



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

National  
Responsible  
Fatherhood Clearinghouse



## NRFC Webinar Series

### *Working with Fathers in Rural Areas and Small Communities*

## Transcript

**March 16, 2016**

**Moderator:**

- Nigel Vann, National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse.

**Presenters:**

- Mindy Scott, Senior Research Scientist, Child Trends, Bethesda, Maryland
- Sean Brotherson, Professor and Extension Family Science Specialist, North Dakota State University, Fargo, North Dakota
- Derrick Dease, Executive Director, Man 2 Man Fatherhood Initiative, Bennettsville, South Carolina

**Operator:** Good day, and welcome to the “Working with Fathers in Rural Areas and Small Communities” webinar. Today’s webinar 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 good morning, good afternoon, depending on where you are. Welcome to today’s webinar from the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. Those of you who have joined us before, you know that we provide these webinars, as well as various other resources, as part of a learning community that you can contribute to and learn from – which means that we certainly welcome and encourage your input and participation during the webinar and any questions and input you have afterwards.

So just a few notes in terms of the screen that you see, and I see quite a few of you have already found the Chat box and are saying hi to each other, and that’s exactly what that’s for. And you’re hearing the audio through your computers, so any questions you would like to ask, you can use the Ask a Question box at the bottom right corner of your screen, and then we’ll have a Q&A section at the end of the webinar that the presenters can respond to your questions. So you can make those a general question, or you can direct them to one of the presenters specifically.

The webinar is being recorded, and the transcript and all the materials for the webinar will be available on the [fatherhood.gov](http://fatherhood.gov) website in the next few weeks. And when I say recording, that means that you can actually come back and hear the audio and see the slides move forward in real time. We did recently get all the recordings added for 2015. There had been a bit of a hitch with a few of them, and the 2016 ones will be up very soon as well. So do keep checking back to the website.

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You'll actually see, in the bottom left of your corner, there's a few web links there. The NRFC website, which is [fatherhood.gov](http://fatherhood.gov), that's the first one, and then we have websites from our three presenters, which I'm going to tell you a bit more about as we go through. The one at the bottom, if you can just click on that, it will take you to a list of all the previous webinars that we've done, and you can see and download materials from them all there.

In terms of the questions that you're going to ask, I do want to say that if we don't have time for all of them, we do post answers to those [from] the webinar. Basically, I think all I need to tell you about the screen that we're looking at right now, so let me just turn now to Damon Waters with the federal Office of Family Assistance [OFA] – you make all this possible. Damon is just going to set the stage for us a little bit here. Damon.

Damon Waters: Thanks, Nigel. On behalf of the federal Office of Family Assistance, our Director, Nisha Patel, and our Branch Chief, Lisa Washington-Thomas. Like Nigel said, I'm Damon Waters, and welcome and thank you for joining us for today's webinar about working with fathers in rural areas and small communities. You spoke, we listened. We heard a lot of feedback about the need to discuss challenges faced by fathers and fatherhood programs in rural, tribal, and small communities.

So today, the conversation will focus on challenges faced by fathers and fatherhood programs in these communities, strategies that have been used by programs in rural communities, how these challenges and strategies compare to the experience of programs in urban communities, and you might be surprised to know that, although there are obvious differences, there are quite a few similarities. I hope you find the webinar informative and helpful. We'll be asking one or two poll questions during the webinar to get an idea of what you do in your programs. This helps our presenters frame their comments to fit your experiences.

We'll also ask you for your feedback about today's conversation at the end of the webinar. Please continue to send any ideas or questions to the clearinghouse team at [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov). We're particularly interested in hearing about topics that you would like us to cover in future webinars. With that, I'll turn things back over to Nigel.

Nigel Vann: And thank you very much, Damon. You'll see on your screen now, just that quick overview slide of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. Those of you who are joining us for the first time, this is just giving you a quick sample of what you can find on that website. There's various resources for fathers themselves, for fatherhood programs, for others who work in the fatherhood field, and the website, again, is [fatherhood.gov](http://fatherhood.gov).

A couple of things that we do highlight there, we have a toolkit with various tips for engaging and working with dads, and we have that link to the previous webinars. As Damon mentioned, you can always send us questions at [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov). We have had a few problems with that lately, so we also have an alternate email up there for Enzo, who is working behind the scenes, making this all possible today. So if you don't get a reply from an email to [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov), feel free to send it to Enzo, or any of the other emails that you see at the bottom of your screen there. They are the key staff on our project.

Also, if you're working with any parents who have any questions or issues, particularly if they're not getting on together very well and would like some mediation, you can always call our National Call Center there, toll-free number 1 (877) 4DAD411 [1-877-432-3411], and there are trained mediators on the line who can talk to you, and they can also refer you to all sorts of resources, any kind of questions that relate to fatherhood.

So today, as Damon said, we're going to be talking about the issue of working with fathers in small communities and rural areas. In particular, we're going to look at how this is different from working in larger areas, but also maybe have a little look at—well, what can we learn from this work that applies to larger areas, and vice versa as well. We're going to have the various resources that you can download—in fact, you can see that in the Downloadable Resources box there. And we'll be adding to that if there's any more suggestions after the webinar. So we're going to check back and see if that changes.

You can also download the full bios for today's presenters there. I'm just going to briefly introduce you to them now, and I'll say a few more words [no audio] to their individual turns. Our first presenter will be Mindy Scott, who is a Senior Research Scientist at Child Trends, and she and her team of professional researchers are working very closely with us here at the Clearinghouse to produce a number of new products for the Clearinghouse, including one that's an infographic describing characteristics of men and fathers in rural areas. Mindy's going to be telling us a bit more about that today.

Sean Brotherson is a Professor and Extension Family Science Specialist at the North Dakota State University in Fargo, North Dakota. As the Family Life Specialist in North Dakota, Sean works to strengthen and enhance the well-being of children, adults and, families through research, education, and work with community organizations. He is also the Co-Director of the National Extension, Relationship and Marriage Education Network, otherwise known as NERMEN. I know he's spread the word quite extensively through those two networks, so I assume that quite a few of you have joined us as a result of that outreach, which we really appreciate, Sean.

I'd just like to also highlight, in the Web Links box, you can see there's a Family Life Specialist Director list there. There's a Family Life Specialist, or more than one in some states, but every state has one or more of these Family Life Specialists who do the kind of work that Sean does. So I encourage everybody to download, to go to that web link and download it. It's also listed in the resources list, and you can contact the equivalent of Sean in any of the states.

And finally, our third presenter will be Derrick Dease, who is the Executive Director of the Man 2 Man Fatherhood Initiative in Marlboro County, South Carolina. Derrick was born and raised in Marlboro County, and he's worked with Man 2 Man since its inception in 2000. Since then, they've served more than 2,000 fathers. So I'll tell you a little bit more about each of the presenters as we get to them.

Before I turn this over to Mindy, I just wanted to go through a couple of slides here, just to sort of further set the state a little bit. When we're talking about rural America, we're obviously talking about a diverse set of communities. There are more than 59 million people who live in rural America. Eighteen percent of those folk are classified as poor, and it's interesting to compare that to the fact that 20 percent of the population in the central cities is also classified as poor. Twenty-five percent of children in rural areas are growing up poor.

