



FATHERHOOD

Lessons



Bienvenidos Children's Center, Inc.
The National Compadres Network
The National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute

Gratitude

The National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute, Bienvenidos Children's Center Inc., and the National Compadres Network thank the following individuals and organizations that have contributed their energy, intellect, and insights to this toolkit. Their generous assistance makes this work possible.

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A special acknowledgement to Jerry Tello for allowing us to draw upon the teachings and lessons from his "A Reflection of on Latino Fathers Sustaining and Survival through Welfare Reform"

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
November, 2000.

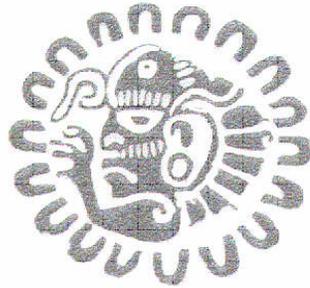
This toolkit was published with the generous support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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BIENVENIDOS

Welcome!

The elders and wise ones from many traditions often tell us that people from every culture bring us certain lessons and gifts, lessons that can help us create a better world, a better society. My mother must have known this, because as a child I learned, by her example, the importance of respecting the people of every culture who entered our home. That respect for the lessons and gifts of other cultures is as important today as any time before.

We live in a country that is melting pot of rich traditions, ancient cultures, and modern innovation – the very definition of the American spirit. Yet, the importance of the “old country” is not diminishing – it is increasing – as the lessons and gifts of our homelands are acknowledged and embraced. This is especially true for Latinos in America today.

As the Latino population increases, the influence of Latino culture is permeating every element of our society. In our economy, schools, language, entertainment, and politics – Latinos increasingly exert their strength and Latino culture weaves its way deeper into the tapestry of American culture.

The National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute, a project of Bienvenidos Children’s Center Inc., working in collaboration with the National Compadres Network has served the needs of Latino families for more than a decade. NLFFI has become a leading advocate the delivery of culturally competent services for Latino fathers and families, with family intervention programs and curriculum components that are nationally recognized models.

With the publication of this toolkit, we are grateful for the opportunity to further extend our reach and share our understanding of Latino fathers with an even broader audience – organizations committed to building successful fatherhood programs to meet the burgeoning needs of Latino fathers and families in communities across the country.

While effective, well-designed, fatherhood programs are in place in many communities, Latino fathers and their families need programs and practitioners that genuinely understand and respect the deep cultural roots, customs, and values that underscore their daily lives and decisions.

Both a strong foundation and the right tools are necessary to build sustainable programs. Just as a carpenter reaches into his bag and selects the right tool to create a home with a solid foundation, or a gardener chooses the right implement to help a tree establish strong healthy roots, the right approach and tools must be selected.

This toolkit offers insights to help deepen your understanding of many of the customs and traditions that historically motivate Latino men and their families and provides a variety of practical tools, guidelines, and interventions to consider when constructing culturally relevant fatherhood programs.

Designed by service practitioners with a personal understanding of Latino culture, the tools and strategies outlined are proven. Programs across the country have used these interventions to help Latino men of all ages strengthen and heal their families. Some tools are designed to help men find the means to support their families; others offer strategies to help heal personal pain, and some help fathers find the right legal path. The tools reinforce the importance of providing supportive services within the context of “*la familia*” (the family), and underscore other cultural factors that can affect outcomes. As with any tool, it is up to the practitioner to select the right tools that will best help an individual father and his family.

We invite you to read this information carefully and sequentially – and build your understanding and knowledge in much the same way we counsel fathers – step-by-step. A successful program starts with a solid connection and mutual acknowledgement between the practitioner and the recipient of the services. In our experience, when you have compassionate knowledge as your base, the fathers will teach you the rest.

Thank you for choosing to do this valuable work.

Con respeto!

Jerry Tello

*and the staff of the
National Fatherhood and Family Institute*



INTRODUCCIÓN

Introduction

Delivering culturally competent services for Latino families, especially Latino fathers, represents a valuable opportunity and a compelling challenge. With sensitive program delivery, service providers have the opportunity to become recognized as an important resource and trusted member of the community, significantly improving the future for Latino men, and their families.

The challenge is to provide truly culturally relevant services – services whose credibility is determined by offering more than bilingual programs or materials. The staff, resources, curriculum, and outreach strategies must be based on a true understanding of the traditional, historical, and cultural perceptions of Latino families along with the current realities of their lives in the diverse communities in which they live.

By developing a deep understanding of the community served, providers will come to know how traditional customs and values impact the attitudes and decisions Latino men make as they experience dramatic cultural shifts and learn to live in a new, bi-cultural reality. With this knowledge, providers are in a better position to provide solutions that meaningfully impact the lives of fathers, their children and families, and the larger community.

