



# Understanding Barriers to Father Engagement & Introduction to the Father Friendly Principles

# Agenda

- Icebreaker
- Alameda County Fathers Corps Background
- “Voices of Fathers and the Providers who Serve Them”
- Breaking Barriers - Small Group Discussion
- Key Partners to Change the System
- Father Friendly Principles
- Tips for introducing and implementing
- Wrap Up



# Icebreaker

- What are the barriers to fathers being engaged in the lives of their children?
- How can service providers better support fathers?



# Fathers Corps Overview

- Capacity Building
- Systems Change
- Research and Assessment



# Voices Of Fathers & the Providers who Serve Them

- **Listening Sessions (focus groups) and 1-on-1 interviews with fathers who were not involved in the lives of their children**
- **Online survey of 111 providers**
- **Barriers to fathers' engagement with their children**
- **Barriers to fathers' engagement in services**



# Barriers to Father Engagement

## Provider Perspectives

- **Conflict with Mom and Fractured Relationships**

“Some big barriers that come to mind are communication with the mother or whomever has physical custody of the child”

- **Fathers’ work schedule**

“If he works a lot, he just doesn’t have enough hours in the day to also engage with his child. And when he is home, he’s tired.”

- **Limited availability of community resources**

“We are a program whose name says Women, Infants and Children so — sometimes fathers may feel they do not have a place at the program.”

# Barriers to Father Engagement

## Fathers' Perspectives

- Co-Parenting Difficulties

“When she feel good, feel happy, she let me see the kids, but when she get into that mood swing, it’s police, restraining order, fight for primary rights, full custody. I’ve been through all that.” — Latino, 38, Father of 4

“What’s best is both parents, and if that means going through therapy then that’s the avenue that must be taken. But complete separation and starting from there is unacceptable. It’s painful.”

- African-American, 27, Father of 1 whose former partner moved out of state with son

# Barriers to Father Engagement

## Fathers' Perspectives continued

- **Financial Issues — 45% of fathers reported**
  - Difficulties providing for their child affected the amount of contact fathers sought
  - 61% of the fathers reported past felony convictions significantly impacted their employability

**“My number one issue is financial issues, not being able to provide for my daughter like I used to provide before I went to prison. I’m not as financially solvent as I used to be. I haven’t been really seeking contact because of that.” — African-American, 45, Father of 4**

**“Man, I been applyin’ [for] hella jobs. You know, people say, ‘I can get you in’ and right when they do a background check- drugs. I’m not an addict or anything like that, I stopped that already, but it’s my background. I’m a felon... they turn you down.” — Latino, 24, Father of 4**



# Barriers to Father Engagement

## Fathers' Perspectives continued

- 42% of fathers reported Child Support as a barrier
  - Finding quality employment and making child support payments challenging
  - Unsuccessful in altering payments to fit current financial circumstances
  - Non-payment and large arrears contributed to conflict and resentment between parents

“I... have a crappy job working at Toys ‘R’ Us. So even if I’m up at 4 or 5 in the morning unloading the truck and stuff... when I get my check and... open... [the] envelope... I almost want to cry. I work 40 hours a week and then I look at my check and it’s like 110 bucks. I can’t live on that... Why should me being a father be based off of financial issues” – African-American, 45, Father of 4

“I just feel that the child support thing shouldn’t be the most important thing. If you want to be an active father, you should be able to be an active father, you know what I’m saying?”  
– African-American, 26, Father of 1

# Barriers to Father Engagement

## Fathers' Perspectives continued

- **Legal Issues**

- 48% reported past and ongoing interactions with criminal justice system
- 35% reported restraining orders and other actions related to domestic violence issues
- 32% reported caregivers failing to abide by legal custody agreements
- Many believed custody decisions turned against them due to their criminal records

“What I trip off of, they bring the criminal record up in a family court. This is just for custody of the child... But this is always brought up as an issue and it puts you in a bad light... when you go through the court system, it seems like... the deck is always stacked against you. Whatever you say gets shut down. It really hurt my heart.” — African-American, 44, Father of 5

“I just feel that the child support thing shouldn't be the most important thing. If you want to be an active father, you should be able to be an active father, you know what I'm saying?”

