



Report to the Pennsylvania State Roundtable



Father Engagement Workgroup

May 2012

Chairperson:

Honorable Maria Musti Cook
Court of Common Pleas of York County



May 2012

Dear Statewide Roundtable Members:

Following the 2011 State Roundtable, the Father Engagement Workgroup was charged with the following tasks: develop a regional cross-training to improve father engagement, review American Bar Association bench cards and align them with Pennsylvania protocols to be distributed to judges and hearing officers, identify best practices for father support groups that could be replicated throughout the state, identify barriers and solutions to effectively engaging fathers in the lives of their children who are part of the child welfare system, and develop a strategy to print and distribute the Father Engagement brochure that was created in 2011.

The Father Engagement Workgroup met regularly from August 2011 through March 2012. This report summarizes the efforts of the workgroup to accomplish the identified tasks and establish a statewide approach for involving fathers in the lives of their children with the ultimate goals of protecting children, promoting strong families, promoting child well-being, and providing timely permanence.

Our sub-committees worked diligently to accomplish our tasks. With the assistance of Elke Moyer, the Father Engagement brochures were beautifully printed and distribution has begun. The ABA bench cards have been assimilated with PA protocols and distribution is planned through the Bench Book update. A training curriculum outline has been developed and the process is in place to move that project ahead through the Child Welfare Training office. A comprehensive program outline was developed for creating and sustaining a Fathers' Support Group at the county level. Barriers and solutions to father engagement have been identified.

In the next year, the workgroup envisions finalizing the training program and developing a schedule for training dates throughout the state. The workgroup has also identified the need to survey the counties to make sure our efforts have reached the courts, child welfare agencies, providers, attorneys and fathers and made a positive change in the practice of engaging fathers.

I wish to especially acknowledge the hard work of the members of our workgroup, especially the fathers who travelled from Allegheny County for each meeting and provided us with valuable insight. As always our work would not be possible without the significant contributions of the staff members of the Office of Children and Families in the Courts.



Maria Musti Cook, Chair
Father Engagement Workgroup

Father Engagement Workgroup

Chairperson

Honorable Maria Musti Cook,
Court of Common Pleas of York County

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2011-2012 Father Engagement Workgroup

This report details work accomplished from August 2011 through March 2012 by the re-named Father Engagement Workgroup. The workgroup met seven times, with additional subcommittee meetings/conference calls. The workgroup completed its tasks, with the exception of finalizing the father engagement training curriculum. With the assistance of the Office of Children and Families in the Courts, the brochure developed by the workgroup in 2011 was printed and distributed across the state.

The workgroup was split into four subcommittees to address specific tasks. Carrie Ann Frolio, Assistant Director of York County Children, Youth and Families, led the subcommittee which created bench cards to be forwarded to the Benchbook Committee for possible inclusion in the Dependency Bench Book. The subcommittee combined the salient points contained within the American Bar Association's bench cards with the Pennsylvania practices and protocols presented in this workgroup's 2011 report.

Peter Rogers, Esquire from Berks County, led the subcommittee that identified the Barriers and Solutions to father engagement, an excellent tool for discussion and consideration.

Kathy Moore, CEO of Moore Training and Consulting and trainer for the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center (PaCWRC) and Gene Detter, Curriculum and Instructional Specialist from PaCWRC led a subcommittee addressing the father engagement training curriculum and format. The workgroup believes it is vital to the success of the training that the Administrative Office of PA Courts and Department of Public Welfare coordinate an update and revision of the existing "Engaging Absent Fathers" curriculum through the PaCWRC to utilize this valuable resource while expanding it to include a multi-disciplinary approach.

Lisa Chambers, Court Liaison Manager, Allegheny County Children Youth and Families, led the subcommittee that developed a best practice model curriculum that can be replicated throughout the state in the form of a father engagement support group model. Inclusion of fathers who have been participants in the system was a key element to the development of the model curriculum.

Father Engagement Workgroup Judicial Bench Cards Subcommittee

The Judicial Bench Cards Subcommittee reviewed existing bench cards from the National Quality Improvement Center (NQIC) on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System and the protocols for the agency, court, and legal professionals contained in the Pennsylvania Fatherhood Workgroup's May 2011 Report to the State Roundtable, "Kids Need Their Dads." The conclusion was that although the NQIC bench cards were extremely thorough, there were additional salient points from the Pennsylvania report that

needed to be included. Therefore, the proposed bench cards contain condensed information from the NQIC resources and additional components from the Pennsylvania protocols. This resulted in three separate bench cards on identifying and locating fathers, engaging fathers, and understanding male help-seeking and learning styles. The bench cards are included as an attachment to this report (Attachment 1).

Father Engagement Workgroup Subcommittee Barriers and Solutions

Engaging fathers in the child welfare system is critical to the best interests and long-term outcomes of children involved in the system. Nonetheless, many fathers are either entirely unengaged or engaged only in a limited manner.

To address this issue, the Father Engagement Workgroup created the Barriers and Solutions Subcommittee and tasked it with investigating and identifying the overarching barriers to father engagement, as well as providing general solutions to these barriers where possible. The subcommittee, comprised of practitioners at many levels of the child welfare and court systems, met regularly over the course of a year and worked diligently, engaging in robust discussions, exploring a wide range of issues, and examining the data garnered from pertinent surveys.

Through this process, the subcommittee identified an expansive list of barriers to father engagement common across Pennsylvania and then crafted potential solutions to these barriers, always mindful of the mission and vision of the Father Engagement Workgroup.

The resultant information is included in the attached table for easy review and use (Attachment 2). The Subcommittee intends this information simply as a starting point to begin discussion at the county level. Specifically, it is the subcommittee's hope that if father engagement is a priority issue in a particular county, the local Children's Roundtable will utilize the subcommittee's findings to foster dialogue and facilitate county-specific solutions.

