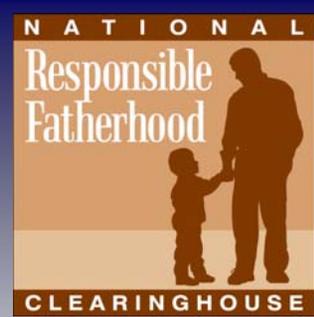


Working with Low-Income Fathers: Promising Practices

Presentation by
Nigel Vann

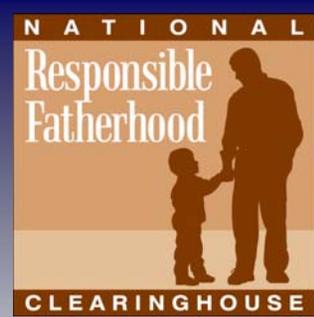
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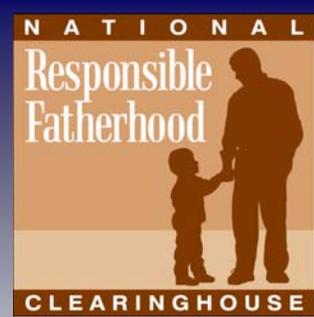
Lessons Learned

- If you build it well, they will come, but it takes time.
- They will stay, if there's something real for them.
- There are at least 3 levels of problems that must be faced in working with fathers-- Personal, Programmatic and Public Policy.
- You must help fathers with personal development, parenting and relationship skills
- You can't just work with fathers; successful programs find a way to engage mothers and other family members—and other community services.



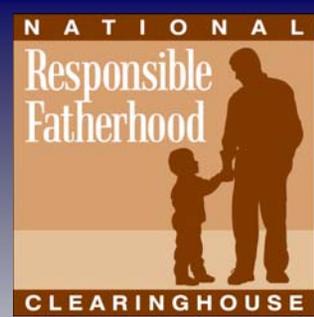
To help low-income dads and their families, it is important to:

- understand who they are, what their world is like;
- engage them in designing meaningful services;
- hire staff who have the ability to give their clients hope, and the skills and connections to help them make and achieve goals; and
- provide staff with the support they need to get the job done.



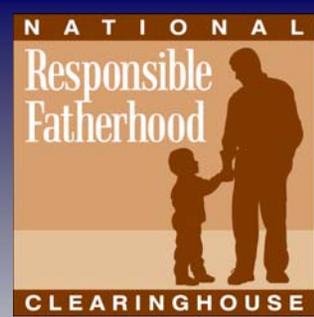
Recruitment

- Need at least one-full time position during first year.
- Face to face contact--form a true connection.
- Mention value for kids.
- Spread word in community—multiple sources.
- Ultimately, word of mouth—hire alumni.
- Offers of employment assistance can be the best recruitment “carrots.”



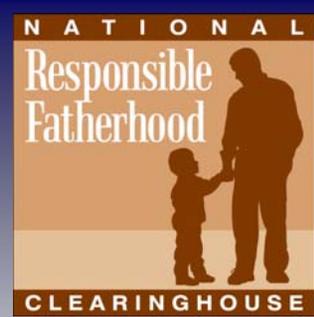
Be aware:

- Our expectations of individuals can become self-fulfilling prophecies.
- Don't ask "Why aren't men involved in our program?" Rather, ask "What keeps us from engaging men?"
- Low-income men will often distrust attempts to engage them in "helping" or "supportive" services." Previous experiences may well have taught them that contact with such services means they will be misjudged, ignored, treated poorly, reported to authorities for some unrelated offense, or in some other way be treated negatively



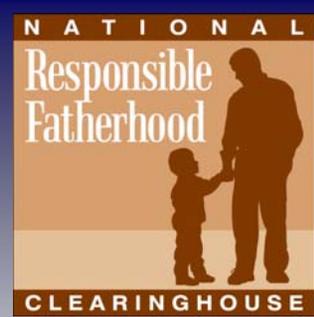
Be aware:

- Providing immediate services that meet participants' most pressing needs can be a good way to engage them.
- Whenever possible, be “in the moment” with low-income participants, addressing their issues and concerns now rather than making an appointment for a later time.



