we're equalizing the base of field for our fathers, we have to also encourage that conversation across the social service network and base, so that we can tackle and ensure that our children have the best futures possible, because we're talking about moms and dads across the board.

Nigel Vann: Thank you, Kenny. Let me say in closing that you've got the contact information for the presenters there. You've also got the Clearinghouse email address again. I haven't been tracking the chat box as much as I would like to, but I see, and Mindy's been pointing out to me, there's an awful lot of sharing going on there in resources. After this, we're going to take a careful look at that chat box, and to the extent that there are resources there that we could share with others, we'll put together a list and we can post that when we post the other webinar materials. That'll be in a few weeks' time.

In the meantime, if anybody really wants to follow up with us and get more information about anything that's been shared in the chat box or by the presenters, please use that email. Just send an email to help@fatherhood.gov. If you want to share information with us or if you want to get information from us about today, or more generally about our work and of course, the role of women in fatherhood, please send that in, and someone will get back to you as quickly as possible.

I've also asked you to take a minute after this to complete the short online survey that'll come up through the SurveyMonkey facility. And if you don't have time today, we'll be sending that out again with another reminder, but we really appreciate any feedback that you can give us on this and future webinars.



I wish you all a good day. I hope you can stay warm out East. We're going to enjoy the California sunshine with Alan-Michael Graves here at Project Fatherhood and learn more about the great work they're doing here. Thank you very much for your time and have a good day. Bye-bye.

Kenneth Braswell: Thank you, thank you, guys.

[Voices overlap]

Operator: Thank you for your participation.