The information on this slide was drawn from some work by Cynthia Duncan, and you can also find that in the Resources list, if you want to download it and read the full article. One of the points that she makes is that often, in a rural community, you're fairly geographically isolated, so there might be a lack of financial or other resources to support programs. There's [sic] certainly geographical differences. If you go from the Deep South to the West, to the Midwest, to the Southwest, to various Native American communities and reservations, you're going to see a different set of circumstances, often based on the climate, the local resources, [and] the local economy. So we realize, you know, we're talking about a diverse set of communities here. There's all sorts of different issues going on.

One of the things that Cynthia pointed out in that article was that there's at least three to four different rural areas. About half the folk who live in rural areas are in chronically poor communities. It doesn't mean they're all poor, but they're in [no audio] rich areas, which are areas that are attracting second home buyers, they're attracting tourists, there's people retiring there, but all the other areas that might be classified as rural or small communities are seeing a decline in population, partly because of a lack of jobs, and also changing jobs. That's just something to bear in mind as we begin this conversation.

I also just wanted to point out a few things. We did do a webinar on this back in 2008, and we also had some conversations with fatherhood grantees of the Office of Family Assistance back in 2009. These are some of the things they talked about. When you talk about a rural community, it's generally defined by the land, whereas you might

think of a small community as being defined by a particular industry or education; all of which often define the kind of jobs there, because there's often just one employer or one industry.

So if that industry – like, I actually live in a small community in New Mexico, where the major employer is a local copper mine. When the price of copper goes down, it's not good for people here. People in these small communities do tend to know each other, which in terms of providing program services, means it's good to have folk[s] on staff who maybe have grown up there, or have been there for a while, so they're more readily accepted. Not that you can't have folk who have just moved there more recently, but having that balance.

People also tend to have a sort of frontier spirit of being a bit more self-reliant, and perhaps even less so than in urban areas, thinking about reaching out to support from the fatherhood program or the social services. So you do need to bear that in mind as you try and find ways to reach out and explain what you have to offer, and engage dads in these fatherhood programs. To some programs, that means perhaps doing more home visiting or individual meetings to start with, particularly if it's a diverse area or it's hard to get people together for the group meetings, or moving your location. So you offer services in different parts of the area.

That's just a few key things that you're going to hear more of from the presenters, and we'll sort of circle back to this again at the end of the webinar. So before I introduce Mindy, we're just going to give you a quick poll question. As Damon mentioned, we do like to have a few of these questions to get a little bit of input from you and help the presenters frame their remarks. As you see, and I see a few of you are already started answering – “Which of the following best describes where you work and/or live?” We're interested in how many of you are in a rural community or small town, urban area, [or] suburban area. I see we've got a good proportion of you from a rural area or a small town. I'll just give you a few more seconds to keep clicking on that.

[Thank you] very much, we appreciate that. With that, let me ask Mindy to step forward. I'll just say a few more words about her. Besides the work she's doing for us on the Clearinghouse, she also has a lot of other research that she's working on about the impact of father involvement. She's also the principal investigator on a project to learn more about healthy relationship programming with young folk. Her work has been featured in publications such as *The New York Times* and *USA Today*. She's co-authored various peer-reviewed papers that have been published in leading journals such as the *Journal of Marriage and Family* and *Parenting Science and Practice*. With that, let me invite Mindy to tell you a bit more about what she's been up to. Mindy?

Mindy Scott: Great. Thanks for the introduction, Nigel, and welcome to everybody who has joined us today. It's really great to be part of today's webinar. I just wanted to start by giving a very brief overview of my organization, Child Trends. Child Trends is actually the nation's leading non-profit research organization focused exclusively on improving the lives and prospects of children, youth, and their families. We conduct high-quality rigorous research and evaluation, and really work to communicate our research findings, and the implications and recommendations from our research to a wide array of audiences including the general public, but also practitioners, researchers, and policymakers.

Child Trends helps to shape the nation's understanding of children, really from diverse types of families and communities across the country, and today we're here to focus specifically on children and families in rural areas and small communities. We'll hear throughout the webinar that living in a rural community can offer different challenges and opportunities than living in urban or suburban areas. But we will also hear about many of the similarities of fathers and families across these communities.

The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse is committed to learning more about the experiences of fathers and families in rural communities, and in supporting programs in their efforts to better reach and serve these fathers. To this end, the Clearinghouse is conducting a number of different activities that focus on rural fathers, starting with today's webinar. We will also be visiting a number of programs in rural areas to observe services for

fathers, to speak to program staff. And then, as part of our product development work for the Clearinghouse, as Nigel mentioned, Child Trends is working to develop a demographic portrait of rural men and fathers, and we're using census data for that work. And that's actually what I'll be focusing on for the rest of my presentation today.

Our hope is that a demographic portrait will be useful for helping programs better understand the fathers that they are trying to reach and serve in rural areas. We don't actually know a lot about rural fathers. They represent a relatively small proportion of all fathers in the United States and are under-studied for a number of reasons. One of those reasons is due to data limitations. There just aren't a lot of nationally representative studies that include fathers and also distinguish between rural and non-rural areas, and have large enough numbers to study them well.

Another limitation of – kind of all data with men and fathers, is that very few studies give us a good, detailed picture of dads who don't live with their children, and what their characteristics are and what they do with their children. Despite those limitations, though, there are some good data sources that can be used, and for our demographic portrait, we are conducting some original analyses of those data to help tell a story about fathers in rural areas.

For this work we are using 2015 data from the Current Population Survey, or the CPS. These data are nationally representative of the total U.S. population, and they are released every year. The data that we'll be presenting today tell us about fathers that live with their children in rural areas, and some of their economic and social well-being characteristics, but we will be providing similar information for fathers that do not live with their children in the final product.

Just some definitions that I wanted to review before we move on to some of the results. The unit of analysis that we are using for most of our analyses is father's household. The CPS is actually a household survey, so we've restricted our analyses to households with adult men who were identified as fathers with children that were living with them in the home for the analysis today, and we will also have a group of fathers who have children that are living elsewhere. Based on our definition, about 30 percent of all men were identified as fathers living with their children. These men can be either biological or step or social fathers, and fathers' households may or may not include a partner. So there could be a mother or partner in the house, but some of these fathers are single custodial fathers as well.

And it's probably a conservative estimate—this estimate of 30 percent of the households with fathers—since other men may be serving in a father role, but we just couldn't clearly identify those men with the data. We will also present some results based on all children's households. And so, this could be children living with any combination of adults, and I'll point out which measures are based on children's households, rather than fathers' households.

And then, also thinking about how we're defining rural versus non-rural – in the CPS, the rural group is comprised of U.S. counties that do not include any areas with 50,000 or more people. We compared this group of fathers in households to all other households. So everybody else is classified as being in a non-rural area. When we're talking about children for these analyses, we are considering all minors younger than 18 in a household as children.