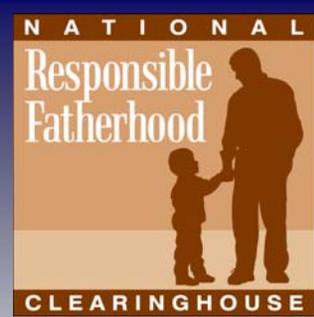
Recruitment tips:

- Invite dads personally to specific activities—follow-up regularly if they don't show up.
- Ensure your agency is inviting (positive pictures of dads) and accessible (flexible hours).
- Limit your use of the 'P' word! P is for Parent--most dads don't feel included by it. Say (and write) 'moms and dads' or 'fathers and mothers.'
- Tell dads how their involvement benefits their kids.
- Reach out to biological dads and father-figures.



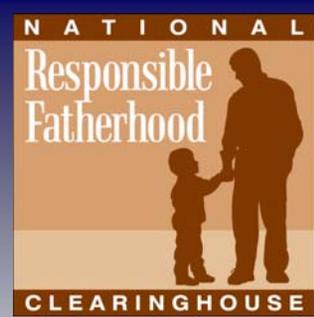
Retention

- Be real.
- Meet their needs, but challenge them to grow.
- Caring staff and peer support activities are most likely to be what keeps men involved in a program. Many may not have experienced warm, loving relationships with their own fathers; by providing love and nurturance to fathers, programs can help prepare men to provide more loving, supportive environments for their children.



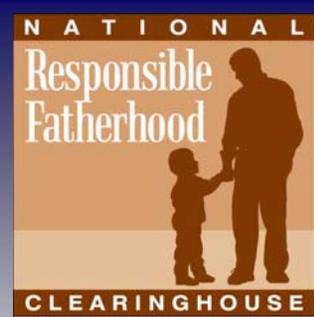
Personal Barriers

- Same barriers to full-time, stable employment as low-income women -- likely to have dropped out of school, unlikely to have job skills that allow them to obtain “living wage” jobs.
- Legal issues-- child support, drivers license revoked for minor traffic offenses, impact of prison record on employment options, etc.
- Transportation, Housing, Substance Abuse, etc.



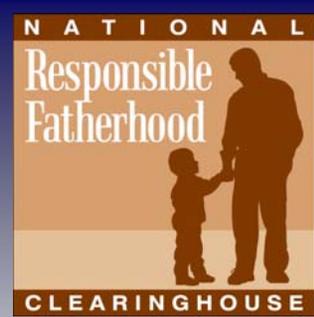
Programmatic Barriers

- Agency Policies
- Staff attitudes
- Reputation of agency in community
- Support of agency leadership
- Funding sources/expectations



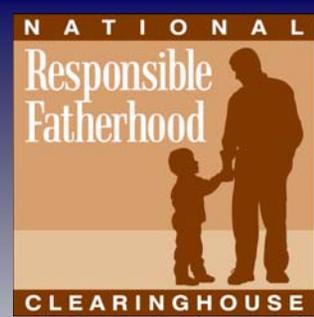
Policy Barriers

- Policies and regulations of child support agencies, employment projects, housing authorities, family courts, etc. are often not supportive of fathers.
- Programs must help dads navigate the system as it is.
- Some advocacy work, to inform policymakers of the incongruities of their rules and regulations, but this should always be secondary to the main goals of helping fathers deal with their immediate issues today.



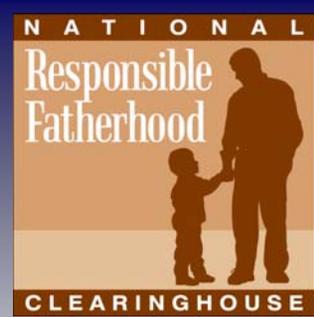
Essential Services

- **Education**—ABE, GED, post secondary.
- **Employment**--Job readiness, job skills, job development/job placement, follow-up.
- **Counseling/case management**
 - setting and working toward goals (Personal Development)
 - crisis intervention (housing, substance abuse, mental health, legal assistance, domestic violence, etc.)
 - negotiating child support system
 - co-parenting/mediation services.
- **Fatherhood Development**
 - peer support groups/parenting workshops (include info on child development, techniques for effective discipline, ways to spend quality time with your children, nutrition, budgeting)
 - opportunities for leadership development
 - recreational activities w/ and w/o children and for whole families.
- **Community Network.**



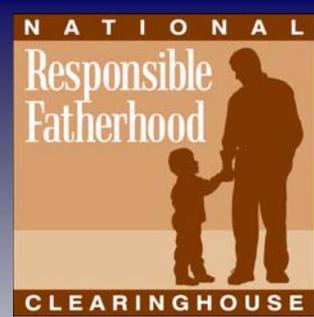
Be aware:

- Studies have shown that many low-income women have a general mistrust of men, often due to sexual infidelity. Be real with men about such issues and problem-solve ways to earn more trust.
- Studies have also shown many low-income men are frustrated with conflict initiated by women.
- Other commonplace challenges identified include: co-parenting problems, financial pressures, children from previous relationships, child support/custody, incarceration, racial discrimination, cultural assimilation.



