

# COLORADO FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

November 2020



Family Resource Center Association  
Connecting Resources, Impacting Lives

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The Colorado Fatherhood Network's (CFN) Steering Committee reached out to the Family Resource Center Association (FRCA) in January 2020 to discuss FRCA becoming the umbrella organization to host and support the CFN. FRCA then undertook a comprehensive research process to understand: 1) the scope of current fatherhood programming in the state; 2) which specific supports would help support and sustain the initiative; and, 3) what promising practices were known in the fatherhood field.

## Background of the Colorado Fatherhood Initiative

The Colorado Fatherhood Initiative was created by Governor Roy Romer's office in the mid-1990s to bring state, county and local decision-makers together to increase father's engagement in their child's lives. The Governor convened a statewide Summit on Responsible Fatherhood in 1996 to kick off a state level Task Force. The Summit included almost 500 child and family advocates, concerned citizens, philanthropists and national fatherhood experts. The Task Force, supported by the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), created a report that included a blue print for a state agenda and recommendations for immediate action:

1. Recognize the need and moral right of children to know and interact with both parents;
2. Hold fathers morally, emotionally and financially responsible for the welfare of their children;
3. Recognize that a father's involvement in his child's life is multi-faceted;
4. Provide role models of responsible fathering/male behavior;
5. Accept fathers' role in the home just as women are accepted in the work place.

During the next fifteen years, the network expanded membership to include local program providers. In 2013, CDHS determined that it was no longer in a position to maintain active leadership or provide assets to the Steering Committee. During the past six years, CFN has been hosted under the umbrella of private nonprofit organizations. Part-time staff supported statewide fatherhood programs through networking, education, peer-sharing at periodic convenings, training and flow-through funding, when available. In 2019, the current umbrella agency narrowed its mission and determined that facilitating the CFN was no longer a good fit for their organization. At this time, FRCA was approached to help move the Colorado Fatherhood Initiative forward.

## Lessons Learned 1996 – 2019

Six CFN Steering Committee members who had been involved in CFN over ten years participated in one-on-one-interviews. CFN's peak activity occurred between 2005-2011 when CDHS administered Colorado's federal Responsible Fatherhood Grant. During this period there were sufficient resources to fund local fatherhood programs, provide trainings, hold regular convenings for network members, host a robust website and provide technical assistance to local programs. A second robust period with similar network and local program vitality occurred when CDHS oversaw the Colorado Parent

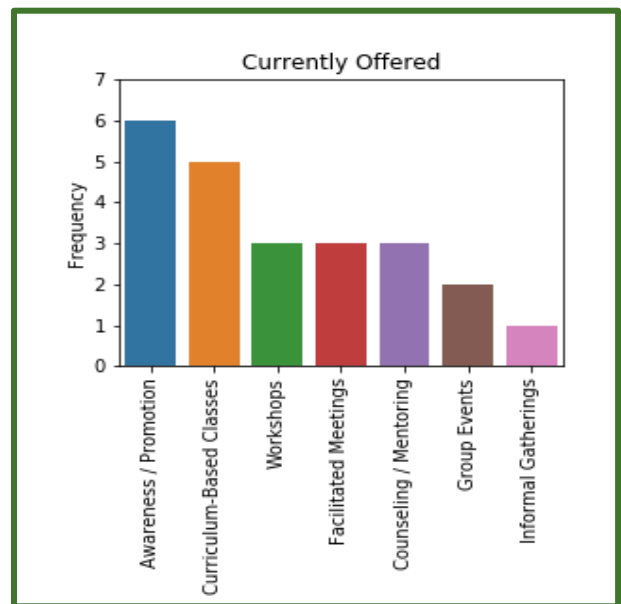
Employment Project from 2012-2018. As resources declined, however, the majority of local staffing and programming was discontinued, resulting in steadily declining network activity and participation.

One of the most notable successes during this period was increased cross-departmental collaboration at the state and local levels to support fathers (i.e. domestic violence providers, child welfare agencies and workers, Office of Economic Security, 2Gen office and the Office of Early Childhood). During this time, dialogue advanced from an early perspective of “dead-beat dads” to “how do we engage fathers in their children’s lives”.