The role culture plays in the everyday lives of Latino fathers, their families, and community, cannot be underestimated. Cultural identity, the extended family system, individual values and work ethics, patterns of self-sufficiency, and perceptions of cultural contributions, all have a major impact on Latino lives. The decisions Latino fathers make are based on the values and expectations of their cultural paradigms. Their participation, co-operation, and compliance with programs or services are very much determined by these perceptions.

Although Latino fathers and their families arrive with many individual strengths and cultural assets that contribute positively to their communities, many agencies primarily see fathers who are finding it difficult to multiple stressors and challenges.

Low literacy and education levels, health issues, lack of insurance, and other cultural factors are stressors that continue to place a significant segment of the Latino population at risk for continued struggle. Latino fathers have the lowest literacy rate (in English or Spanish) and lowest educational levels of any group in the nation. Low literacy rates make it difficult, if not at times impossible, for men to participate in programs that measure success with tools that depend upon reading or writing proficiency. Latinos also face a multitude of health issues such as heart disease, diabetes, tuberculosis, and substance abuse; yet have the lowest rates of health insurance coverage of any group in the nations.

Current state and national legislation places significant pressure on agencies to increase paternity establishment and enforce of child support orders, yet unique cultural issues complicate Latino fathers' compliance. Parents are often required to participate in various "developmental" programs or face the risk of losing benefits. For fathers, these sanctions can include losing their license, parole violation, jail, or economic debt impossible to pay. Latino fathers are often pressured into attending programs (i.e., job training, domestic violence, fatherhood) regardless of the program's relevance to their culture, language, or real life conditions.

Many programs do not fully recognize the cultural resiliency or the tremendous risk factors that Latinos face as they struggle to parent and support their children. And sadly, for many Latino fathers there appears to be even less understanding. *(From Jerry Tello's 'A Reflection on Latino Fathers Sustaining and Survival through Welfare Reform', Nov 2000)

The toolkit begins by offering cultural and demographic information to help practitioners build an understanding of the issues facing Latino families. The remaining sections offer information, guidelines, and examples to deepen this understanding. Finally, it is important to note additional training in a culturally-based Latino fatherhood program may be required to fully implement a culturally competent program.

Delivering culturally relevant services

Things to consider

Language – Is your staff bilingual in the languages and dialects of your community?

Outreach, curriculum, and materials – Do you provide bilingual materials, programs, and outreach? Are they sensitive to literacy levels and language differences?

Staff – Does your staff reflect the community you serve? Will your clients feel comfortable and trust their contacts? Does your staff include educated Latino men and women as role models and mentors?

Cultural Relevance – Is your curriculum culturally relevant? Do you acknowledge and respect the customs and value of the community?

Approach – Is your program based on strengthening family relationships and not perceived as an arm of the criminal justice system?

Service Relevance – Are your services relevant to the needs of service based on their own needs?

Community – Is your program an integral and trusted member of your community?

Understanding – Are your programs built on a foundation that includes an authentic understanding of the cultural drivers that influence the needs and decisions of individuals and families?

An expression of appreciation



CONOCIMIENTO

Acknowledgement

Recognition of the existence, truth, authority, or validity of something

In Latino culture, significant time and energy is traditionally spent paying respect by “getting to know” and welcoming people into the *familia*. With this in mind, *acknowledgement* and respect for the dignity of the man and his family is a vital first step when working with Latino fathers and families.

In the same way one takes extra care to welcome a friend to your home for the first time, practitioners will benefit from greeting Latino fathers with enthusiasm and appreciation for their courage as they take important steps to strengthen their families and their futures.

With this in mind, here we provide some background information about Latino fathers and their families to help practitioners better understand their reality and become better equipped to welcome them to your *familia*.

Latinos in America today

Latinos are a culturally rich and diverse population, not a monolithic group. Each culture of origin is unique, with its own customs, values, and language that must be considered when building service programs.

National Origins

- 64.5% are of Mexican descent
- 10.1% have Puerto Rican origins
- 4.4% are from Central and South America including Guatemala, El Salvador, Venezuela
- 4.3% are Cuban
- 6.8% are categorized as having "other Latino" origins, which include countries like Brazil, the Philippines, and Spain.

Latinos currently represent about 13% of the American population, with a nearly 40% growth rate since 1990. By the year 2005, Latinos will become the major minority in the nation, accounting for 44% of population growth and representing nearly 18% of the American population. Latino population growth is expected to continue at a higher pace than any other subgroup, with the exception of Asians, for the next 30 years.

Issues Facing Latino Children

Childhood Poverty

Poverty has immediate and long-term effects on Latino children. 20% of all children in the U.S. live below the poverty line. 11% of these children are white, 42% percent are African-American, and 39% are Latino.

Among Latino subgroups, Mexican American and Puerto Rican children have the highest rates of poverty. Given the projected increases in the Latino population, along with national and state welfare reforms, the proportion of poor Latino children is likely to increase.

No hay mal que dure cien año.

Nothing goes on forever. Nothing has changed.