Father Engagement Workgroup Training Subcommittee

Overall Vision:

The Father Engagement Workgroup Training Subcommittee was tasked with creating training for child welfare and related professionals (legal, direct service and others) on the topic of father engagement in court and child welfare direct service efforts.

The training would total twelve hours – possibly two six-hour sessions (from this point on referred to as “days”), which ideally occur consecutively. The morning of the first six-hour day would consist of a three-hour component that offers an overview on the importance of fathers in the child welfare system. This overview portion would be written for a global audience but would have information that focuses to a larger degree on attorneys and judicial officers. The remaining day and a half of training would be written primarily for direct service workers.

While the subcommittee recommends the entire training be eligible for twelve Continuing Education Credits, the Workgroup specifically recommends the overview portion of the training (the morning of day one) be eligible for three Continuing Legal Education credits. Content would need to reflect information written to the educational level necessary for assuring the assignment of the appropriate credits.

Recommended Global Content Considerations:

The entire two days of training on father engagement, as it relates to those involved in the child welfare and related fields (legal or otherwise), would be written using a cross-systems perspective. All information (stemming from recommendations made by the Father Engagement Workgroup and other individuals/entities versed in father engagement) would be research-grounded. The information would reveal and support the positive outcomes that result when legal professionals (attorneys and judicial officers) and direct service workers actively locate, engage, and empower fathers to remain or become change agents in the circumstance(s) that brought their child(ren) to the attention of the courts and the child welfare agency.

In conjunction with the recommendations made by the Father Engagement Workgroup and other individuals/entities versed in father engagement, the three-hour portion of day one would offer the historical context of father engagement as it relates to traditional child welfare practice (legal and direct service), as well as buy-in and best practice considerations. The remainder of the session would focus on practical solutions geared toward direct service workers to help them meet and/or exceed best practice protocols.

Recommended Trainer/Faculty Requirements:

Trainer/faculty must have a genuine appreciation for and belief in the need to engage and involve fathers in all facets of the child welfare system from the viewpoints of attorneys, judicial officers and direct service workers. The trainer/faculty must have specific knowledge of and appreciation for Federal and Pennsylvania child welfare laws, regulations, and bulletins related to the need to locate, engage, and empower fathers in child welfare cases as well as practical experience implementing best practices surrounding father engagement.

An in-depth knowledge of Family Finding and Family Group Decision Making is needed, as Pennsylvania has adopted these models to locate, engage, and empower fathers and family members. An awareness of the Child and Family Services Review, the Commonwealth's implementation of those reviews (i.e., the Quality Services Reviews), and related plans to make system-wide change as it relates to locating, engaging, and empowering fathers is preferred. In addition, a view concerning how the need to engage fathers (both in and out of the courts) affects cross-systems work and shared case responsibility is important. Ideally, the presenter would also have training experience.

Father Engagement Workgroup Best Practice Subcommittee

Two years ago, the Father Engagement Workgroup surveyed all child welfare agencies in Pennsylvania. The feedback received indicated a need to develop a Best Practice Subcommittee, which would concentrate on the needs of fathers and create a program that would increase fathers' participation and understanding of the child welfare system. Thus, the Best Practice Subcommittee was created out of the larger workgroup on Father Engagement. This Subcommittee in turn, created a model support group curriculum discussed in the following paragraph.

The Fathers' Support Group program is for fathers involved in the child welfare system. Father Engagement Workgroup members believe it is important for fathers to have their own support group because fathers are treated differently than mothers in the context of the child welfare system. This differential treatment is evident from the start: the mother is included in case planning from the moment a case opens and receives services while a father is often listed as "unknown" or "alleged" for some time, and must take steps to establish himself as a child's father before efforts are made to involve him in case planning and provide him with services to the same degree as a mother. Even after paternity is confirmed, many fathers deal with additional obstacles to parenting their children that result from being physically separated from them, whether due to being a non-resident father, family conflict, incarceration, etc.

The benefit to offering a support group just for fathers is that the curriculum could cover topics directly relating to the unique role of a father within the family and as a participant in the child welfare system. This would allow child welfare agencies to engage fathers early in the process, provide services, and immediately begin working to increase their participation through knowledge and empowerment.

The proposed Father Support Group curriculum is comprised of four modules in which participants would acquire the necessary skills to enhance their role as fathers. The modules are: Building Blocks, The Dynamic Father, Enhancing Relationships, and Partnering for Success (see Program Outline - Attachment 3c for details). The modules would be offered

in conjunction with a self-help support meeting, held monthly. Each module consists of four weekly sessions, with each session lasting two hours. Fathers may begin the program at the first session of any module, as the modules do not build upon one another.

A pre-assessment would be completed by a father when he starts the program to determine his knowledge about topics that will be covered in the modules and to help the facilitator adjust delivery as needed. Attendance would be taken at each session. Once a participant completes all four modules, by attending a minimum of three sessions per module, the father would complete a post-assessment to measure skills and knowledge gained. Fathers who attend sessions regularly and demonstrate an understanding of the information covered would be awarded a certificate of achievement. Those who receive their certificate of achievement would have an opportunity to become a peer mentor to other fathers in the program.

Fathers would be encouraged to bring their children to these sessions, when appropriate, as some sessions would include interactional activities. Additionally, there would be planned events for fathers and their children.

