



Serving Young Fathers in Community-Based Fatherhood Programs in South Carolina:

Lessons Learned from a two-year initiative

About SCCFS

The South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families, a ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System, supports a unique network of 18 fatherhood programs serving all 46 counties of the state, providing education and resources that help men become engaged and responsible fathers. The Center also promotes father-friendly policies and practices that help erase society's negative stereotypes of non-custodial, low-income dads.

Learn more about us at Scfathersandfamilies.com

For fatherhood resources or to find the SC program center nearest you, visit

Father365.com

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The typical young father served was a 21-year-old never married NCP with one child, likely to be living with his parents and/or grandparents. Almost one-half of the participants did not graduate high school, and over 60% enrolled unemployed. Very few participants were enrolled in high school at intake. If employed, earnings were low, and jobs come without health benefits. Participants cite a lack of transportation and a criminal record are two significant barriers to gaining or maintaining employment, but clearly their lack of education and marketable skills are an even bigger barrier. This made it a necessity for programs to prioritize job readiness and employment needs, making it a challenge to concomitantly improve parenting and relationship skills. .

About the program. Between July 1 2018 and June 30 2020, six Fatherhood sites served a total of 296 fully enrolled participants aged 24 and under as part of Community Supports for Young Parents (CSYP), a grant-funded program sponsored through the Parenting Assistance Fund (PAF) of the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

LESSONS LEARNED

Few Fatherhood participants are in school at the time of enrollment. One of the goals of PAF is to keep those pregnant and parenting youths in school until graduation. However, only six Fatherhood participants were in actually in high school at the time of enrollment, compared to 49 participants who were in school in a similar program for pregnant and parenting young females. In fact, just under 10% of those served could be considered school age (18 years old or less). It seems that Fatherhood attracts a older "male youth" population similar programs designed for pregnant or parenting young mothers.

Lesson Learned: Expect most young fathers to be between the ages of 19-24.

It is very difficult to re-engage young fathers on a pathway to earning a GED or HS diploma. Slightly less than 50% of the youth entered Fatherhood without a high school diploma or GED, and 33 (22%) of these participants managed to enroll in adult education or a GED program , at least while they were attending the program. While a laudable goal, returning to school at this point in their lives may not be a realistic option for other young men. Of those without a high school degree or diploma, 18% engaged in vocational training that would teach them a marketable skill. The remainder either continued to seek employment or remained at their current job.



Lesson Learned: Young fathers are open to additional education and training if maintaining current employment or the need to gain employment does not take priority.

Addressing to immediate needs such as employment are more of a priority for these young men than gaining knowledge and understanding about Fatherhood. With one-third of the participants with a child support order, and 60% unemployed, it is understandable that immediate needs take precedence over learning skills related to healthy relationships or positive parenting. Once financially stabilized, young fathers are more open to hearing about improving their relationships and parenting skills.

Lesson Learned: A significant proportion of young fathers are in crisis and looking for assistance in meeting a specific, tangible, and immediate need. They may not yet be ready to receive messaging about other fatherhood issues beyond their immediate needs.

The necessity of addressing a young father's immediate needs impacts our ability to improve that father's relationship with his child. Having to address one's immediate needs as many of these young fathers must do impacts their ability to connect with their child. Fewer young fathers (32%) reported improvement in their relationship with their child(ren) than did older fathers (43%) in the same Fatherhood sites over the same time period. While this may be due to a number of factors (younger fathers naturally have younger children; younger fathers may still be in conflict with their ex), it is plausible that more emphasis on meeting immediate needs leaves less program time available to learn new parenting skills, thus having a reduced impact on parenting outcomes. The data seem to support this interpretation: just 15 % of young fathers complete the parenting component compared to 25% of fathers over age 24.

Lesson Learned: Our ability to have a positive impact on parent outcomes may be reduced with younger fathers as their immediate needs take priority.

