



Case Study of Father Engagement in Substance Use Disorder Treatment Programs

ForeverDads

Danielle DeLisle, Rebekah Selekmán, and Pamela Holcomb

Program: ForeverDads

Program type: Fatherhood Program

Geographic area: Six rural counties in Ohio (Muskingum, Guernsey, Perry, Morgan, Noble, Coshocton)

Setting: Nonprofit community-based organization (one office), substance use disorder treatment programs (two inpatient facilities and one outpatient facility), correctional facilities (one prison), online

Focal population: Fathers in substance use disorder treatment program (60 percent), fathers in the broader community (30 percent), incarcerated fathers (10 percent)

Number of participants served: 203 enrolled in state fiscal year 2020

Initial year of operation: 2006

Main funding source: Ohio Commission on Fatherhood (state funding)

Introduction

ForeverDads is a nonprofit community-based organization founded in 2006 that encourages, educates, and equips men as fathers to develop positive relationships with their children, families, and community. In addition to serving primarily low-income fathers from across the community, ForeverDads serves fathers who reside in one correctional facility and fathers participating in three substance use disorder (SUD) treatment programs.

ForeverDads began partnering with SUD treatment programs in 2018 to serve fathers in recovery. Today, 60 percent of the fathers ForeverDads serves are involved in SUD treatment programs. This case study highlights the partnership development and program modifications ForeverDads made to engage this new and large subpopulation with the goal of improving economic mobility and other outcomes for the fathers, their families, and their children.

Father engagement refers to the purposeful inclusion of fathers (including biological, social, resident, nonresident, and stepfathers) in program services and activities with the objective of improving outcomes for fathers, children, and families. Strategies to promote father engagement may include recruiting, enrolling, and maintaining active participation of fathers in programming, involving fathers in policy and program development, and integrating fathers into program operations.

For the purposes of this case study, we focus on how one fatherhood program—ForeverDads—reaches a specific subpopulation of fathers participating in SUD treatment and enrolls them in its program.

Program overview

ForeverDads provides classes for fathers that address diverse topics, including fathering and parenting skills, relationships and co-parenting, and emotional self-awareness. During classes, fathers explore their family history, recognize their own weaknesses, discuss work/life balance, and learn how to co-parent to teach effective values to their children. One curriculum is Nurturing Fathers for Life (NFL)¹, a 13-session course during which fathers meet weekly to participate in group sessions with a facilitator. Another curriculum is Fathering in 15, an online course covering parenting topics with 15 sessions of 15 minutes

Case Study of Father Engagement in Substance Use Disorder Programs

each (self-guided).² To meet the different needs of fathers from the broader community and of those participating in SUD treatment programs, ForeverDads offers these program structures:

- *Outpatient facility:* Fathers in an outpatient SUD treatment program complete the NFL curriculum in person at the ForeverDads' facility alongside other fathers from across the community.
- *Residential facilities:* Fathers in one residential SUD treatment program complete the NFL curriculum at the inpatient facility, while fathers in a second facility with a shorter length of stay complete an adapted version of the Fathering in 15 curriculum.

Fathers are screened for intimate partner violence during intake, though it is not commonly identified among fathers they serve. When fathers are identified as having a history of abusive tactics, they are referred to a behavioral health agency for anger management or an intimate partner violence course.

Building partnerships for father engagement: Substance use disorder facilities as a model

ForeverDads develops critical partnerships to meet fathers' needs. As one example, ForeverDads recognized the need for fatherhood programming for fathers in recovery, so it partnered with local SUD treatment programs and modified its approach to serving fathers from the broader community so that it could better serve fathers participating in SUD treatment programs (see Box 1 for additional detail).

Use partners' existing facilities and structures for program delivery in a new setting

Program leaders from ForeverDads and the residential SUD treatment programs agreed to allow ForeverDads to hold on-site classes in the residential facilities because those fathers cannot attend classes at the ForeverDads office. The SUD treatment programs provide both the time in participants' schedules and the space required for ForeverDads staff to provide the program on site at the residential facility.

ForeverDads program leaders also considered how to align the program length given each SUD treatment program's typical length of stay. For example, one of the residential SUD treatment programs does not have a typical length of stay that is long enough to offer the entire NFL curriculum. For these fathers, ForeverDads revised the online Fathering in 15 curriculum to contain five modules that can be administered in person within the program's typical shorter length of stay. In addition, fathers that are discharged from a residential SUD treatment program before completing the NFL curriculum are permitted to participate in any classes they missed at the ForeverDads main office. This is an especially important strategy because some fathers might be required by law or by a caseworker to present a certificate of completion from the fatherhood program.

Identify opportunities to embed a focus on fatherhood into partner program

ForeverDads staff described people in SUD treatment programs as being on an "introspective journey for self-improvement through the rehabilitation process." ForeverDads leverages that journey to encourage fathers to use their time in treatment to reflect on and enhance their relationship with their children. Research suggests that this might be a particularly successful approach, as many fathers in recovery want to reconnect with their children and parent effectively, which also gives them a powerful reason to remain sober.³ For fathers in the SUD

"To get the most out of the [fatherhood] program, they have to be truthful and honest with themselves. These guys have been through a lot and are going through something personal and humbling. In recovery, they are already taking a serious look at themselves..."
– Staff member, on how elements of the SUD treatment experience align with and support fatherhood program goals.

