

Lessons Learned (and Learning) from Virtual Workshop Classes
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We are learning the challenges, and also celebrating the successes, of operating virtually.

- Most fathers still present with a desire to gain employment, obtain their high school equivalency (HSE) diploma, and meet court requirements.
- The age range of participants has stayed the same (18–57 years old).
- Prior to Covid-19, classes were provided Monday–Friday (9am–3pm) for 3 weeks.

Early Lessons learned:

- Six hours a day is too long for seat and screen time--true for staff as well as participants.
- We kept the 3-week format, but classes are now only 3 hours, with a few 1pm–2pm sessions; if needed, we use the afternoon for additional make up time.
- Reducing the length of the class day helps men who share devices with other household members and/or men who have limited data plans.

Our first virtual class was in March 2020: They had already completed two weeks of in-person classes, so just had to complete one virtual week. 100% completed all three weeks

- As they were already engaged, the transition to virtual was relatively easy.
- We had that group come in and pick up hard copy packets of material we would present, so they could follow along at home.
- This worked for them, since they were already used to packets, taking notes, and providing input and responses in writing (traditional method of pen and paper).

Our April 2020 class was the first group we recruited virtually

- Number of fathers interested was down--some guys are used to walking in the building to register and many may not call the numbers posted on our door to sign up.
- For the men who did start the virtual classes, we find our attrition rate has not drifted far off from our previous in person classes--which has been good and amazing.

Access to Technology

- Some men do not have access to Wi-Fi or the internet; some still have flip phones and cannot complete our online processes for class engagement.
 - We keep them on a waiting list for future in-person classes.
- Some have had cracked screens and/or devices, but were able to cope for class sessions.
 - We offer assistance with fixing devices, paying cell phone bills (if needed).

Case management: Support services

- Main needs are for food assistance, help with rent, employment, counseling, and housing assistance.
- We try to update our website home page in real time with up to date Covid-19 assistance as well as our Facebook page so we can direct them.

Other lessons learned:

- One lesson I want to really stress: be flexible and patient.
 - With participants and staff; doing so much virtually is a new world for most of us.
- We have learned from those we serve as well.
 - Many are more familiar with using devices to communicate and transmit information than we are!
- Some men are just waking up at the start of the class.
- For some, their bedroom is the only quiet space in the home; some join from their car.
- We try not to spend too much time talking at them (just as in-class), so give them a chance to share and (at times) vent.
- For many, we are the only non-family, non-household members they engage with routinely (this was true before Covid-19 too).
- We have included guest facilitators and experts to join our virtual class sessions – so we are able to offer the same classes/services that we offered for in-person groups.
- We added a virtual job/career fair with an employer partner, including mock interview practice.
- We offer virtual counseling services for individuals and couples, couples education classes, and sessions for women – all in separate meeting sessions for privacy.
- For information we need to hand to class participants, we drop off at their homes or mail to them directly; as a last resort, we specify a time for them to pick up items at the Center – stressing PPE and social distancing methods.
 - We try not to accept any material from participants “hand to hand.” We ask they take a picture of the item(s) and email and/or text to us.
 - For those seeking to obtain a high school diploma, we have paper packet pick every Friday.

Our recruitment process:

1. Men call in or submit an online inquiry (this has been our intake process for a few years).
 - For those who walk up – we made our signage a little more explicit. We post on the door and advertise on the radio that we now have virtual classes.
2. For those who don't have access to a smart phone, computer, or other device, we now put them on a wait list.
 - We look for ways to get these fathers access to Wi-Fi and/or smart devices.
3. Men are emailed instructions to complete for intake completion.
 - They complete an online application and submit documentation (securely) through our class portal; they can take pictures of their ID, SSN card, Birth Certificate.
 - All paper work is now on our web page, with simple access and instructions.
 - They receive an orientation date and links via email and/or text to click and join.
 - A follow up text and phone call is made the day before their orientation date, and they are given a name and phone number to contact if they have any problems.
 - The link they use for orientation is the same link for the duration of the class and follow up meetings as well.