A majority of the Steering Committee members stated that inconsistent network leadership and lack of a sustainability plan contributed to a perceived low benefit to the network members. A lack of both qualitative and quantitative data collection at the program and network level decreased the likelihood of securing sustainable funding to continue local programs and the network itself.

### CFN – Current Services

FRCA conducted an electronic survey to gather a real-time sense of current services provided by the CFN members. Twelve responses to the survey represented nine direct service organizations. The number of organizations offering each service can be seen in the figure at the right.



### CFN – Network Priorities

The CFN members ranked the importance of network supports to the success of their fatherhood program as follows:

Network Supports Prioritized by CFN - 2020		
Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important
Communication	Networking/Peer Support	Organization Capacity Building
Supporting Program Implementation	Policy/Advocacy	
Tracking Outcomes and Evaluation		
Resource Development		

### Statewide Scan of Fatherhood Supports - 2020

A Community Stakeholder Survey was sent to slightly over 100 organizations to inventory fatherhood programs in Colorado, identify TA needs for organizations providing those services and to identify county-level interest in expanding or adding services to fathers. Seventy-six (76) individuals, representing 70 organizations, responded to the survey. Organizations included:

- County Department of Human Services’ Child Support Offices known to provide fatherhood-specific programs (CCSO) – 24 responses
- Early Childhood Councils (ECC) – 16 responses
- Family Resource Centers (FRC) – 26 responses
- Promoting Safe and Stable Program Providers (PSSF) – 21 responses
- Strengthening Families Network members (SFN) – 19 responses

### Current Available Services - Statewide

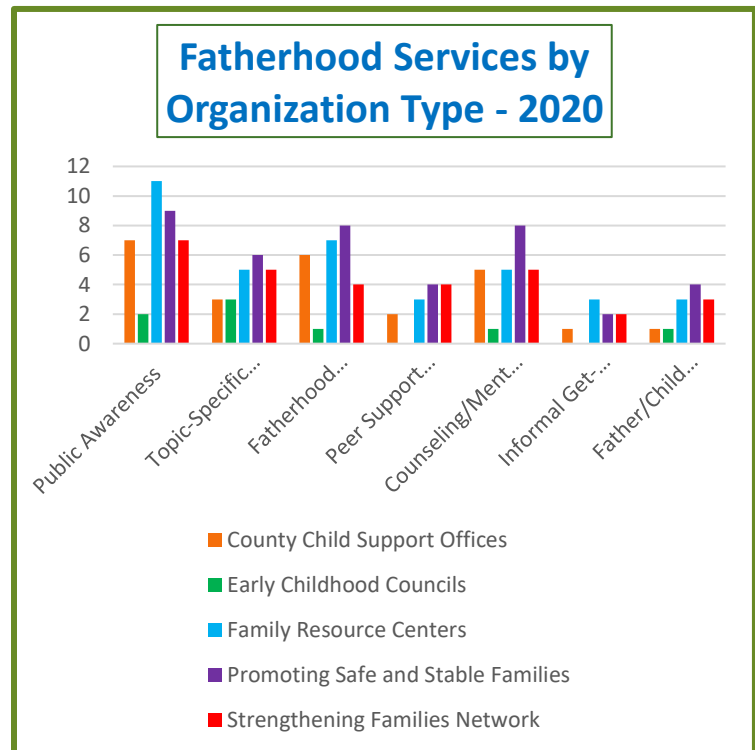
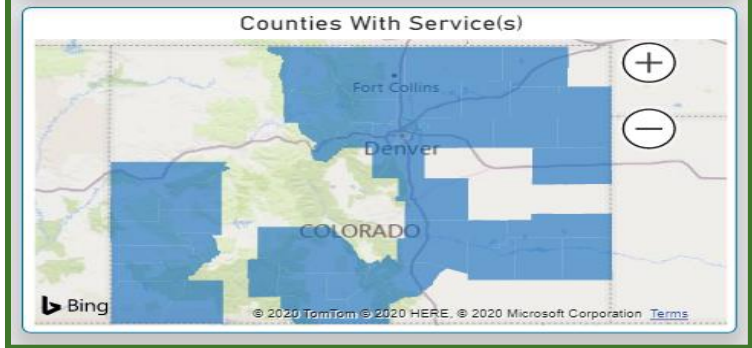
Forty-two of the 71 organizations that responded to the survey reported providing one, or more, fatherhood activities locally, as seen in the figure to the right. The map indicates which counties have at least one of the in-person services provided locally.