Okay, we're going to jump to this slide, and start to present some of our results. I just want to note, all of the differences between rural versus non-rural that we showed today are statistically significant. Just keep that in mind. We first looked at the proportion of men's households that include minor children – that's what's shown here. We found that about half of men in rural areas live with children younger than 18, and that's compared to 46 percent of households in non-rural areas. When we narrow this set of men with minor children in the household to men who were specifically identified as fathers of those children—so this is a subset of all men with children; the men that were identified specifically as fathers—we see that slightly more than a third of men are fathers in rural areas. This is significantly different from 29 percent of men in non-rural areas.

Then, if we do look at this from a children's perspective, rather than a father's perspective—that's what's shown on this slide—this shows the percent of children in households in rural areas where there's actually no father present.

And we found that more children in rural areas live in households without a father. About a third of children in rural areas, compared to 32 percent in non-rural areas. You'll see, for this slide and some other results, the differences that we are talking about across many of these characteristics are not huge. They're pretty small, so this is a pretty small difference. So even if they are statistically different, these differences may not be substantively huge and meaningful.

I think that really highlights that there are some similarities between fathers and families in rural and non-rural areas, and we see that many of the characteristics and potential challenges that fathers in rural areas face may also be issues that need to be addressed for fathers in non-rural areas. How you go about actually addressing some of those issues for men in different areas may be different and I think the rest of the webinar will focus on some of those sort of unique circumstances and unique approaches that may be more effective for working with men in rural areas.

I also want to note, this group of children that we are seeing here that are in households without a father, will be the group that we'll explore in more analyses in the final product. Again, looking at children in households without a father, and then looking at characteristics of the fathers that live apart from these children.

Okay, we also looked at the racial ethnic breakdown of fathers in rural and non-rural areas, and we see here that the vast majority of rural fathers are non-Hispanic whites, but we do see more diversity among non-rural fathers. So only about 60 percent of fathers in non-rural areas are white and a larger proportion are Hispanic, or non-Hispanic black, or another race.

Next, we examine fathers' union status. Although most fathers in rural and non-rural areas are married, we do see that slightly more fathers in rural areas are cohabiting with a partner—so living with a partner, but not married—or are living with children without another custodial parent. That's our single custodial father category here. The experiences of these cohabiting and single custodial fathers are really likely to be different from those of married fathers. This is something to consider when thinking about the types of support fathers may need from fatherhood programs – the types of relationships and barriers to involvement that some dads may have in the different contexts in which fathering is happening.

One note about this measure, these categories do not add up to 100 percent. This does not represent all households with fathers, because there are other types of households that we just aren't highlighting in this graph. For example, we don't include households with other family members beyond parents and children, and we also exclude that group we talked about a little bit – households without any fathers. So this is really restricting to fathers with children and potentially with partners, and whether they're married to those partners or not.

We have a couple of indicators of fathers' socioeconomic status. First, we see that a slightly higher proportion of fathers in rural areas are impoverished and a higher proportion receive food stamps, and subsidized housing. The measure of subsidized housing includes accommodation of public housing or rental subsidies. One thing to point out: rental subsidies make up more of this type of subsidized housing assistance in rural areas, and public housing is more common in non-rural areas. We also found that a higher proportion of rural fathers are unemployed, and have lower educational attainment compared to non-rural fathers. Specifically, 10 percent of fathers in rural areas are unemployed, and 12 percent have less than a high school education.

Here we have a more detailed breakdown of educational attainment. You can see sort of the full distribution of different education levels. Only about half of fathers in rural areas have more than a high school diploma, and on these figures that's shown by categories representing some college, or B.A. or [a] higher degree. So about half of fathers in rural areas have some college or more, compared to 63 percent of fathers in non-rural areas.

Just to sum up this information that we reviewed, our results highlight that rural fathers may be more likely to face certain types of adversity and disadvantage than non-rural fathers. For example, we did find that fathers in rural

areas are more likely to live in poverty and receive food stamps and rental subsidies. On average, fathers in rural areas are less educated and have higher rates of unemployment. However, something I think will keep coming up throughout the webinar is how important it is that we keep in mind that some of these differences really are not that large, and these challenges represent issues that fathers in more urban communities also face.

One thing that we do want to highlight is how some of these economic and educational barriers can be linked to a number of additional risks that may also shape the service needs of fathers, including issues related to unemployment, mental health problems, and alcohol and drug use.

So that's a quick preview of the demographic portrait of rural men and fathers that we are developing for the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. As I mentioned, we'll be expanding on these indicators to also focus on fathers not living with their children. We really hope that the product will be a useful tool for programs and other stakeholders working with men and fathers in rural areas, as well as non-rural areas, and just getting more information about the characteristics of these men. If you have any questions after today's webinar or want to get in touch with me, feel free to email me anytime. My email address is here and the link to Child Trends is here too. Thank you again for having me participate in today's webinar.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Mindy. Yeah, that really sort of [no audio] the issues that I know Sean and Derrick and I are going to really expand upon. I see that Sean's already been providing quite a bit of information in the Chat box. He's been working with fatherhood programs in one way or another for the last 20 years, so he's got a lot of expertise in this area to share. There's [sic] articles on fathering and family policy, family life education and how parents respond to the challenges of stress and grief. But today, he's going to specifically share some of the lessons he's learned from his work with the Dakota Fatherhood Initiative. So Sean, take it away.

Sean Brotherson: All right, thank you, Nigel. I hope you all can hear me. It's a pleasure to be with you on this educational opportunity today. Keep sharing questions in the Ask a Question section, or comments in the Chat section. We enjoy hearing from you and interacting with you during these webinars.

As Nigel mentioned, I work at North Dakota State University in the state of North Dakota, Fargo specifically, and work extensively with the Cooperative Extension Service. And would just reinforce what he mentioned, that the Cooperative Extension Service is a nationwide educational system through the Land-Grant University System across the United States, with local educational offices in nearly every county in the United States, and local educators, or what are often called Extension Agents, who have a responsibility to work in local communities for the betterment of their families and community. So if you have not had the opportunity to connect with Cooperative Extension, I'd encourage you to try to do that in your local setting.

I wanted to start today and just visit for a minute about – As we think about fathering, often when I am asked to go out and work in a local community and encourage healthy, responsible, [and] involved fathering, I like to start with a set of questions and just ask people to think about some of these questions. Where are they starting from? So first, what are some of the expectations that they carry for fathers? What is it that they want to achieve with fathers? I think, as we work in different contexts, especially in a rural context, we have to understand what is possible versus what we might want to achieve. What are the approaches that they think are going to encourage attitudes and behavior that lead to responsible fathering? Is it mentoring that's going to be your approach? Is it home visiting? Is it involvement with a faith community? There's a variety of approaches, and what you feel will work, or you want to try in your local context.

And then, in thinking particularly with, as we talk about fathers in rural areas and small communities, what are some of the adjustments that we might need to make to assist fathers in those local contexts? When I came to North Dakota many years ago—17 years ago—one of the things I learned quickly, as I came to understand the rural nature of the state, was that there was [sic] differing definitions of what we mean by rural. The community that I lived in has

close to a couple of hundred thousand people, but it's often classified—and I would consider it urban—but it's often classified as a somewhat rural kind of community. And of course, there's a difference between a rural community of 10 to 15,000 people versus one with only a few hundred people. And even across those kind of contexts, we have some communities that we call frontier counties or communities, where the population density is very low.