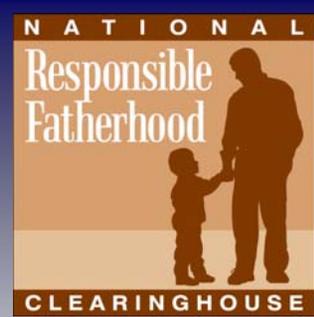
Learning styles

- Because of low literacy levels and unhappy memories of school, some participants will not relate well to lectures, workbooks and other written materials.
- Use a variety of approaches to meet different learning styles
- Always focus on honest dialogue, skill building and making the experience enjoyable.



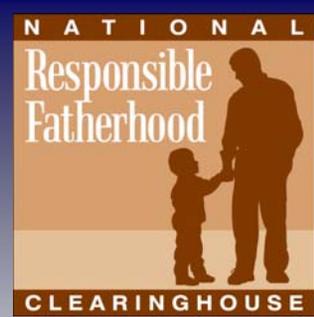
In general:

- Have high expectations for all fathers.
- Be nonjudgmental. Start where a father is, not where you think he should be or where stereotypes might lead you.
- Be respectful. View each dad as an equal human being worthy of respect and dignity. Communicate on an equal level, never from a position of superiority.
- Be patient. Be willing to hang in there with men who will have ups and downs.
- Demonstrate genuine and ongoing caring.



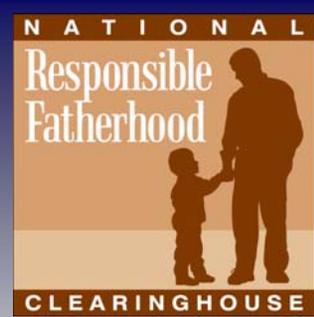
In general:

- Earn their trust.
- Be real and down-to-earth.
- Use language and messages that men will respond to.
- Ask explorative questions in a non-threatening manner. Allow time for men to respond and open up to you.
- Form connections with men by engaging or joining them in some activity. Let conversation happen as you do something together.
- Assume that all men can be reached--look for opportunities to meet specific needs and be prepared to follow-up as often as it takes.



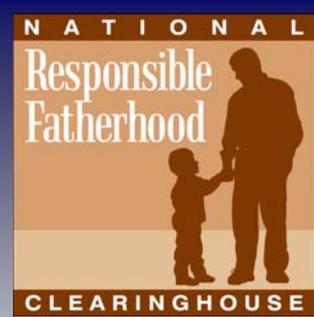
Follow-up services

- Particularly important for low-income individuals because the stress and unexpected challenges of their lives can easily set them back or distract them from practicing and maintaining what they have learned in the program.
- Possible approaches: monthly support groups, newsletter, booster sessions, alumni activities (picnics, outings, holiday celebrations), phone calls and/or home visits from staff/alumni.
- Open door policy.



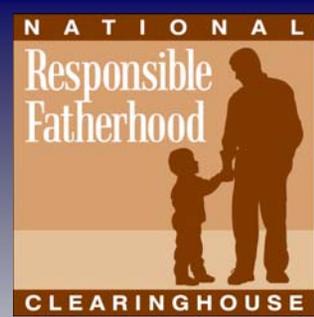
Staff

- Sensitive to the needs of men and fathers.
- Can relate linguistically and culturally.
- Genuine, caring, respectful, accepting.
- Positive, but realistic role models.
- Able to see individuals strengths and potential more readily than their challenges and deficits.
- Need some male presence.
- Teamwork, variety of skills.



A successful program needs:

- strong leadership
- solid community partnerships
- support of staff throughout the agency
- quality, committed staff to work with the fathers
- ongoing staff development
- consistent funding
- clear statement of goals and expected outcomes
- comprehensive service strategy
- good documentation of services and activities.