Child welfare agencies will have to secure funding for the Fathers' Support Group, to cover the cost of staff, meals, transportation, activities, and program supplies. Currently, under PA Code, Title 55 (Public Welfare), Chapter 3140, § 3140.22 – regarding services for which the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) will reimburse child welfare agencies for services to dependent and delinquent children – DPW will reimburse agencies at a rate of 75% to 90% for:

- **§§ (f), (2) – Counseling/ Intervention Services:** *Supportive and therapeutic activities provided to a child or a child's family and directed at preventing or alleviating conditions, including crisis conditions, which present a risk to the safety or well-being of the child, by improving problem-solving and coping skills, interpersonal functioning, the stability of the family or the capacity of the family to function independently.*
- **§§ (f), (9) – Life Skills Education:** *Practical education and training to the child and other family members, either in or outside of their own homes, in skills needed to perform the activities of daily living, including child care and parenting education, home management and related functions.*

Funding opportunities could vary from county to county depending on local resources. Some funding options may include: local foundations, federal, state or local grants (i.e., Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grant), fundraising, partnering with providers, volunteer or community groups (i.e., faith based organizations) or the Needs Based Plan and Budget.

The overall need to gain fathers' involvement at the onset of a child welfare case is paramount. In an effort to make sure father engagement occurs and fathers receive the same benefits as mothers, the Father Engagement Workgroup believes each child welfare

agency in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that does not currently offer a curriculum for fathers, should adopt the program outlined.

See Attachments 3 (a) – 3 (d)

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The members of the Father Engagement Workgroup respectfully recommend the State Roundtable:

1. Approve forwarding the Bench Cards to the Bench Book Committee for possible inclusion with the next addendum to the Dependency Bench Book.
2. Approve the Barriers and Solutions as discussion items for local Children’s Roundtable consideration.
3. Approve submission of a formal request to the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare - Office of Children, Youth and Families to authorize an update and revision to the existing “305: Engaging Absent Fathers” training through the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center to become multi-disciplinary focused.
4. Endorse the Father Engagement Support Group Curriculum and encourage each child welfare agency in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that does not currently offer a curriculum for fathers to adapt the program outlined or partner with local providers or community groups to provide this service.
5. Approve continued work of the Father Engagement Workgroup for 2012-2013 to address the following issues:
 - a) Implementation of the father engagement training
 - b) Development of a follow-up county survey to determine if efforts to bring the issue of father engagement to the forefront have successfully resulted in increased father engagement and participation to achieve permanency for children in the child welfare system
6. Request the CPCMS Dependency Module collect data on court attendance by fathers in order to measure outcomes with respect to father engagement in court.

Engaging Fathers in Child Protection Court Hearings and Case Planning

JUDICIAL BENCH CARD

Judicial officers can take several steps to help fathers participate in the child protection court process and case planning.

<p>Create a culture of inclusion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set expectations for father involvement with the child welfare agency and directly with fathers.• Judicial officers should treat a father with respect and acknowledge his importance to the legal proceedings and the child. Take time to explain issues such as the nature of the proceedings, the importance of a father, permanency issues, father's legal rights, and the potential role of the paternal family with respect to the child.• At every hearing, the judicial officer should give a father the opportunity to address the court.• When a father or putative father attends his first court hearing:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Stress the importance of his involvement in the proceedings and in his child's life.○ Explain the proceedings, timelines and permanency options.○ Encourage him to take pride in his role in his child's life.○ Encourage his ongoing involvement by explaining how it can result in better outcomes for his child.	<p>Involve the father in hearings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the father is not attending proceedings, find out why and try to overcome barriers. Encourage him to speak with his attorney about resolving them or if he does not have one to write a letter to the court.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ If the father is incarcerated, let him participate by telephone or request to have him transported to hearings.○ If the father lacks transportation to hearings, encourage the social worker to help arrange it.○ If the father's work schedule does not enable him to attend, schedule hearings at more convenient times, or allow participation by phone.• Allow a putative or alleged father to participate in hearings before and until paternity is established. Encourage efforts to establish paternity as soon as possible.• If domestic violence has been alleged, ensure assessments are conducted to determine whether and to what degree danger exists. If founded, require that a safety plan be created with the victim(s).• If the father is located, but does not attend court, the court should require him to be subpoenaed so that the court can ensure his appearance.• Utilize technology, such as videoconferencing, to allow a father to participate in hearings when attendance is not possible.• The father's attorney should ensure that father's position is communicated to the court.
<p>Consider the father as a placement option.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Absent a finding of unfitness, place the child with the father unless a safety threat exists.• Assess whether there is a need for an ongoing child protection case if there is a fit, able parent willing to care for the child.	<p>Involve the father's relatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify paternal family members early and encourage the caseworker to assess their willingness/capacity to care for or be involved in the child's life.• Permit extended family, where appropriate, to participate in court hearings, decision-making, and visitation.

Encourage the father's involvement in case planning.

- Ensure the agency includes the father (and paternal relatives/support persons) in case planning meetings, family group conferences, and similar sessions.
- Use the “no reasonable efforts” finding when necessary to ensure the father and, where appropriate, paternal kin are engaged and considered potential placement options.
- Require a service plan that includes both parents. Encourage and insist on equal access/referral to services for father and mother.
- Examine whether services required in the service plan are “father-friendly” and address documented safety concerns.
- Encourage developing community-based services to meet the father's needs, like male-inclusive parenting classes, father mentoring programs, father engagement education groups, and other gender-specific programs.
- Ensure each party has separate case plans that protect confidential information and that promote safe and respectful parenting.

Address family violence.