This picture shows some of the fathers in communities that I've worked with in a rural context on the left. Often, men in agricultural settings and rural contexts, but also tribal communities. About 10 percent of the state population up here is Native American. So I'm working with fathers in tribal communities. Even in rural contexts, you often have a lot of diversity, and it's very important to understand fathers in the rural context.

I'd like to just draw a few lessons from the Dakota Fatherhood Initiative, which was a decade-long grassroots initiative in North and South Dakota that I co-founded with a colleague of mine at South Dakota State at the time, Joseph White. Our objective was to promote responsible, involved fathering for the benefit of children and families across the Dakota region. It went from about 2002 to 2012. We were working with fathers all across rural kinds of settings, and I want to draw a few lessons from both the macro and the micro level.

The first being, really begin with an understanding and an assessment of the context that you're working in. Again, rural communities may differ dramatically. So the first question is—we brought people together around trying to create an understanding of working with men of different communities—was, what does research and public dialogue tell you about the issue in your own community? We found, for example, in the community next door, in Minnesota, I found that there was quite a bit of interest and concern around the issue of teen parenting in young men who were becoming teen parents, so we worked specifically on that particular initiative. Whereas, if I went northwest several hours to the community of Minot, North Dakota, there's a large military base in the region. The issues that the community and men were facing in that region had much more to do with military deployment kind of issues, which brought up a very different set of concerns. So you need to focus on what public dialogue in that community has to say about men and their involvement.

And then next is, what is the attitude of potential communities of interest toward the issue? When I first started working with male-involvement programs in the state of Oregon, one set of rural communities I worked with were coastal communities, where fishing was a key industry. They were very interested in how you work with men who are working at a distance from the family, because they would be gone for weeks at a time in the fishing industry in these small coastal towns. Whereas, in the state of North Dakota, as I mentioned, I came into the state and there are four or five different major tribal communities in the state, each of them with their own unique history and concerns. So there I was, working with men in quite a different context understanding there was interest in all of those communities in having healthy, involved fathering, but how that looked was a little bit different depending on the community.

A second step in working at the macro level was really identifying then, in a community, who would be the community stakeholders, and assess their level of interest. In a rural setting, there may be a small number of stakeholders available. Head Start has been a great collaborating partner with us in rural contexts, and we found just in our region that the state Head Start Collaboration Office was a great partner in working to try and reach fathers in local rural contexts. So that might be a stakeholder that you go to, or other early childhood settings.

When you are in a small town setting, there may be only two or three key employers. They're interested in the well-being of their workforce and their families. So it may be about building a relationship with particular employers in the community who want to have a healthy workforce, want to provide support to those who are working in their local industry. You may identify those key employers in the region. Again, there may be only two or three in a small rural community that are really key.

Next is assessing what's the level of interest among those community groups that you may be working with. It's important in rural contexts to be sensitive that there are limited resources – so that's an issue. Then, again, folks, what are their particular areas of interest that they would like to focus on? It may be employment, or it may be parenting classes – things like that.

So as you identify those partners and their level of interest, a third thing that we kind of focused on was trying to develop productive community partnerships. One of the differences, I think, in working in rural areas and small towns is that you don't have the luxury of burning bridges. Working in partnerships is central to working with families in these kind of communities. It's how work gets done, because there are a limited number of professionals, or there are a limited number of organizations available to work with children and families. So it's very important that you don't burn bridges with particular entities because they need to be your partners. Often, it will vary by the rural community, but safe communities often tend to be valued partners in these kinds of efforts in rural areas, and we found that very much to be the case in the Dakota region.

As you work together to find specific ways that you can advance the issue of father involvement and family well-being, a couple of examples. In the community of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, which is several hours south of where I am, the local community foundation was interested in working together in doing an initiative to facilitate healthy father involvement. They helped to facilitate ties with other entities in the community. So often, if you can identify a key partner that works with other partners, that is a very good way to get access to families and partners that would be more difficult for you to build relationships with otherwise.

As an example, we have a local semi-pro basketball team, the Sioux Falls Skyforce. They sponsored a community night, and over 2,000 attended, fathers and their children, and there was a promotional aspect to it. It was just a night for fathers to come out with their kids, and we were trying to communicate the importance of fathers spending time with children. It's something quite simple, but very valued.

Finally, you may need to bring resources and training to specific areas to further goals. Often there are limited resources, and in rural areas, they may not have had particular resources focused on male-involvement kind of issues in the community. One of the things that we did was, we tried to bring in programs that would be a compliment and that were needed, but just simply were not available previously. So, for example, we developed a parenting newsletter specifically for fathers, and that could be used with early childhood settings like Head Start in rural areas to reach men. And we found that being used in a variety of different ways.

Another is that we found that our correctional system in the region had not had much exposure to programs targeted at working with incarcerated fathers and their families. So we brought individuals to the region who had experience with those kind of programs, and provided opportunities for training. Sometimes it's simply getting those resources to areas where they have not been before.

Just a few things now at the micro level, working with fathers specifically in rural communities. One is, it's always important to assess the kind of barriers that may exist. Work and economic stress, as mentioned, often in rural areas – that may be an issue. And you'll find that, in our experience anyway, that the provider role takes on increased significance when there are conditions of economic stress in those rural communities. There's also a cultural emphasis, I think, in rural areas where families tend to be more traditionalistic in their patterns. There's an emphasis often with men in rural areas on that provider role, so starting with them from that starting point is often important.

Another issue is time or logistical availability. Because of shift work, or depending on the season, if they're involved with agriculture and intensive planting and harvesting kind of responsibilities, there may be difficulty with them just being logistically available to attend certain kinds of activities or programs. As well as, in rural areas, the distances can be large. Child care is also limited, so there may be higher levels of difficulty and barriers with transportation and child care. If you want men to be involved, those have to be taken into account.

Finally, personal attitude kind of issues. Again, more traditionalistic kind of attitudes, where men in rural areas are often less prone to seek help or support. And so, you may have to overcome some attitude barriers that can exist. We found it was really necessary to adapt our programs to a rural context. For example, we had a popular 16-week program that brought families together around school readiness, and men were very engaged with that program. But as we rolled it out into rural context, a lot of the local schools and families that we work with said, “We’d like to do this, but we can’t do a 16-week program. This distance is too much. But could we do a four-week version?” So we developed a four-week version that was adapted for rural settings. Well, that was important.

Considering your staffing and support—again, with limited numbers of people available—you need to partner. We have had successes. We’ve tried to partner, often with what you might consider unconventional facilitators, for programs—our mediation staff, for example—but they had common interests for the well-being of families, and were willing to partner with us in different kind of settings. And then, again, because you are reaching men in specific settings, we found that it was really important to try and reach out to them in the specific rural context where they might be, whether it’s in the cab of a tractor, or whether it’s in a small community.