*Note: Two survey respondents (representing two organizations) and one trainer provide online services only to all 64 counties also responded. In order to understand where in-person services are currently available, their data is not included in these tables.*

The second figure to the right indicates how many of the responding organization types currently provide each of the following fatherhood services:

- Public Awareness/ Promoting Fatherhood is provided most frequently across entities;
- Fatherhood education classes, individual counseling/ mentoring and one-time topic-specific presentations are provided by the majority of respondents across entities;
- Peer support groups, father/child group events and informal get-togethers for dads are provided least frequently across entities

Activity	Unique Organizations
Public Awareness/Promoting Fatherhood	23
Fatherhood Education Classes	16
Individual Counseling/Mentoring Sessions	15
One-Time Topic-Specific Presentations	12
Facilitated Networking or Peer Support Groups	8
Father-Led Group Events With Children	6
Informal Get Togethers	6



## Interest in Providing Services – Statewide

The organizations were asked which services they would expand and/or begin to offer if funding and other barriers were removed in order to gain an informal indication of unmet needs for fathers in local communities:

- Nearly 50% of the 71 organizations reported interest in expanding or adding: Public Awareness/Promoting Fatherhood, Father-led group events with their children; and One-time topic-specific presentations;
- Over 33% of respondents would provide drop-in informal get togethers, peer support groups and fatherhood education classes.

## Network Approaches and Strategies

Sixty of the 71 survey respondents completed the section to prioritize the network supports from the following list that would be most meaningful to their programs and organizations:

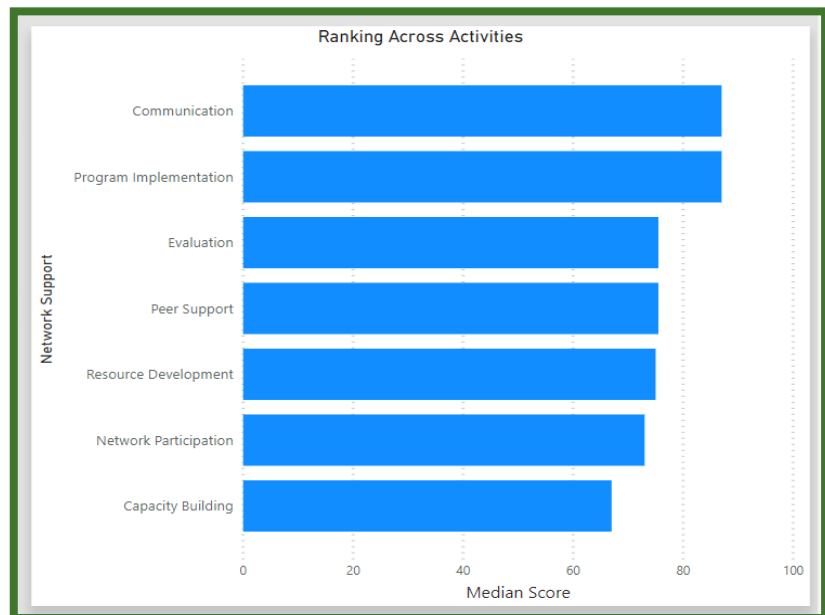
- Communication: website for fatherhood information; monthly or quarterly newsletters that share fatherhood funding opportunities, national trends on father support programs, etc.
- Peer Support: Quarterly, semi-annual or annual in-person networking meetings for fatherhood program providers
- Network Participation: Committee or work-group meetings on fatherhood topics
- Program Implementation: Program Standards, coaching/training in best practices/evidence-based curricula, program implementation with fidelity, etc.
- Evaluation: Program outcome assessment, data tracking, evaluation (i.e. data system to track Fatherhood services, outcome assessments and reports)
- Resource Development: Grant-writing training, help accessing funders, flow-through funding
- Organizational Capacity Building: Board training, financial management technical assistance, help creating organizational policies and procedures, etc.