- Carefully and thoroughly explore allegations of domestic violence, by reviewing information from multiple sources including, but not solely, the parent (and/or child) alleging abuse.
- Violence exists in different forms and to varying degrees in many relationships, yet often does not result in a report to authorities or a conviction of the perpetrator, even if there is a pattern of coercive control or physical violence. A single act or allegation of domestic violence should not become a barrier to a father safely engaging with his child. Absent proof of domestic violence, fathers should be allowed to safely connect with their children while balancing the reality that an absence of proof does not mean domestic violence is not present.
- In cases where family violence exists, ensure services are targeted to the specific family dynamics, and the agency is not referring all families to the same “one-size-fits-all” services.
- Ensure case planning, alternative dispute resolution, and family group decision-making meetings consider family violence issues.

Allow visitation.

- As soon as paternity is established, order visitation between the child and father (unless it would harm the child), including incarcerated fathers.
- If the father is unable to visit, allow other forms of contact, such as letters or phone calls.
- Allow the father and child to have at least as much contact as they had before court involvement, and more if possible.
- Consider allowing other family, mentors, and friends to be present during visitation (particularly if the father has limited experience with the child or parenting).
- Consider asking the social worker to report on how visits have gone and the connection between father and child.
- Unless there is a documented reasonable safety concern, move to unsupervised visits as quickly as possible.
- Ensure the timing and frequency of visits meet the developmental needs of the child and support father-child attachment (e.g., younger children should visit more often and for shorter periods).
- If a history of domestic violence is established, consider supervised visitation that can be eased if required services are met, behaviors change, and safety allows.

The Pennsylvania Father Engagement Workgroup, a committee of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts Office of Children & Families in the Courts produced this bench card with special thanks and reference to the following sources:

- ***National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System***
- ***American Humane Association***
- ***American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law***
- ***National Fatherhood Initiative***
- ***The Pennsylvania Fatherhood Workgroup's May 2011 Report to the State Roundtable, "Kids Need their Dads."***

Identifying and Locating Noncustodial Fathers in Child Protection Cases

JUDICIAL BENCH CARD

Early identification and location of father, helps a child establish or maintain important connections with his/her father and paternal relatives. It may also reduce delays in permanency, whether the goal is reunification or adoption. Establishing paternity quickly after a putative father is located is critical to ensuring the case moves quickly and the father can assert and protect his constitutional rights to the care and custody of his child. Judicial officers can:

<p>Identify noncustodial father early and make ongoing attempts to locate him.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child welfare professional should utilize all six steps of Family Finding (discovery, engagement, planning, decision making, follow up and evaluation). Follow the Fostering Connections Act and notify all adult relatives to the fifth degree within 30 days of placement. • Explain to the mother and other relatives the importance of identifying and locating the father early. • Ask the mother and other relatives about the father's identity and location at the first hearing. Obtain information under oath or via an affidavit establishing parentage. • If possible, ask the child about the father's identity and location and names of paternal kin. The child welfare professional should interview the child regarding the father's whereabouts. • Ensure the child welfare agency has a policy on identifying and locating absent parents, including fathers and alleged fathers, and that it follows the policy in a timely manner. • Require the agency to promptly obtain, through their local child support office, Parent Locator, information which can help find not only fathers but also paternal relatives. • Order the child welfare agency to follow up on information gained from court hearings. • The child welfare professional should send letters to the last known address and request post office verification. • Request, at every subsequent hearing, information about progress in identifying and locating the father. • Consider imposing deadlines for searches or for filing affidavits detailing search efforts. • Ask whether the agency has: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Asked the mother, child or relatives about the father's whereabouts 2. Used federal, state or other parent locator systems 3. Sent letters to and visited the last known address of the father, talked to neighbors, and family members in the community where father previously resided 4. Checked with local jails, prison or correctional departments, probation or parole agencies, and immigration authorities 5. Checked public benefits information (e.g., social security or public assistance) 6. Checked with the child support enforcement agency 7. Tried to locate the father through his driving and vehicle registration records 8. Used family-finding technology or services to locate the father • Make sure court orders and the record reflect efforts to identify and locate the father. The hearing officer should consider a finding of "No Reasonable Efforts" if the agency has not made attempts to locate father. 	<p>Establish paternity quickly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If paternity and dependency are being handled as separate cases, arrange for the paternity case to be expedited so the father can be engaged and supported in the dependency actions. • Question the putative father directly about his: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relationship to the mother 2. Desire to be a father 3. Effort to have or maintain a relationship with his child, which may include questions about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ How often he sees the child ➢ How often he speaks with the child ➢ Whether he provides formal or informal financial or other support to the child (e.g., pays child support; buys food, clothes, gifts, etc.) ➢ If his name is on the birth certificate ➢ If he has filed with a putative father registry ➢ If he was living with or married to the mother when she was pregnant or when the child was born ➢ If he has been prevented from contact with the child • Tell the putative father that once paternity is established, he will be treated as a parent at all court hearings. • Require paternity testing if there is a question about who the biological father is and ensure the child welfare agency pays for it. • Request at every hearing, information about progress being made to establish paternity. • Be clear in the court order once paternity and "legal" fatherhood is established. • Appoint counsel when paternity is established (if not before for the putative father), at government expense based on the father's financial capacity.
<p><i>The Pennsylvania Father Engagement Workgroup, a committee of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, Office of Children & Families in the Courts produced this bench card with special thanks and reference to the following sources:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System</i> - <i>American Humane Association</i> - <i>American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law</i> - <i>National Fatherhood Initiative</i> - <i>The Pennsylvania Fatherhood Workgroup's May 2011 Report to the State Roundtable, "Kids Need their Dads."</i> 	

Engaging Fathers in Child Protection Cases by Understanding Male Help-Seeking and Learning Styles

JUDICIAL BENCH CARD

Judicial officers can help better engage fathers by understanding how men seek help and learn differently from women. They can also encourage the child welfare agency to work with fathers as often as mothers, offer services geared toward men's learning styles, and work as hard to find and engage fathers as mothers.