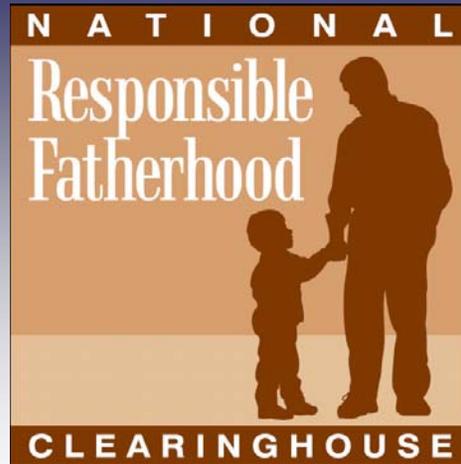
Contact Information

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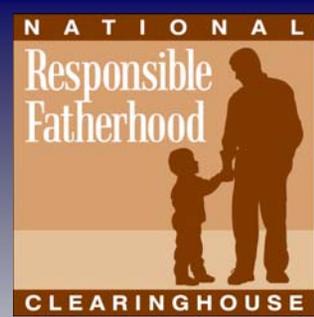
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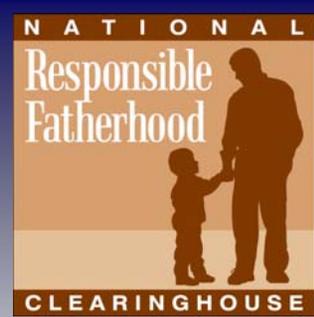
Low-Income Fathers: Working From Ground Zero

Reuben K. Lawrence
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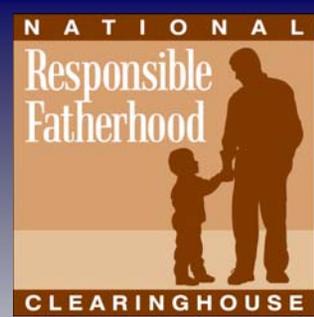
FatherCare Family Services

- FatherCare Family Services is a non-profit faith-based organization. Our primary focus is working with boys and men on being good fathers.
- FFC was established in July 18, 1989 in honor of Dr. John D. Lawrence, who spent his life working with men around the world..



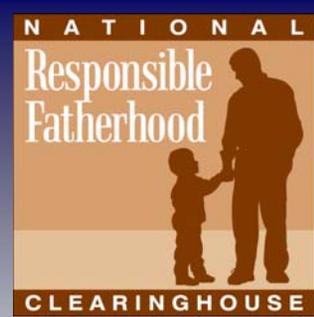
FatherCare Family Services

- FFC began as a program reaching out to the parents of low-income youth in the Atlanta Public High School.
- The program began by offering information to parents on parenting troubled youth. The parents group evolved in to a support group for fathers.



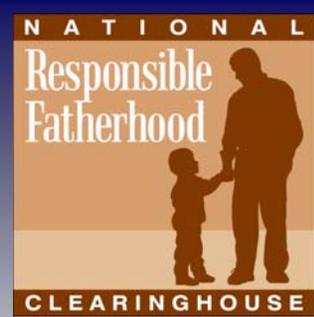
FatherCare Family Services

- Many of the fathers began inviting their friends and their teenage son, who were fathers.
- Over the past 10 years, FFC has worked with communities, schools and churches in establish parenting and support groups for fathers.
- We believe that we can restore our communities by restoring the fathers.



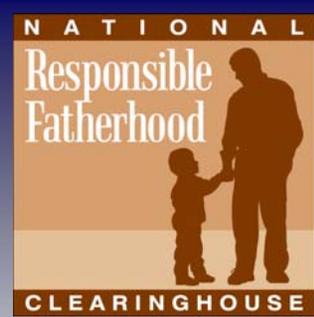
Do Your Homework

- Get to know the community that you are going to serve.
- Are you the first program to come into that community?
If others have been there why didn't it work?
- What was good and what was bad?
Learn from mistakes of others.



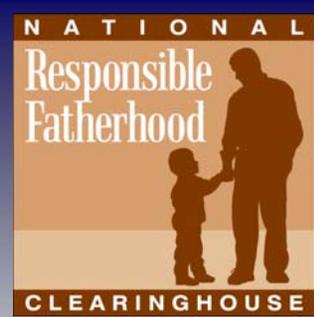
Do Your Homework

“ The success in your future can be effected by others failures in the past.”



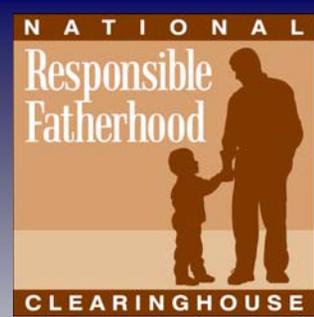
Do Your Homework

- What other programs are there in the community and who do they serve? Ex.. Parents as Teachers, Head Start, Community Watch...
- What are some of the issues facing the fathers in that community.. unemployment, literacy, ex-offenders...
- Who are the gatekeepers of that community? People or organizations with influence, another community agency, the church, Ms. Watson.