Case Study of Father Engagement in Substance Use Disorder Programs

Box 1. How ForeverDads used its community partnership development framework to create partnerships with SUD treatment programs

ForeverDads reaches and engages fathers through its community partnerships. Staff leverage the program's positive reputation and their own personal connections in the community to initiate and develop mutually beneficial partnerships. It has a systematic approach to developing partnerships that it has used with various systems and community partners, including schools, child welfare and child support agencies, faith-based organizations, as well as courts, attorneys and the legal community. This box describes how it applied that systematic approach to partnering with SUD programs.

Step 1. Identify community agencies working with fathers who could benefit from fatherhood programming. ForeverDads program leaders had anecdotal evidence that there were many fathers involved in local SUD treatment programs. They believed there was an opportunity to expand access to fatherhood programming through those programs.

Step 2. Hold an initial partnership development meeting. ForeverDads invited representatives from SUD treatment programs to the ForeverDads office and held a meeting in its conference room, which visually displays the history of the ForeverDads program and its positive impact on participants and the community.

Step 3. Discuss how a partnership would be mutually beneficial. During the initial partnership development meeting, ForeverDads introduced its program and learned more about the SUD treatment programs' goals, resources, and interest in offering fatherhood programming. The SUD treatment programs determined that offering fatherhood programming would improve outcomes for their residents. Because of ForeverDads' positive reputation in the community, the SUD treatment programs decided to partner with ForeverDads to provide the fatherhood programming while fathers simultaneously complete treatment.

Step 4. Implement the partnership quickly. At the end of the initial partnership development meeting, ForeverDads and the SUD treatment programs discussed the process to implement the fatherhood program and determined a start date within each site. Within a couple of weeks of the initial outreach, ForeverDads identified facilitators and determined the best program format, and the SUD treatment programs secured time and space in their facilities to begin offering the fatherhood program.

treatment programs it serves, ForeverDads provides the support they need to enhance their parenting skills and rekindle relationships with their children.

Leverage existing relationships to enhance the class experience and promote father engagement

ForeverDads tries to capitalize on interpersonal dynamics within the group to create a class environment that promotes participation and engagement with the material. Fathers from the SUD treatment programs have the shared experiences of both participating in the fatherhood program and going through recovery together. ForeverDads facilitators can build on this dynamic to further enhance fathers' openness to sharing, participating, and engaging

“Active participation is the best way for the men to get the most out of the program. The curriculum has opportunities to brainstorm ideas and share experiences...It really helps to listen to each other and participate in conversations.” – Staff member

Case Study of Father Engagement in Substance Use Disorder Programs

with the fatherhood curriculum. This openness, in turn, helps fathers achieve program goals for both programs and improve their parenting skills to better support their children and families.

Lessons and considerations

ForeverDads' experiences, including its collaboration with SUD treatment programs, offer lessons for how other human services programs can build partnerships with community organizations and expand or modify programming to improve father engagement and promote positive family and child outcomes.

Serve as a connector to other organizations that offer father-centered programming

Building partnerships to meet fathers' needs can be challenging for community-based programs, particularly in communities where organizations and agencies operate in silos. To prioritize offering services they are best-equipped to deliver to fathers, organizations can serve as a connector within the community to wrap additional much-needed supports around fathers. They can leverage program staffs' professional and personal connections to engage and link community organizations to one another, increasing the pool of resources available for fathers. Mutually beneficial partnerships, shared resources, and close and ongoing collaboration can help expand partners' reach and ability to help fathers meet their goals.

"We use staff members in different positions and our strength is bringing the community together. [Community organizations] all have pockets of resources, but they don't talk to each other – we are the centerpiece to open up those community resources... Our success has been to bridge community resources. We believe everything that is available can be shared." – Staff member

Integrate programming for fathers into existing program structures

Programs can leverage their partners' existing program structures to offer programming to new subpopulations of fathers. They can identify other community programs serving fathers who could benefit from fatherhood programming. From there, programs can slightly modify their content and delivery to adapt to the structure of the partner organization. Both programs can expand their reach and fathers can receive multiple services simultaneously and holistically. These kind of shared services models can reduce the amount of time required to obtain required certificates of completion and, more importantly, help fathers achieve their goals for engaging with children, achieving economic mobility, and meeting other aims more effectively.

This case study is part of a series of three case studies that showcase how select programs implement father engagement strategies. Each case study highlights key programmatic elements of father engagement and shares lessons learned to expand the knowledge of programs working to improve child and family well-being. The study is sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The authors thank our project officers Amanda Benton, Pamala Trivedi, Matthew Cournoyer, and Emily Hopkins for their valuable guidance and contributions to this case study.

Endnotes

¹ ForeverDads added "for Life" to the formal curriculum name, Nurturing Fathers, to make it NFL and increase interest on the part of fathers.

² Although it is not the focus of this case study, ForeverDads also offers a third curriculum, InsideOut Dad, to fathers in correctional facilities.

³ Kim, K.L., M.I. Davis, L.A. Jason, and J.R. Ferrari. "Structural Social Support: Impact on Adult Substance Use and Recovery Attempts." *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, vol. 31, no. 1–2, 2006, pp. 85–94.