Support positive impressions about fathers.

- Give father the benefit of the doubt. If he fails to attend a hearing or attend inconsistently, ask why and if the court can help overcome any barriers.
- Ask the father's counsel or caseworker whether the father has been properly notified of hearings and meetings and/or why he has been unable to attend.
- Address barriers to participation, which may include work schedules, transportation, incarceration or misunderstandings about the court process.
- Be open-minded about the father: his desire to play a role in his child's life can lead to a positive outcome.

Encourage the child welfare agency to offer the father services that respond to male learning styles.

- Ensure required services are appropriate and meet "reasonable efforts" requirements to reunify (or unify) the child with the father.
- Require the agency to develop a case plan for the father with his input in its development.
- Require the agency to provide the same level of service and outreach for father as it gives mother.
- Request services that encourage cooperative relationships and meaningful communication between mother and father.
- Encourage the agency to engage fathers in services tailored to men's learning styles. They should:
 - Be informational and provide concrete practical guidance.
 - Not dwell on emotional disclosures or how the father is feeling
 - Focus on planning for the future and resolving problems.
 - Keep discussions action-oriented.

Focus on strengths.

- Get a complete and accurate picture of the father's ability to parent and his strengths. Gather information from the caseworker, the father and any of the father's relatives who participate in proceedings.
- Reaffirm the importance of fatherhood to the fathers and mothers who come before the court.
- Use the strengths of "traditional" masculinity but address self-defeating beliefs about getting help (e.g., "With all of the hard work you did at your last job, I'm sure the vocational center will be able to help you find a new job.")
- Tell the father how his absence affects a child's life and emphasize the positive impact when he is present and involved.

The Pennsylvania Father Engagement Workgroup, a committee of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, Office of Children & Families in the Courts produced this bench card with special thanks and reference to the following sources:

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Barriers	Potential Solutions
<p>Fathers' refusal to attend hearings due to fear of child support obligations, immigration concerns, and outstanding warrants</p>	<p>Bench warrants</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Timely attorney representation prior to first hearing 2. Early identification by caseworker and parent attorney as to whether outstanding warrants exist 3. Direction from caseworker that the father call his attorney or request court appointed attorney who can resolve the warrants prior to coming to court 4. Continual encouragement by caseworkers for the father to resolve warrants 5. Assistance given to fathers in setting-up payment plans when the warrants are due to failure to pay 6. Explanation to fathers that many warrants are minor and can be resolved relatively easily; thus, they are not as substantial of a problem as perceived (majority come from MDJ level and are not very serious, nor expensive to resolve) 7. Use of Family Group Decision Making to identify resources that may assist in resolution of warrants
<p>Problems associated with incarcerated visits (i.e., inaccurate perception that visits will traumatize the children, inappropriate meeting places at the jail/prison, resistance of jail/prison personnel, Courts, Masters, Guardians, etc.)</p>	<p>Utilize Family Group Decision Making conferences to facilitate visits by engaging extended family who may be visiting on their own or who may be willing to provide transportation</p> <p>Speak with counselor at jail/prison to facilitate visits on the ground level</p> <p>Implement systematic change at the administrative level via communication with (and education of) sheriffs, wardens, judges, county commissioners, and agency directors (must create buy-in)</p> <p>Set-up child-friendly visitation rooms</p> <p>*The Incarcerated Fathers Workgroup is addressing these issues in more depth</p>
<p>Limited buy-in by Agency and Court; undervaluation of importance of fathers; lack of effort by Agency to locate fathers; greater expectations placed on fathers/more required of fathers</p>	<p>Bi-monthly group discussions amongst caseworkers sharing positive cases that promote the benefit of father involvement</p> <p>Increased accountability of all governmental systems and agencies</p> <p>Ongoing training of Agency administrators and Judges</p> <p>Consistent requests by the Court that the Agency describe the efforts it has undertaken to locate and engage fathers</p>

<p>Fathers are frequently unaware of hearings</p>	<p>Agency must send out notice early when the father's address is known</p> <p>Notice of upcoming court dates should be given to fathers at the end of each court appearance in writing</p> <p>Identification of whether the father is illiterate and, when appropriate, continual verbal communication of court dates</p> <p>Notice provided in language spoken/read by the father (i.e., Spanish)</p> <p>When appropriate, use of mother's assistance in informing the father of court dates</p> <p>Effort to notify members of extended paternal family</p>
<p>Fathers reside outside of continental U.S. (i.e., Berks County - large population that moves back and forth between Puerto Rico and the continental U.S.)</p>	<p>Increased focus on engagement of extended family</p>
<p>Paternity Issues</p> <p>Due to the fact that a man's relationship to a child is not necessarily clear at birth, delays in establishing paternity have negative effects on fathers (i.e., fewer visits for fathers if paternity has not been established, fathers' extended family is less willing to provide support prior to establishment of paternity, services withheld prior to establishment of paternity, etc.)</p>	<p>Recommendation for creation of paternity subgroup to address these issues</p>
<p>Logistical Barriers: court hours, child welfare agency's hours, attorney hours, travel/transportation, work conflicts, etc.</p>	<p>Transportation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Utilize public transportation 2. Provide bus passes 3. Utilize In-home team, caseworker, or case aides 4. Fund use of rental car 5. Utilize family/friend resources <p>Court hours / work conflicts</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Traveling Dependency Court <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Use of MDJ offices 2. Night Dependency Court 3. Attempt by Court to accommodate the father's work schedule when possible 4. Use of telephone testimony to alleviate the need of the father to leave work