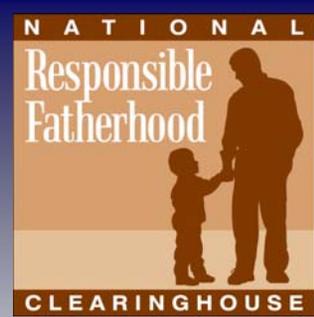
Many low-income fathers will come with issues in these areas:

- Employment
- Literacy
- Mental Health
- Drug and Alcohol addiction
- Housing assistance
- Utility assistance
- Child Support – Visitation and Access
- Finances



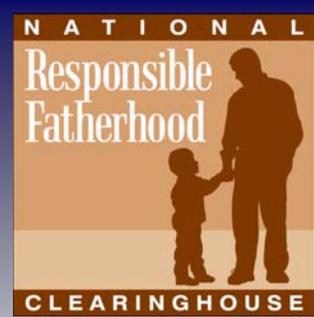
Build a coalition of support

- When developing collaborative partnerships, try to involve organizations with access to those services.
- Many non-profit organizations, churches, community programs, colleges and universities have programs that can serve your fathers for little to no cost to them.



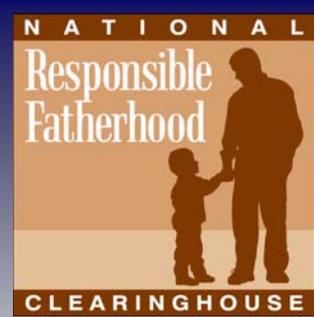
Barriers and Challenges:

- Many of the low-income fathers come with multiple issues and barriers that prevent them from functioning well and having any type of relationship with their children.
- The first barrier is usually themselves and how they view their situation.
- You may have to address these internal issues first.



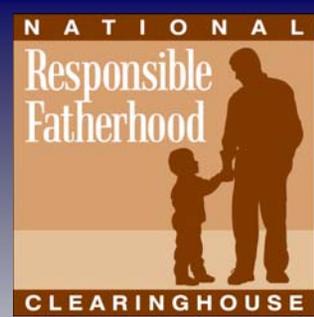
Building Support

- Develop collaboration with other organizations that will help meet the needs of the fathers before you begin to engage them.
- Look for other programs that can support the fathers in other areas. “Many hands make the load light.”



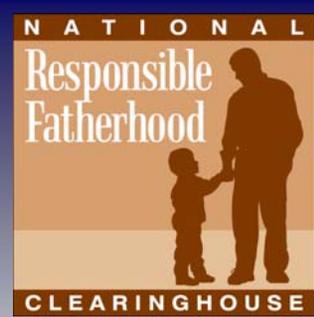
Some of the major barriers are:

- Low literacy – many of the fathers dropped out of school and can only read on a 5th grade reading level.
- Legal Issues – many fathers have criminal records and /or Child Support orders that they cannot pay. (Immigration laws - fathers not wanting to be reported)



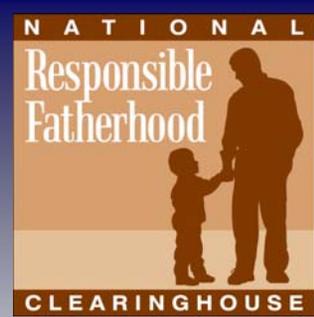
Some of the major barriers are:

- Unemployment – with no or very little legal work history, many of the fathers are unable to get any employer to give them a chance.
- Discrimination – this comes in many forms, it can be racial, legal or even economic. This is where program have to guard themselves. We limit the service or miss seeing the potential of a father because of his circumstance. ex., Ga fatherhood Postal Worker



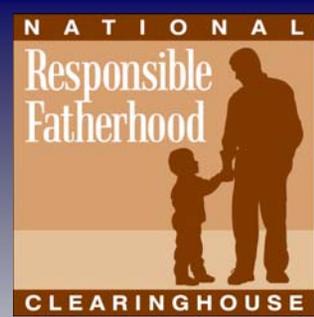
Some of the major barriers are:

- Low-self esteem – because of their disappointments and the hopelessness of their situation, many fathers don't see themselves as having a chance.
- Family Conflict– many fathers have complex situations with the mother of their child, so they don't want to try. Some of them have multiple children from multiple women.