The last couple of points, I think, link with things that I’ve already said. With time and resource challenges in these kinds of contexts, it’s really important to link with existing partners and try to fit what you do into existing pathways of support, rather than developing something that is independent of what already exists in the community. Try to partner together and integrate what you do with them.

I think it’s important to consider this issue of the outsider effect. People are often wary of experts – outside individuals coming in to change things. People value the voice of local authority, and that’s why I encourage, for example, working with your local Cooperative Extension System, because they’re embedded in those local communities. They tend to be a trusted resource, and help to get you in the door if you’re trying to access populations.

Finally, I think when we talk about what is similar, I would simply say that best practices apply when you’re working with fathers in rural settings, as well as in any other kind of context. These are best practices that are identified in working with men and fathers across many different kinds of context. Sending direct invitations to men is very important, rather than having it funneled through other channels. Having women engaged in the process is critical. It’s not a zero-sum game to try and get men involved at any expense, but the women in their lives are very key to their motivation in their involvement in the lives of children and families. Folks seen [as] identifying their interests and capacities using a strength-based approach and building on that is very critical with men. An then, identifying those possible barriers – letting them know well ahead of time. If you want involvement in a specific kind of program or event, there has to be opportunity ahead of time to be able to schedule that, especially in rural contexts. Then, finally, creating mechanisms so that you’re having a dialogue with the population that you’re trying to serve. Getting feedback about their needs, their interests, how they are receiving support, and what more can be done to assist them.

I’ll kind of stop that there, and then we’ll go on to Derrick. Thank you for the opportunity to visit, and I’ll welcome any questions that you might have a little be later. Nigel, I’ll turn it back to you.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Sean. And I was just trying to move the slide up – let’s just briefly leave Sean’s last slide on the screen there. He does have his book that he co-authored, actually, with Joseph White, who I see has been providing a lot of information in the Chat box too.

Before we go to Derrick, we’re just going to quickly have our second poll question, if we can have that, Enzo. So if you could just let us know your opinion – “Which of the following is the biggest barrier to serving dads in rural areas and small communities?” Is it lack of good jobs, transportation issues, limited resources, or a sense of independence and the reluctance to ask for help?

While you are just finishing responding to that, I'll begin to introduce Derrick, who, as I mentioned earlier, he's been working for 15 years as the Executive Director of the Man 2 Man Fatherhood Initiative in Marlboro County. They've got two office locations in the county, in Florence and Bennettsville, and they also provide services in four neighboring counties: Dylan, Chesterfield, Darlington, and Florence. Derrick was actually recommended to us by Patricia Littlejohn, who is the Executive Director of the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families, who work closely with Man 2 Man. And, one of the things that Pat told me, was that everything that she has learned about helping fathers find employment, she learned from Derrick. So I'm expecting to hear some great lessons here. Tell us what you've been doing there, Derrick.

Derrick Dease: Thank you, thank you. As stated earlier, I'm the Executive Director of Man 2 Man. We provide the means for dads to be better fathers. We believe that when men are invested in, you invest into your community by investing in men. So, just giving a general snapshot of the county in which I serve—one of the counties in which I serve, which is Marlboro County—you see here there's very rural, high unemployment rate, in which, with that being the case, it presents a lot of challenges, but a lot of opportunity as well. A high number of unemployed unmarried mothers, and 76 percent of teens are born to unwed mothers. So there's a high rate of non-custodial fathers that presents [*sic*] a lot of barriers for families that we take pride in addressing.

Going on to what we do and who we are, we're part of a network of one of six fatherhood programs across the state in which we have been providing services for 15 years. And the way we do it, we understand the challenges. So one of the things that we try to do, that we've been doing for years is, first, healing family relationships. A lot of families, because of rural areas and the lack of economics, a lack of job skills training, a lack of understanding because you have a group of men that have never been fathers themselves, they're struggling with parenting issues. So in healing families, that's one of the goals that we always keep [at the] forefront. There's a lot of challenges, and a lot of brokenness, often due to abuse and neglect issues, economic because of poverty, and also poverty of spirit, which leads to low self-esteem. So healing families is very vital and crucial to, as a result, producing well-rounded children.

The next [thing] we do is help practice healthy parenting. As I stated earlier, when you have a group of men that haven't been fathers themselves, they've never seen parental models. That leads to a lot of stereotypes and a lot of lack of understanding [of] what manhood is, and what is it to be a father. And so, practice healthy parenting is very vital to helping them understand their role; helping fathers understand their role and influence on the children. Often with this population, the concept of "out of sight, out of mind" seems to stand there strong, because they feel as though if they're away, they don't matter. As long as the children are being raised by the mother, or oftentimes, there's a grandmother involved, they don't understand that their absence has a tremendous effect on the children. So we help them to understand their children's needs and understanding co-parenting issue[s] as well.

Gaining productive employment, stable employment. When you're living in small rural communities, I stated earlier, there's a limited amount of jobs. Often, there is one or two industries, and as the climate economics change, oftentimes there's a higher demand for higher-skilled workers. We have to prepare these men for the workforce. I'm going to get later on into some of the things we do, but I'll just touch base here now. So, helping the men to gain stable employment is very important. In rural communities there's a lot of seasonal work, so we often try to partner – and partnership is big in providing this work, in providing the skills needed in order to meet the demands of employers. We try to be a resource, and try to help men to be work-ready, to meet the demands of what the employers are asking for.

Oftentimes, there's the statement that is made: "You build it, they'll come," but our greatest recruitment tool is by word of mouth. By producing good services, and as the result of productive service, and effective service delivery, the men and the clients will become your best recruiters. So word of mouth is key to what we do. When we help one father get a job, get back in the lives of his children, that father really goes out and brings in other men to come and receive the service that they have received.

Thirty percent of our clients are court-ordered as part of a Jobs, Not Jail; we call it ATI (Alternatives to Incarceration). Men that are court-ordered by a rule to show cause to appear in front of the judge. The judge enjoys having that option to be able to send them to a program that he can become gainfully employed. Often in rural communities, it costs around \$16,000 to incarcerate a young man at a local jail, but he can send them to our program where it is less cost, and he can contribute to society and pay taxes in that community. So the judges love having the option to send the men, the fathers, to us.

Ninety-three percent that comes in are unemployed, 28 percent say they have a hostile relationship with the mother of their children. That is a problem, because it impacts the children, so we help the men to understand the repercussions of having a hostile relationship. We teach them communication skills: how to relate, how to speak, how to express anger in a positive way. Because we realize that substance abuse [and] high [un]employment rate – it produces a great amount of stress, and these stresses factor into the relationship that he will have with the mother of his child. So we address those issues as well.

We are a goal-oriented program. We conduct a thorough assessment. We believe that trying to provide services without doing the assessment is equivalent to a doctor trying to perform surgery without having an X-ray done. We need to see a snapshot of the demographics. We need to understand who he is, his job skills, how many children, whether or not there's a child support order, and also whether or not he has any health issues. We do provide – we have a nurse practitioner that comes every other week to provide services, free of charge, to our men. We discovered that there's a lot of men [who] have health issues that hinder them from getting a job or keeping a job. So we do a thorough assessment.