	<p>Attorney hours / Agency hours</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deviation from traditional hours for attorneys and caseworkers 2. Increased compensation for work beyond normal hours
Fathers maybe fearful of responsibilities to a new family due to lack of bond to child and estrangement from child's mother	Explanation to fathers of services and assistance that will be provided to them to overcome these challenges, with an emphasis on the positive outcomes for the children
Fathers are fearful of reigniting violent relationships with mothers and mother's family/friends	<p>Encourage caseworkers and parent attorneys to explain to fathers that they are never alone, one-on-one interaction is not forced, all interaction takes place in a public settings, and deputies will be present or close by at all times</p> <p>Use attorneys and caseworkers as channels of communication for basic information</p> <p>Offer services focused on addressing domestic violence issues, if necessary</p> <p>Develop protocol for interaction when safety is an issue</p>
Court is an unfriendly/suspicious environment for parents of dependent or potentially dependent children	Encourage the Agency, the Court, and the Attorneys to address fathers respectfully
Fear that if the father comes into court, child welfare agency may start looking into his life and try to take custody of other children	<p>Community outreach sponsored by all factions of the dependency system whereby information is provided to the community about dependency and the Agency</p> <p>(E.g.) Symposiums at local high school and colleges</p>
Fear that court appointed attorneys are "part of the system" and not really looking out for the father's best interests	<p>Increased communication between fathers and court appointed attorneys</p> <p>Community outreach sponsored by all factions of the dependency system whereby information is provided to the community about dependency and the Agency</p> <p>(E.g.). Symposiums at local high school and colleges</p>
Fear of having to pay for an attorney	Early and repeated instruction by the caseworker that most fathers in the dependency system are granted a court appointed attorney who will represent the father's interests at no cost to the father
Fathers are not contacted if a child has individual educational needs	Place greater importance on providing all information to both parents
Use of offensive terminology	<p>Identification of offensive terminology and systemic effort to use neutral language</p> <p>(E.g.). Refer to "Masters" as "Hearing Officers", fathers should never be called "sperm donors" or "deadbeat dads"</p>

Lack of judicial leadership	Provide best practices checklist to the judiciary Utilize judicial bench cards Encourage the judiciary to promote success stories
Confusion of where to go at the courthouse and general sense of being overwhelmed	Greeters at main entrances to welcome and direct people where to go
Lack of understanding of what is expected	Greater communication by the Agency, parent attorneys, and the Court

The Importance of Program Pre- and Post-Assessments

Pre- and post-assessments serve many important purposes. For instance, when offered as part of the Fathers' Support Group program, in conjunction with clear learning objectives, the assessments will help gauge and provide documentation related to:

- Participant knowledge about a topic before and after a program session; and,
- The effectiveness of the way in which the information is offered in the program overall and in each session specifically.

Ultimately, the information from the assessments will provide real-time data to determine successes in addition to any need for change in the program.

The following sample pre- and post-assessments are only offered as a guide for any assessment that you would use in your county-specific program. Feel free to modify the questions, as those offered only very generically address the learning objectives for the proposed layouts for the modules.

It is important to know that pre- and post-assessment questions must be as specific to the content as possible and must measure important concepts clearly defined within a respective module. Please search for the phrase *pre- and post-assessment* using your Internet search engine of choice for numerous resources on the topic and further ideas for creating assessments.

Fathers' Support Group Pre-Assessment

Thank you for taking part in the Fathers' Support Group. Please spend a few minutes taking the following pre-assessment. The assessment is important since it will:

- Help you discover what you knew before taking the first module compared to what you know after taking the last module about:
 - the child welfare and court system; and,
 - the strengths and supports that you and your child and family have to ensure a better chance of plan success.
- Help us to make sure that the information we offer in the modules and the way we offer that information is as useful to you as we can possibly make it to give you, and others taking part in the group, the best possible chance of plan success now and in the future.

You will also be asked to complete a post-assessment when you complete all the modules. The questions on the pre- and post-assessments are very similar; so, you will see the questions below again when you take the post-assessment in a few months. Please answer the questions honestly and think about how your answers can help you gauge what you would like to discover during the support group sessions and how your answers can help us improve the information and delivery of the support group. Your guide will ask everyone to talk about their answers after completing the assessment.

Module 1 – Building Blocks

1. What are the two key Pennsylvania child welfare laws that allow child welfare agencies and the courts to become involved when allegations of abuse and neglect arise?
 - _____
 - _____
2. List one way that child welfare laws and regulations allow child welfare agencies and the courts to become involved when allegations of abuse and neglect arise.
 - _____
3. List two of your rights under child welfare law.
 - _____
 - _____

4. Briefly describe the purpose of your child welfare Family Service Plan.

5. List three important services available to you through the child welfare agency and community resources.

- ---
- ---
- ---

6. Briefly describe the roles of the following people that you will/might meet while involved with the child welfare agency:

- Caseworkers:

- Judges:

- Child Attorneys:

- Parent Attorneys:

Module 2 – The Dynamic Father

1. Briefly describe how you see your role, as a father, as it relates to meeting the needs of your child.

2. List three ways to overcome any feelings and beliefs that might stop your family from succeeding with your case plan and in life in general.

- ---
- ---
- ---

3. List two general feelings and beliefs that could occur when an absentee or incarcerated father attempts to reconnect with his child and family.

- _____
- _____

4. Briefly describe two ways that a father (who never had, has lost, or has damaged the trust of his children and family) can create, regain, or rebuild the trust of his children and/or family.

- _____
- _____

Module 3 – Enhancing Relationships

1. List at least three emotional needs your child has.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. List at least three basic physical needs your child has.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3. List two typical behaviors seen as children and teenagers develop.

- _____
- _____

4. Describe one way of communicating with a child (who is similar to yours in gender, age, and development) that considers the child's gender, age, and development.