The table below shows the overall median importance survey respondents reported:

Communication and Program Implementation Support were valued by 87% of respondents;

Evaluation, Peer Support, Resource Development and Network Participation were valued by about 75% of respondents;

Organizational Capacity Building was valued by 66% of respondents



## Research

According to the National Fatherhood Initiative, US Census data show more than 1 in 4, or 19.7 million, children live without a father in the home affecting children in the following ways<sup>1</sup>:

1. 4 times greater risk of poverty;
2. 7 times more likely to become pregnant as a teen;
3. 2 times greater risk of: infant mortality; obesity; and high school drop-out; and
4. More likely to experience: child abuse and neglect, behavioral problems, drugs and alcohol abuse, committing a crime or going to prison.

Findings from multiple research projects prove the effectiveness of Fatherhood programs that have evolved from an early narrow focus on financial stability and child support payment to a broader agenda that includes father involvement, relationships and parenting.

- A 2018 Congressional Report on federally-funded programs cites growing evidence of the effectiveness of broader-focused programs that include: media campaigns that emphasize the importance of emotional, physical, psychological, and financial connections of fathers to their children; parenting education, responsible decision-making; mediation for both parents; information on the Child Support Enforcement program; skills related to conflict resolution, stress management, problem-solving; peer support; and job-training opportunities<sup>2</sup>. The findings also support use of these programs for new unmarried fathers.
- The outcome report for the Responsible Fatherhood Grant found that employment rates and earnings increased significantly, especially for noncustodial parents who were previously unemployed. In addition, the report found that 27% of the fathers reported seeing their children more often after completion of the program, associated with significantly increased child support compliance rates<sup>3</sup>.

### Implications for Practice and Policy-Making:

The Center for Policy Research describes findings of successful fatherhood efforts of 12 state level initiatives (including Colorado) to overcome systemic weaknesses in a 2019 report. This study recommends the following implications for practice and policy-making<sup>4</sup>:

1. *Create multi-agency fatherhood committees, councils or advisory boards that convene regularly for the precise purpose of reviewing policies, practices and programs to become more father-friendly.*
2. *Access unobligated TANF funding as a direct way for states to fund fatherhood programs. As of 2019, most states held large TANF balances. Fatherhood programs are consistent with TANF objectives.*
3. *Conduct evaluations and Return on Investment Studies to document how involved fatherhood has been linked to better outcomes in numerous measures of child well-being.*

<sup>1</sup> National Fatherhood Initiative. [www.Fatherhood.org](http://www.Fatherhood.org). Father Absence Graphic:

<https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/135704/NFIFatherAbsenceInfoGraphic071118.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Tollestrup, Jessica. *Fatherhood Initiatives: Connecting Fathers to Their Children*. Congressional Research Service, Washington D.C., May 1, 2018. [www.crs.gov](http://www.crs.gov)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Pearson, Jessica & Fagan, Jay. Center for Policy Research, Denver, Co. State Efforts to Support the Engagement of Nonresident Fathers in the Lives of Their Children. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*. 2019, Vol 100(4) 392-408. Sagepub.com/journals-permissions. DOI: 10.1177/1044389419874172.

4. *Include fathers in Families First and 2 Gen Programs.* These funding streams can boost father engagement in required parent advisory boards and in the programs they fund.
5. *Boost the engagement of the Child Support Agency in father support* to help strengthen and fund father engagement initiatives by playing a stronger leadership role and becoming what is known as a “family building system” to impact family poverty levels.

### Promising Practices:

Research and interviews with national experts identified the following best practices in the fatherhood field:

1. **Equity/Social Justice** for dads is a core component to any public awareness, outreach or engagement work when promoting the role of fathers according to several experts spoken to during the research phase of this project. For example, Jen Agosti, JRA Consulting Ltd, is a nationally recognized consultant that provides services to a multitude of diverse government, private and public organizations across the country, strongly recommends a **constant focus on racial equity and social justice**. She believes programs are less effective if people don’t believe in the value of dad’s role in the family (even if parents are separated) as a key component to implementing any fatherhood program or service.
2. **Embedding specific outreach and implementation strategies for fathers** into all family and parent programs has been proven to be effective in increasing father participation in existing parent support programs vs father-only programs. Published articles showing this positive engagement strategy include:
  - a. Home Visitation Programs: A pilot study of adding the “Dads Matter” enhancement to standard perinatal home visitation services indicated positive trends in the quality of the mother-father relationship, perceived stress indicators, fathers’ involvement with the child, maltreatment indicators and fathers’ verbalizations toward their infant<sup>5</sup>.
  - b. Maternal and Infant Health Programs: A summary of promising practices compiled by the University of Rochester Medical Center provides a strong rationale and promising practices for outreach, engagement and involvement of fathers in Maternal and Infant Health Programs.<sup>6</sup>
  - c. Programs designed to impact the Five Protective Factors: The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) collaborated with the national Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) to create a brief that maps how NFI’s resources can help those who use the framework to build the protective factors in their community through more effective engagement of fathers<sup>7</sup>.
  - d. Programs that provide comprehensive supportive services to families, especially those that impact economic sustainability: In the same report cited above, CSSP and NFI also emphasized that research shows “involving fathers in family support programs that impact economic sustainability is critical for families living in poverty”.<sup>8</sup>
3. **Co-Parenting focus even when fathers do not live in the household**: Research supports working with the whole family including both parents (even if one is a non-resident parent).

<sup>5</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.10.017>

<sup>6</sup> <https://gaobgyn.org/gaobgyn/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Engaging-Fathers-MIH-CB-Blog1.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.fatherhood.org/free-resources/father-involvement-five-protective-factors>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



Jennifer Bellamy’s presentation to the Society of Social Work and Research in 2017 provides empirical evidence of working with the whole family vs. only the father<sup>9</sup>.

4. **Breakthrough Series Collaborative:** According to national experts in the Promoting Fatherhood field, one of the most promising strategies being implemented today is a continuous quality improvement approach known as the Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) method. The method is designed to overcome common barriers to change and improvement, and to tap into leadership at multiple levels of an organization, or even a community, to make implementation efforts more effective and sustainable.

Research revealed many examples of how this method has been successfully used in health, early childhood and child welfare organizations. This method is showing promise in a pilot project with two sites in Colorado (Prowers and Denver Counties) to catalyze child welfare teams to better engage fathers. An evaluation report is expected late Fall.

*Jennifer Bellamy, PhD, University of Denver, who is working with the Colorado pilot sites says “the BSC method is the most promising strategy to increase father engagement that I’ve seen in my 20 years working in this field”.*

5. **Implementation of Fatherhood Education Programs**—Very few father-specific curricula have received evidence-based ratings. However, if a curriculum is used, implementation should include the leadership, competency and organizational drivers described in the National Implementation Research Network’s (NIRN) Implementation Science Framework<sup>10</sup>.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the above findings, five Core Components of Fatherhood Involvement are recommended as a framework for FRCA to move the Colorado Fatherhood Initiative forward in a phased approach:

1. **Social Equity for Fathers:** A wide-spread understanding and belief of the importance of a father’s involvement in their child’s lives to mitigate known child risk factors;
2. **Father-friendly Outreach and Engagement Strategies** for all family and parent education and support programs: Intentionally embed specific strategies to engage fathers in all existing programs;
3. **Co-Parenting** focus for all family and parent education and support programs: Understanding that increased parenting outcomes can be achieved when both parents attend parent education and support programs, even a parent that does not live in the household;
4. **Breakthrough Collaborative Series:** A continuous quality improvement approach to overcome barriers to change and improvement within and among organizations and communities;
5. **Implementation Science:** Leadership, staff and organizational drivers to assure implementation of all programs with fidelity.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jirmopbnaEM>

<sup>10</sup> <https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/>



## CORE COMPONENTS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT

Public Awareness & Community Norms	Whole Family Services	Quality Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Social Equity</b> for Fathers (individual, program, organization and system levels)</li> <li>• <b>Collaborative Breakthrough Series</b> (Organization/system levels)</li> <li>• <b>Policy and Advocacy</b> (father involvement in local and state system decision-making efforts)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Co-parenting</b> perspective even if a father lives outside the home and/or is currently not involved in his child's life</li> <li>• <b>Embed Father-friendly outreach and engagement strategies</b> in all family and parent programs and services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Implementation Science:</b> Leadership Drivers Competency Drivers Organization Drivers</li> <li>• <b>Standards of Quality for Fatherhood Programs:</b> Programmatic Indicators Organizational Indicators</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcomes:</b> Increased father engagement in program participation Increased father involvement in co-parenting/family role Increased father participation in local/state advisory and policy-making groups</p>		