We do what we call our One Man's Plan. This allows the men to set goals. A lot of fathers have never set goals. They live life day by day, just take it one day after the other, without really setting goals. So having the fathers to set goals and achieve those goals helps foster good self-esteem and self-efficacy. Helping him understand possibilities—once you reach one level of goal—it could be as simple as making a child support payment in order to be able to gain visitation to mend that relationship with the mother of his child. The goal could be to get a driver's license. And we put baby steps in order to achieve those goals.

Also, we have our peer weekly groups, which is very effective, in all the locations. Oftentimes, the men get the chance to see that they're not the only one in this fight. When they see other fathers that are struggling with the same struggle, and facing the same challenges, and as a group, [they] pull together to support each other in fighting the same fight and getting guidance from each other. They form a cohesive group and they are able to be supportive of one another, and it helps the men understand that there is a sense of camaraderie in being a father, and also a joy as well.

Also, we do father-child events annually. We have the Harlem Rockets to come down, and it usually range[s] from 2 to 2,500 in attendance, father and children. They get a chance to really sit down and be a part of this event, and of course, get autographs and all these type of things. They really enjoy it.

Our curriculum topics – our program is 24 weeks. These are some of the topics that we cover in the curriculum that we feel that it's vital to providing holistic services.

Responsible Fatherhood. It talks about the benefits of father involvement, because when you haven't been a father yourself, you don't understand the benefits that you're providing to your child. We help them to understand the benefits, helping them to understand that you do matter—and these are the ways that you matter in terms of providing the support to your sons and to your daughters—and we just get into the meat and potatoes of that.

Self-Development and Life Skills. A lot of men that come to us, they come in survival mode, they come in crisis mode. We help them understand life skills and soft skills, and how to better themselves as an individual. Helping them to

have a better view of who they are, and what they're capable of doing by presenting possibilities. The role of many communities and families [and] the role they play versus the stereotypes that they've been given; helping them to understand who they really are and what men do, and what fathers do, and the importance of really understanding the fundamentals of their role as their father.

Parenting and Co-Parenting, understanding the child's needs. This is based upon age-appropriateness, contributions to raising your children, how to co-parent, how to father from a distance. Many times, how to mend that relationship, so you can still be a player in the game of parenting. How to communicate with your child. Most of these fathers – some have never seen their father, some had such a distant relationship with their child. They come in with the notion to parent as they were parented or were not parented. So we teach them to communicate with your child, how to relate.

Helping the Children Learn. Statistics show that children raise[d with a father], when fathers are involved, children seem to do better academically. We help them understand that same understanding. They really see that their role is vital, and they're not just a bank, they're not just a child support check. We want them to understand that their presence makes a great impact on the life of the children's development. By doing that, we help them develop the parenting skills that they need in order to co-parent.

Healthy Relationships. This is very important, especially in visitation issues. One of the things that we discovered in providing this work over the years, that many of the mothers just wanted to know whether or not he was willing to put forth an effort. Oftentimes, there is a severed relationship with the mother, the child, and the father. We are able to step in and say, "Hey, John Doe has joined our program. What are some of the things that you need in order for him to contribute?" And oftentimes, just by him being involved in the program, it helps her develop some sort of hope, and come back and let us know that "Hey, I've seen some changes. John Brown is doing better." And oftentimes, when we get the feedback of what he's doing, it is the result of roleplaying that we've done in the sessions, in helping him to communicate, in communication skills, and resolving conflicts.

We do talk about the benefits of marriage and how financially the families fare better when in marriage, and what the data shows – in sort of stress reduction, and how it affects the children as well.

Economic stability is very key to the services we provide. We help him [the father] become job ready. We have what we call a Jobs Boot Camp. And in that Jobs Boot Camp is a week-long sessions [sic] that we provide. The first day he comes in, we talk about work attitudes, and talk about being willing to work in order to be able to come in with the right attitude. Because a lot of these men are angry; they feel marginalized, they feel isolated. So we want to change the heart from a cognitive approach. We want to change the heart in order to be able to change the behavior.

The next day, we talk about mastering communication. How to have verbal confidence, how to interview, how to walk in their interview with confidence, and how to be able to communicate. The third day, we get into application and resume, how to develop a resume. A lot of dads have never had a resume done, so we really get into those type of things. Also, we partner with WIA (W-I-A), and I think it just changed to W-I-O-A, to get him to – maybe he needs to become federally bonded, and also to apply for jobs and help build his skills, and apply for jobs as well. And these are not just places we just send them, we actually go with them. I think that helps the men see that we are very much invested in seeing them become successful.

Day five, we talk about what the employers really want, get the employers' perspective. We actually have an employer to come here and basically talk about what they want. What are their expectations? What are they trying to achieve? And basically, so they can hear that "hey, this is what the employer wants, and this is what I need to acquire to get." And so, when the employer really goes into details, we help him [fathers] acquire those skills to match what that employer wants.

Men's Health. As I said earlier, we have a nurse practitioner that really comes to provide, free of charge – This past year, we've had four men to get surgeries, acquire surgeries through our program through partnerships and donations that allow them to be able to work. Next slide.

So we are a resource for families. But this is one of the main resources, I think through our partnerships, especially [with] the Department of Social Services [DSS] loves, is that we have the ability to be in there. When a child goes into foster care or child's preservation case, oftentimes, they have the mother there, especially if there are concerns. But when you don't bring the father to the table, you're cutting off 50 percent of that child's family tree. So when we bring the father into the picture, it allows DSS to have more placement options. This could be his mother, his sister, or people in his family that they didn't have before. This helps keep children out of foster care [and] as a result, preserve family connections and increase visitation of non-residential parents, because when a child goes into foster care, there's a lot of trauma that that child experience[s]; being absent from his father or being absent from the family that he was taken from.

So oftentimes, when we're serving these fathers, DSS will send these guys to us to get parenting classes to understand communication. This shortens the life of their case, and the result, get[s] these kids out of foster care and back in the hands of their family, because we see 80 percent of children in foster care come from single-parent homes. So it is vital that we build these men, for the sake of the children, to preserve family connections, and to help them step up to the plate. We've had men gain custody of their children by helping them get jobs, and as a result of getting jobs, teach them how to budget and getting a home, and really presenting a safe environment for their children.

Healing family relationships through services and partnerships. As a result, when we build men, we understand that, and we help not just for staff to understand, but it is vitally important for their children to understand, that by building you, by a father becoming whole, complete, working, it improves the children's school performance. We are able to see these fathers really show forth a lot of healthy self-esteem, knowing that they are involved and seeing their children's grades improve as a result of the fathers now being in their lives. Avoid drug use, drug abuse, and criminal behavior, delay sexual activity, reduce teen pregnancy, and just a whole list of things that we help, as a result of fathers being involved that these children benefit from.

What we've seen over the years as the barriers to employment was the lack of job skills and work history. Because of the lack of job skills, especially in rural communities, we found it very vital, as stated earlier, to develop strong partnerships. And one of the partnerships I want to highlight is with the local community colleges. The local community colleges, oftentimes on the "continuing ed" side of the school – often they have a lot of programs, and a lot of funding resources that are income-based, that consist of welding, basic electricity, heavy equipment operating, [and] forklift operation. We are able to really get a lot of guys certified really to meet the demands of employers. So it's very important to really develop those relationships with employers, but also with the community colleges. To help these men get those skills, especially in a lot of rural communities, especially when you are dealing with – a lot of rural communities have a lot of textile industries, poultry industries, so it's very important to help them get those skills, health and wellness that I covered earlier.