- _____
- _____

5. Describe one way of disciplining a child (who is similar to yours in gender, age, and development) that considers the child's gender, age, and development.

- _____
- _____

6. Describe three gender-, age-, and developmentally-appropriate activities that children/teenagers, fathers, and the family in general can do together to form stronger bonds.

- _____

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Module 4 – Partnering for Success

1. List five families or community supports that will help you and your family achieve and maintain success – not only while involved with the agency but once you leave as well.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. List at least three tips to consider when creating a great résumé.

- _____
- _____
- _____

3. List at least three resources (community or otherwise) to consider using when looking for a job.

- _____
- _____
- _____

4. Briefly describe other important skills associated with finding and securing a job when the need arises.

- _____

5. Think about and describe a plan to use resources available to you to better ensure the success of your family's case plan now and in the future.

My Expectations for the Support Group

Based on the pre-assessment:

1. Please list at least one strength you bring to the group that could help inform discussions.

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2. Please list at least one thing you'd like to make sure the group discusses.

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Program Outline

The Fathers' Support Group program is for fathers involved in the child welfare system. The curriculum is comprised of four modules in which participants will acquire the necessary skills to enhance their role as a father. The modules should be offered in conjunction with a self-help support meeting, held monthly. Each module consists of four weekly sessions, with each session lasting two hours. Fathers may begin the program at the first session of any module, as the modules do not build upon one another.

A pre-assessment will be completed by a father when he starts the program to determine his knowledge about topics that will be covered in the modules and to help the facilitator adjust delivery as needed. Attendance will be taken at each session. Once a participant completes all four modules, by attending a minimum of three sessions per module, the father would complete a post-assessment to measure skills and knowledge gained. Fathers who attend sessions regularly and demonstrate an understanding of the information covered will be awarded a certificate of achievement. Those who receive their certificate of achievement will have an opportunity to become a peer mentor to other fathers in the program. As an ongoing support network, all fathers involved in the child welfare system are encouraged to participate in the self-help support meetings.

Fathers should bring their children to these sessions, when appropriate, as some sessions will include interactional activities. Additionally, there will be planned events for fathers and their children. Transportation will be available. A meal will be served at each session.

CURRICULUM:

Module 1 – Building Blocks

Goal: Fathers will gain knowledge about the child welfare and juvenile court systems.

Learning Objectives: A father will be able to:

1. Identify how certain child welfare laws and regulations allow child welfare agencies and the courts to become involved when allegations of abuse and neglect arise.
2. List his rights under child welfare-related law.
3. Describe the purpose of the service plan.
4. Identify important services available to him through the agency and community resources.
5. Describe the roles of key people that he will/might meet while involved with the child welfare agency.

Module Description:

Moving through the child welfare and related court system can be difficult since the systems are made up of many layers, are complex and, at times, confusing. To ensure a better chance of achieving successful outcomes for his child, it is important for a father to know the purpose of child welfare and the courts, the laws that guide child welfare agencies, who the people are that make up the system, what his rights are in the system, as well as what his role is throughout his involvement with the system. In this module, fathers will discuss the mission of the child welfare system and its philosophy. Fathers will also learn about the Family Service Plan: what it is, the importance of their involvement in creating the plan, and what occurs once the plan is created. They will discuss Juvenile Court proceedings and procedures as well as the roles and duties of caseworkers, probation officers, judges, child attorneys, parent attorneys, and others working in the child welfare system. In addition, fathers will learn about their rights and responsibilities as it relates to child welfare and any court involvement.

Weekly Session Breakdown:

- 1) An Overview of Child Welfare: Its Mission, Philosophy, and a Discussion about the Family Service Plan
- 2) Juvenile Court Proceedings and Procedures
- 3) The Roles and Duties of Child Welfare and Court Professionals
- 4) Your Rights and Responsibilities as Parents as they Relate to Child Welfare and Court Involvement

Module 2 – The Dynamic Father

Goal: Fathers will understand the importance of their role as it relates to healthy family functioning.

Learning Objectives: A father will be able to:

1. Identify his role, as father, in meeting the needs of his child.
2. Name ways to deal with feelings and beliefs that might stop him and his family from moving forward in the case process and in life in general.
3. Identify the feelings and beliefs that could occur when an absentee or incarcerated father attempts to reconnect with his child and family.
4. Use methods that will help him regain the trust of and build/rebuild strong relationships with his children and family.

Module Description:

Fathers play an important role in the lives of their children. For example, they are asked to be caregivers, playmates, protectors, role models, disciplinarians, and many other things. To accomplish this for their children, fathers must be dynamic. In this

module, fathers will discuss their role in the family, as it relates to reinforcing the role of the dynamic father (or reestablishing it in the case of fathers who have been absent in the lives of their children for whatever reason). Concepts presented in the module will help fathers in dealing with guilt associated with events that occurred in the past in order to get past the guilt and move forward. Since children need structure and proper guidance from a father, fathers will also learn how to become comfortable again setting ground rules for their children and saying “no” when the need arises – despite any feelings of guilt related to the past. Finally, and most importantly, fathers will also discuss effective methods of reconnecting with their family as well as ways to work toward building trust when it has been weakened and regaining trust when it has been lost.

Weekly Session Breakdown:

- 1) A Father’s Role in the Family
- 2) Dealing with Guilt – Letting It Go and Moving Forward
- 3) How to Say, “No” Despite the Past
- 4) Reconnecting and Regaining Trust

Module 3 – Enhancing Relationships

Goal: Fathers will improve their parenting skills by having a general understanding of the child’s needs at different developmental stages.