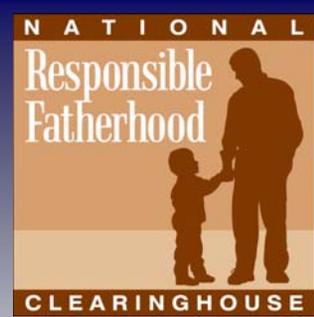
Recommendations:

- While there may not be a set formula to resolve or remove these barriers instantly, it is important that you are aware of them and address them. These fathers will come to your organization to find a way to remove them.
- Let them know that as long as they stay connected, you can continue to look for answers.



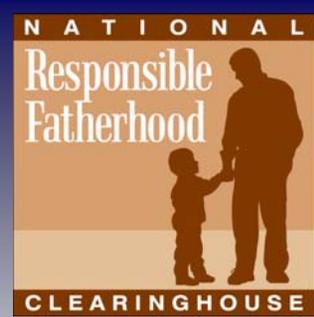
Recommendations:

- Do What You Do Best!!!
- Don't make promises that you can't keep.
- If you cannot fulfill a promise, let them know and try to find an alternative.
- Low-income fathers lose respect for your program when you don't keep your word.
- Remember that these fathers are men too, respect them and they will respect you.
- Always remind them of the positives.



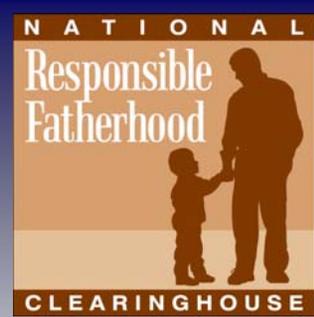
Recommendations:

- Building relationship with Child Support and other agencies will allow you to be the buffer for the fathers as they work to address some of the barriers.



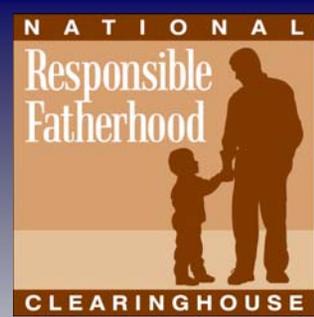
Recommendations:

- You can connect with some of the programs that work with the mothers to provide information on working with fathers. (Head Start, Department of Families and Children Service, Home visiting programs like Healthy Families, Parents as Teachers and others.)



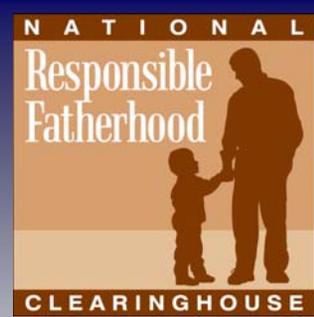
Recommendations:

- When possible, let the mothers know what you are doing and get them involved.
- Connect with your local Department Of Labor office and let them know that you are working with your fathers. Get the father with legal issues bonded.



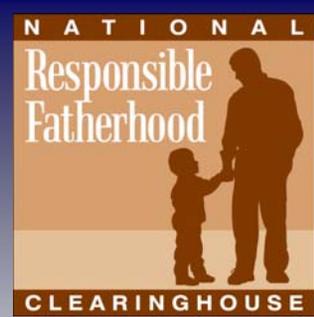
Recommendations:

- Connect with the local literacy programs in your area and develop a referral process or see if they can arrange a class for your fathers.
- Use video clips, pictures and easy reading material in groups to help fathers feel more comfortable.
- Develop relationships with local employers, large warehouses or any major employer in your area. Let them know that you are working with these fathers as support.



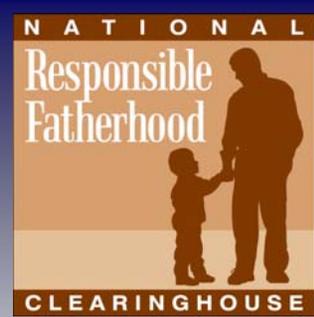
Recruitment:

- Connect with the community on a professional and social level during non-traditional work hours.
- Survey the fathers in the community to see what they believe their needs are and work to include them in your services.



Recruitment:

- Be aware of your personal appearance. ***Are you intimidating or insulting the fathers when you connect with them?***
- BE GENUINE!!!
- Don't try to imitate the culture of the community if that is not who you are. Ex..using slang language or changing your style of dress.
- Don't offer what you can't deliver. When possible, let some of your staff or volunteers reflect the population you serve.



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