— African-American, 26, Father of 1

# Barriers to Father Engagement

## Fathers' Perspectives continued

- **Lack of Role Model/Support from Own Father**
  - 39% reported absence of their biological father
  - Absence of a relationship, unconnected or abusive relationships with their biological fathers elicited some of the most emotional discussion; felt they were on their own with learning how to be a good parent
  - Fathers consistently discussed being better than their fathers

“I didn’t know how to be a parent, not because he [my father] wasn’t in my life, but I didn’t have any examples in my life... I wasn’t sure what was going on, so when my kid turned 6 [months] I was worried he couldn’t walk. I thought he was supposed to be walking... So it was just... my lack of knowledge being a parent. I just learned how to do it myself.” – African-American, 26, Father of 2

“I’m not trying to be no deadbeat like my dad was. He wasn’t there He didn’t teach me how to be a man. The streets taught me how to be a man.” – African-American, 38, Father of 4

# What Fathers Need Most

## Service Provider Perspectives

- **Over 30% reported Father-Specific-Supports and Resources**
  - Fathers' needs are unique
  - Programs and services must be tailored specifically for fathers
  - Programs and services created intentionally and specifically for fathers
- **Over 25% reported fathers needing Parent Education**
  - Enhance fathers' knowledge of child development and the important role fathers play in supporting their child's development
- **Other needs of fathers**
  - Acceptance and acknowledgement
  - Co-parenting education and support
  - Mentorship
  - Quality employment



# What Fathers Need Most

“Fathers need appropriate supports whether it’s an opportunity to talk about their concerns, to specific services tailored to fathers.”

“Education/support that specifically focuses on fathers and their role in the family.”

“Feeling that they are an important figure/role model in their lives and their presence is needed and wanted.”



# What Fathers Need Most

## Fathers' Perspectives

- **Father-Specific Supports and Resources**

- Fathers' Support Groups and Parenting Classes
- Legal Support for: custody, child support, and removing felony convictions

**“The fathers gotta have support, not just the mothers... In most cases the father is underserved.”** — African-American, 26, Father of 1

**“You’ve got to dig, dig, dig and keep pushing, pushing, pushing in order to get something done, but it seems like everywhere I turn to , they just close the door on a person... the system needs to work for us a little bit. I know we ain’t all angels. There’s a lot of men that do damage out there, but there’s a lot of good men too, that care about their children.”** — Latino, 47, Father of 6

# Successful Father Engagement Strategies

## Service Provider Perspectives

- Father-Specific Supports and Programming
- Father-Friendly Services



“Activities that are more kinetic or hands on have helped fathers ‘bond’ and be much more open to hearing feedback and discussion issues/topics”

“Offering evening services for fathers that include child care, dinner and transportation when needed.” (father-friendly)

# Policy and Programmatic Recommendations

- Offer family and father-specific services after hours to accommodate the work schedules of fathers
- Train family service providers on how to engage fathers and father figures in a father-friendly manner that welcomes full participation; and increase the number of male staff within family service organizations at all strategic levels
- Provide ongoing programs, through Alameda County Family Court and family service systems, that support fathers and mothers to develop and maintain healthy co-parenting relationships
- Adequately fund and staff County expungement resources to remove barriers to employment and housing opportunities for fathers and father figures with past criminal convictions



# Policy and Programmatic Recommendations

- Ensure family service program models funded by and contracted out with County funds include a fatherhood component and are effectively engaging and supporting the needs of fathers/father-figures
- Require that father friendly principles be reflected in measurable contract outcomes for family services providers doing business with Alameda County agencies
- Create an Inter-Agency Fathers and Families Council to monitor proposed and existing policies and practices within the family court system, Social Services Agency, Health Care Services Agency and Probation
- Review the ‘best-interest-of-the-child’ standard utilized by Family Court staff and the judicial bench to ensure that irrelevant criminal histories are not given undue evidentiary weight by the staff against fathers or father figures

# Breaking Barriers

- What can you do in your role to address some of the barriers discussed during today's presentation?



# Key Partners Needed to Address Barriers

- Birthing Hospitals
- Child Support
- Child Welfare
- Early Childhood Education
- Family Court
- Health Care Services
- Probation
- School Districts
- Social Services Agency



# Alameda County Fathers Corps

## Father Friendly Principles

- Include the needs of fathers
- Provide father-friendly services
- Portray positive father images
- Create positions that serve fathers
- Train staff on fatherhood issues
- Expect father participation
- Design programs for fathers



# Father Friendly Principles Campaign

## Introducing

- Post FFP posters
- Present to agency leadership
- Present at staff meeting
- Adopt
- Staff participate in FFP training

## Implementing

- Increase outreach to fathers
- Provide ongoing training to staff on working with fathers
- Make changes to physical environment
- Hire male staff
- Apply/secure funding for father-specific programs

# **Your Services and the Father Friendly Principles**

---

- **What would your services look like if you fully embraced the Father Friendly Principles**



**Kevin Bremond**  
**Alameda County Fathers Corps Administrator**  
**First 5 Alameda County**  
**510-227-6932; [kevin.bremond@first5alameda.org](mailto:kevin.bremond@first5alameda.org)**



**Gary Thompson**  
**Family Health Services Coordinator**  
**Manager, FHS Fatherhood Initiative**  
**Alameda County Public Health Department**  
**510-667-4343; [gary.thompson@acgov.org](mailto:gary.thompson@acgov.org)**