Learning Objectives: A father will be able to:

1. Identify essential physical and emotional needs of children and teenagers.
2. List the typical behaviors seen as children and teenagers develop.
3. Use gender-, age-, and developmentally-appropriate communication skills.
4. Use gender-, age-, and developmentally-appropriate discipline techniques.
5. Describe gender-, age-, and developmentally-appropriate activities that children/teenagers, fathers, and the family in general can do together to form stronger bonds.

Module Description:

Parenting in general is a challenging but very rewarding process. Good parent-child relationships set the groundwork for a more rewarding parenting experience. In this module, fathers will learn about child development, age-appropriate behaviors, and what children tend to need as they grow from child to adult. This information will help fathers recognize generally what behaviors and abilities to expect at different ages and stages of growth and will also help fathers consider how best to communicate with and nurture their child as he/she grows. As part of considering child growth, fathers will also discuss methods of gender- and age-appropriate discipline. Finally, as part of reinforcing a good parent-child relationship, fathers will discuss age-appropriate activities that they and their children can do together.

Weekly Session Breakdown:

- 1) Child Development: Milestones and Age-Appropriate Behaviors
- 2) How to Communicate Effectively and Nurture Your Child
- 3) Gender, Age, and Appropriate Discipline
- 4) Activities for You and Your Child

Module 4 – Partnering for Success

Goal: Fathers will identify and build from their strengths and will know how to locate and use available family and community resources to have a better chance of achieving success now and in the future.

Learning Objectives: A father will be able to:

1. Develop a list of family and community supports that will help him and his family achieve and maintain success – not only while involved with the agency but once the agency ends its involvement.
2. Create a résumé and describe other important skills associated with finding and securing a job when the need arises.
3. Write, in concrete terms, a plan to use resources whenever necessary.

Module Description:

Internal strengths, in addition to a strong network of dependable external supports, are crucial to the success of any family – whether or not the family is involved in the child welfare system. However, those same internal strengths that a father and his family possess, when blended with a dedicated and capable support system, is especially important to a father and his child in times of need. In this module, fathers will take a critical look at the strengths they currently possess, as well as those that can be reinforced, that will help fathers as they work through their service plan for the benefit of the child(ren) and family. Recognizing that it can be difficult to ask for help when it is needed, fathers will explore both available supports – family, community, and others, as well as how to ask for help when the time comes. The module will also present information related to seeking a career, the tools necessary to obtain a job, whenever necessary, and planning for next steps related to accessing all the resources available to a father and his family to have a better chance of success while involved with the child welfare system and in the future.

Weekly Session Breakdown:

- 1) Identifying Personal Strengths and Discovering Supports
- 2) Learning How to Ask for Help
- 3) Preparing for Interview and Landing a Job
- 4) Where Do I Go from Here? Accessing Available Resources

Fathers' Support Group Post-Assessment

Again, thank you for taking part in the Fathers' Support Group. Please spend a few minutes completing the following post-assessment. The assessment is important since it will:

- Help you discover what you now know after taking part in the entire support group; and, again,
- Help us to make sure that the information we offered in the modules and the way we offered that information was useful to you and others taking part in the group.

Below is the post-assessment you heard about when you took the pre-assessment several months ago. These are the same questions you saw on the pre-assessment. Please answer the questions honestly and think about how your answers can help you gauge what you learned and how they can help us improve the information and delivery of the support group. Your guide will ask everyone to talk about their answers after they complete the assessment.

Module 1 – Building Blocks

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2. List one way that child welfare laws and regulations allow child welfare agencies and the courts to become involved when allegations of abuse and neglect arise.
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4. Briefly describe the purpose of your child welfare Family Service Plan.

5. List three important services available to you through the child welfare agency and community resources.

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6. Briefly describe the roles of the following people that you will/might meet while involved with the child welfare agency:

- Caseworkers:

- Judges:

- Child Attorneys:

- Parent Attorneys:

Module 2 – The Dynamic Father

1. Briefly describe how you see your role, as a father, as it relates to meeting the needs of your child.

2. List three ways to overcome any feelings and beliefs that might stop your family from succeeding with your case plan and in life in general.

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3. List two general feelings and beliefs that could occur when an absentee or incarcerated father attempts to reconnect with his child and family.

- _____
- _____

4. Briefly describe two ways that a father (who never had, has lost, or has damaged the trust of his children and family) can create, regain, or rebuild the trust of his children and/or family.

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Module 3 – Enhancing Relationships

1. List at least three emotional needs your child has.

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2. List at least three basic physical needs your child has.

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3. List two typical behaviors seen as children and teenagers develop.

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4. Describe one way of communicating with a child (who is similar to yours in gender, age, and development) that considers the child's gender, age, and development.

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5. Describe one way of disciplining a child (who is similar to yours in gender, age, and development) that considers the child's gender, age, and development.

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6. Describe three gender-, age-, and developmentally-appropriate activities that children/teenagers, fathers, and the family in general can do together to form stronger bonds.

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Module 4 – Partnering for Success

1. List five families or community supports that will help you and your family achieve and maintain success – not only while involved with the agency but once you leave as well.

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2. List at least three tips to consider when creating a great résumé.

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3. List at least three resources (community or otherwise) to consider using when looking for a job.

- _____
- _____
- _____

4. Briefly describe other important skills associated with finding and securing a job when the need arises.

- _____

5. Think about and describe, in concrete terms, a plan to use resources available to you to better ensure the success of your family's case plan now and in the future.

What I Gained from the Support Group

Based on the post-assessment and what you learned during your time with the Father's Support Group:

1. Please list at least three things you learned during your time with the group that you plan to use now and in the future.

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2. Please list at least one thing you'd like to see improved in the group to make it better for those attending in the future.

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