Okay, back to the Boot Camp here – I went through earlier about the employment as well, but the community college is very important.

Partnering with industrial trainings. We've done a lot of partnerships with companies that offer training, and those trainings would consist of forklift and heavy equipment operation. NCCER [National Center for Construction Education and Research] certification is a certification, statewide, that allow the men to be able to work on construction sites and really get those jobs that really pay well, to help them really take care of their kids. And so, the partnerships is vitally important.

In providing those partnerships, one of the things that we do – we have to take on a salesman mentality when we go to potential employers, to let them get a snapshot of what these guys look like. They're not deadbeat, they're just dead broke. They need the skills. But they love the fact that we provide case management – this is a guy that we're going to walk through. This is a guy that, if something happens on the job, if he misses a day, call us and we're going to help him with transportation and things of that nature. And a lot of these employers are willing to look past the criminal activity if we speak well of them. If we can vouch for this particular guy, say "hey, this guy's in our program. We know him, he's attended the sessions." We've had one employer to tell us that "if you can tell us that one of your guys have completed the program, we will count that as work experience, up to six months, and some, up to a year's experience." A lot of these guys have never had a real good job, so their resume is really weak because of a lack of work experience. But a lot of these employers, once they buy into the program, they are willing. We've had employers to say "we will count his attendance, and the fact he's attended boot camp and your program, as work experience."

But if anyone have [*sic*] any questions about what we do, how we do it, our website is listed – be more than happy to entertain questions. We believe that men, given the opportunity to succeed with resources, and also staff not being judgmental, but staff that really understands their target population and the men, will help the fathers to buy into the whole notion that we're here to help you. We're here to walk with you. We're here not to just give you fish, but we're here to give you a fishing pole and teach you how to fish. So thank you.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Derrick. So we've got a few minutes to talk a little bit more with each of the presenters here in our Q&A section. I just wanted to delve a little bit into what are some of these things that are really different with the work in the rural communities, and to what extent is that the same in the urban community? And Derrick's really talked about the fact that, a lot of the key presenting issues for dads – really in all fatherhood programs – are help with getting a better job, help with dealing with a co-parenting relationship, and help with any issues with child support that you may have.

But let me come back to you, Sean, for this first. I just wonder if you see any sort of particular – and I think there's two ways to unpack this as well. One is, what are the issues that dads face, and the second part is, well, what are the challenges that programs face? So, in terms of what you've seen, Sean, in terms of rural work, versus urban work, what do you see as the key issues that dads face in a rural area that they maybe don't face in an urban area?

Sean Brotherson: Well, I would say, Nigel, that I think the similarities are stronger than the differences. One of the last points I made, which is that best practices apply when you're trying to serve and work directly with fathers, I think that applies regardless of context. As Derrick pointed out, and as I discussed, economic stress issues are common. But those are common in urban areas as well, and in a variety of contexts.

The issues that are fundamental to healthy male involvement in family life, which is to gain a sense of what parenting means, develop the skills to be able to hold a job, fill that role of providing oneself, as well as for family members, to be able to heal through past difficulties – all of those things are really fundamental. So I think the important thing is to understand really what those things are in common. They're not so different, but there may be unique challenges based on—in rural areas—based on some of the logistical issues with transportation or child care. Just distance, schedules, some things like that, depending on what particular industry they may be involved in—those are some issues.

I think cultural issues very much come into play. Although I think that is important, really, with any population that you're trying to serve, particularly with men. You have to understand the cultural context, and there I'm speaking about an ethnic or cultural kind of background, as you're working with fathers of diverse background. But rural communities tend to have their own local culture. So that issue of being an outsider to a community, gaining trust, finding people who are voices of local authority that you can build partnerships with – I think that that's just a very

intensive need when working with fathers in rural contexts. So some of those things. I'll kind of leave my response at that, and see if there's [sic] other questions. But those are some of the things that I'd indicate are important.

Nigel Vann: Okay, very helpful. Thanks, yeah. You know, one of the issues that I think that certainly Sean talked about a little bit is this – the sense of independence and the sort of frontier communities. So, Derrick, I'm wondering if you see—I mean, I think all fatherhood programs see a challenge with convincing a father as to why he should come into a program—but I'm just wondering, as you talk to dads in South Carolina, what do you do to sort of make them feel comfortable and convince them that you've got something that you can help them with?

Derrick Dease: Well, one of the things, I think reputation is important. I think having staff to understand that. See the men through a different lens, non-judgmental, so the minute he walks in that door, to treat him as an individual, and treat him as a good person. Because I think the reputation is that we look down on them, and of course, you just want them for a child support check. So sometimes, creating that, being empathetic, we understand where you're coming from, being a father myself – I get it.

And having the listening ears, wear big ears, have big ears, listening. A lot of these men have not been listened to, but they have been judged. And so, by listening to them, and then, let them know that we understand, and these are the things that we can do to help. And focusing and basically giving voice to what he does well. The fact that he's coming to the door, we acknowledge that "hey, you coming shows that you really want to try to help your children." And so, basically acknowledging his presence, and what we'll do together, versus just sending him forth. We're in this thing together, so I think fathers, understanding that we're here to help them, it really gets them to buy in.

Nigel Vann: So, maybe come to you, Mindy, and just sort of get your researcher lens on some of this. I just wonder what you might add to this conversation about, you know, what are the differences and what are the similarities, and what your sort of view of this is.

Mindy Scott: Sure. I think we're hearing a lot today, and seeing in the data, too, that even though there are some slight differences, there are a lot of similarities. They just sort of have to think about—I like how Sean said the fundamental needs of fathers in these programs are similar, and even some of the strategies that have been discussed—we have heard similar things for any group of fathers that we've been working, or thinking about doing research with young fathers, fathers not living with their children, [and] unemployed fathers. Thinking around issues of go where the men are. Tailoring your services or your recruitment approaches around that population, the local culture. So even some of the strategies that I think we would recommend for working with different groups of fathers are similar. You just have to apply those to each of the situations.

So I think my big takeaway and big recommendation would be to really understand your population, understand the context within which your program is being implemented. Gather information from stakeholders, and just get all the information and data that you can to really understand the group that you're trying to reach, and then develop strategies for working with those populations – kind of based on that. But I think at the outset, at the beginning, the issues do seem really similar and the strategies that would be used – oh, effective partnerships can come up a lot, too. And I think that's going to be a common approach for whatever group you're working with, too. The right types of partnerships, knowing where to find these men, knowing how to reach them most effectively.

Nigel Vann: Well, that's a great point to bring up, Mindy, because that's going to be my next question, you know. [laughs]

Mindy Scott: Great.

Nigel Vann: I wanted to pose this, perhaps more for Sean and Derrick to chime in on, but certainly, I think you're right, Mindy. And the slide that we've just got on the screen – By the way, it's just a few points from the last webinar

that we did on this. I just thought I'd leave that there for you to look at while I keep talking. So, in terms of working in rural areas and urban areas, you as a fatherhood program cannot meet all the needs of the men you work with. Like partner agencies to help, right? It's getting jobs, it's dealing with mental health, it's dealing with substance abuse, helping with housing, or whatever it may be, handling child support issues. I'm just wondering, and if I could go to Sean first on this – and one key obviously, Sean, is to form a partnership with the local extension services you talked about at the beginning. I'm just wondering if you have any tips for people in terms of how they might reach out to the person in their state, and what they might be asking.

Sean Brotherson: Yeah, I think what people probably should understand about the extension service is that they have local educators who are tasked to work in different areas. But typically, there are some who are tasked to work with either child and family kind of issues, but there may be others. It may be youth development, it may be health and wellness, [or] food [and] nutrition. It may be community development. But really, the important thing is reach out – and you can just look under county government for the local county extension office, Cooperative Extension. And if you can't find it there, then just find your state's land-grant university, and type in "Cooperative Extension System," and Google that. And you can make a contact at the state level. The local educator is the one who is on the ground and connected in the local community. They typically do a lot of their work with partnerships and collaboration, and so they're a good resource really to help with forming those partnerships, maybe introducing you to others.

And I guess I'd say for me, with the issue of male involvement and father involvement, is don't underestimate the interest that individuals or entities in the community might have around this area. It's something that people often recognize as a need, but they don't maybe know exactly how to go about making a difference. What we've found is that, once we've started doing presentations in the community, holding meetings, [or] just inviting people to come together for dialogue. Then, the relationships started to build, and specific programming and service efforts started to move forward. Part of what we had to do was just provide a space for that to happen, and a forum for people to get together, talk about it, and build relationships. So I'd encourage those sorts of activities are really valuable, I think, especially in rural contexts.

Nigel Vann: Yeah, that's great information. I think it always helps to have that other entity to bring folk together. Derrick, just real quickly, could you say just a little bit more about how you form partnerships with the local employers? That's obviously been key to what you've been able to do in helping these guys get jobs. You gained the trust of these employers. How do you do that?

Derrick Dease: Definitely. By meeting with – actually, the employers making time to go, and really give to it a thorough presentation of what we offer, what type of men that we're bringing to them. Let them know that these men are skilled, these men have been trained, these men have soft skills – the very type of people that they're trying to target. Sometimes it meets their interest because it really gives them a pool of workers to choose, to pull from.

Transportation is always a problem with a lot of employers. People being on time, being able to come to work daily. So we let them know that we actually offer transportation for our men as well. We give them incentives, say "hey, if you hire at least ten or more men from our program, we will actually put a van there, so the men will have transportation back and forth." And so, letting them know the quality of men that we're bringing, and these men are going to be on time, they're going to be prompt, [and] they're going to be thorough, really gives them a pool to choose from.

We have one employer that has actually, before they – when they have job openings, they have agreed to contact us before they make it known to the community, and that's the trust that we've developed, by letting them know that we also case manage. We will follow up on our guys to make sure that they're doing everything they're supposed to do on those jobs.

Nigel Vann: Okay, well, thanks. So, I'm just now going to pause to – Enzo, can we just quickly pull up that third poll question? We've been talking about the differences and similarities here. I'd just like to give you all a chance to chime in on this. So, "We've been talking about differences and similarities between working with fathers in rural areas and urban areas. What do you think?" You can say there's more differences, there's more similarities, or it's about the same. It looks like you're coming down on the side of similarities. Okay, thank you very much.

Can we now have the evaluation questions, Enzo? And then I'm going to come back to the presenters and give you one minute to just sort of very briefly leave us your final thoughts. So just respond to these questions. The first one says, "The webinar increased my knowledge about successful strategies for working with dads in rural areas and small communities." You can strongly agree, agree, neither, disagree, or strongly disagree. And the same responses to number two, "The presenters effectively communicated their expertise." And thirdly, "In general, I received good information and resources that I can use in my work with fathers and families."

So while you continue to respond to that, let's come to each of the presenters, and just sort of one final takeaway thought that you would like to leave with the group. How about if I start with you, Mindy?

Mindy Scott: Sure, I just want to say thanks again for having me participate today. It's been really helpful to see everybody's comments, and I love that there's such a community of learning and sharing information. That's one kind of takeaway for me. Also, just thinking about how we can learn from successful programs across the country, serving diverse types of fathers and kind of take [and] learn from successful and effective programs, who are doing really excellent work in a diverse array of areas. Sort of helping to inform programs for urban fathers, learning from rural programs, learning from programs in urban settings to help inform rural programs – I think it's great to see this communication and encourage practitioners, and researchers as well, to continue talking and learning from each other. This has been great – thanks.

Nigel Vann: Okay, thanks Mindy. And Sean, again you provided an awful lot of information in this Chat box—which I look forward to going back and looking at—but what would just be one key thing that you would like to leave people with?

Sean Brotherson: Yeah, I think it's very important to have an optimistic kind of strength-based focus when working with men and fathers. Most men want to be good fathers. They can develop the capacity to be good fathers, and really, there will not be any more important work that they do in their life than the work they do in the walls of their own home, or working with their own children. And so, how do you facilitate that? I agree with the slide where you said, "It really is all about relationships."

Men respond to invitations where someone built a relationship with them, shows an interest in them. That's where it all starts. Whether you're building a relationship with partners to support them, or building a relationship with men themselves in the local settings that they exist in. I think Derrick's program is such a great example of that. I think that's where it starts, and that is where most success will be achieved is in building those kind of relationships.

Nigel Vann: Thank you. So the final word goes to you, Derrick. What's the word of wisdom that you want to leave people with?

Derrick Dease: Well, I thoroughly enjoyed being a part of this webinar—just gaining a lot of insight from the presenters, and looking at the statistics. It's great, I enjoyed it. But also, just as I sit here, I think about, you know, that over, almost 70 percent of these incarcerated men come from fatherless homes, so it's very imperative that we actually just build with passion and be relentless. Also with partnership. Partnership is very important in trying to provide the services needed. And so, continue to work in building fathers and I encourage those that have an interest to understand it is very rewarding. So, thanks.



Nigel Vann: Absolutely, thank you very much. Yeah, and I'd like reiterate that – you know I have certainly found this work over the years to be totally rewarding. It becomes what you do, I think. I'd just like to reiterate Sean's point, though, what goes on inside the home is just key to everything. What you all do out there to help dads better understand their role as parents, maybe improve the relationship with the mother, [or] whatever it is. Just by touching dads' lives, you touch kids' lives, and you shape the future, and that's what this is all about.

So again, I thank our presenters, and you've got the contact information on the slide there. I actually included my email as well to members, so we had a few problems with [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov), but we really encourage you to send any further thoughts, particularly about topics for future webinars. We're always trying to – as Damon said at the beginning, we put this one together based on input that we had gotten from you all. So until next time, thank you very much.

Operator: This concludes today's call. Thank you for your participation.