El mismo perro con otro collar

Mexican proverbs

Education

Education is an area of great concern and great need for Latinos. Traditionally, Latino families have not placed a high priority on education beyond elementary and high school levels. Poverty and a lack of familial role models are key decision drivers. However, attitudes are changing and many Latino fathers are hopeful their children will continue their education and increase their options for better paying, more rewarding career opportunities. Yet, despite current trends, many young Latino fathers – especially men involved in risky and violent behaviors – cannot envision a future for themselves, let alone their children. Providing tools, mentoring, and resources to help Latino men achieve a higher education levels is a key component of service delivery success.

Latinos K-12

- Cumulative education statistics for Latino children in America are as follows:
 - 9.4% have a 5th grade education or less
 - 29% have an 8th grade education or less
- 45.3% have less than a high school education:
 - 71.2% of all Latinos have never attended college.
 - 55.5% of Latino children complete high school versus the rate of 83.7% for whites.
 - Nearly 40% of Latino students who drop out do so before completing 8th grade.
- The competency levels are lower for Latinos than for whites in all subjects.
 - 17-year-old Latinos score lower than 13-year-old whites in reading, writing, and science, and only slightly higher in math.
- 4.3% of all teachers at the elementary and secondary school level are Latino.
 - 14% of the public school student population is Latino.

Latinos and Higher Education

- 27.5% of Latino children are high school graduates versus 46.1% for whites.
- 13.3% of Latinos have attended “some” college.
- 11% of Latinos 25 years old and over are college graduates compared with 25% for whites.
- 1.36 million Latinos are enrolled in higher education in the continental United States and Puerto Rico.
- 50% of Latino students in higher education in the continental US and Puerto Rico attend Hispanic-Serving Institutions.
- In 1996, Latinos accounted for:
 - 6.9% of associate degrees
 - 5.0% of bachelor's degrees
 - 3.6% of master's degrees
 - 4.5% of first-professional degrees
 - 2.2% of all doctorate degrees awarded
- Of all full-time faculties in higher education, 2.4% are Latino, while 9.3% of all students in higher education in the United States are Latino.



ENTENDIMIENTO

A mental grasp

Understanding

A friendly or harmonious relationship

Authentic *entendimiento* requires an understanding of the journey that brings Latinos to America. *Entendimiento* includes exploring the core values that infuse the lives Latino families to identify not only the needs of the father, but also the resiliency factors that can build upon to achieve successful outcomes.

In this section we examine the cultural issues that profoundly affect how Latino fathers interact with their families, including:

- Cultural identity and pride
- Extended family values
- Language barriers
- Cultural contributions
- Work ethics & self-sufficiency
- Immigration

A varied and diverse group, “Latino” includes nationals from many countries around the world – including Mexico, Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Spain, and others.

The primary cultural connection, including native dialect, values, traditions, and the length of time in the U.S affects program response, as well as the degree and speed of first generation assimilation. Assimilation varies among Latino groups and within sub-cultural groups. Greater assimilation typically means better responses to available programs. Yet, many of the resiliency factors in the Latino family, which assist their survival, depend upon their primary cultural ties. Finding a balance between expectations of American culture and the underlying strength of their primary cultural foundations is our challenge.

Recognizing that Latinos are the fastest growing group in the nation, it requires we rethink and retool our existing services to adequately meet the needs of this growing and influential population. This section offers a glimpse into the perception and lifestyles of traditional Latino fathers and families as they struggle to transition from welfare to work.

Cultural Identity

Understanding and honoring the cultural identities and historical differences between Latino nationals is a requirement for success, since cultural loyalty and pride is vital factor that helps newer immigrants maintain purpose and strength

Unlike the experiences of previous immigrant generations, it is not the ultimate goal, or the survival process, for many Latino immigrants to leave their homeland culture, language, or identity behind. And a lack of authentic understanding of the historical and cultural influences that drive individual decisions can undermine many well-conceived programs. For example, an entire group of El Salvadorian fathers refused to sign up for a job-training program when they were informed that a requirement of the program was to register with the Selective Service (military). Their reaction was based on frightening experiences the El Salvadoran military regime. When systems and organizations don't fully understand or respect the cultural identity of Latinos as a group – and as individuals from distinct nations with different cultural identities – it will have major impact on a man's willingness to be involved with available programs.

Identity also applies to the “identity” and reputation of organizations or agencies serving Latinos. The Latino communities’ perception of the agency will greatly influence its success. To recruit and retain fathers Latinos in the community will ask:

- “Is this a trustworthy group?”
- “Does it have a reputation for serving and advocating fairly for Latinos like me?”
- “Does the staff look like me? Do they speak my language and my dialect?”
- “Do they understand what the social, political, and historical factor that bring me to this community now?”
- “Do they respect my honor and dignity?”

If an organization is perceived as being insensitive, deceitful, or disrespectful of the needs of Latino families, the community will disassociate from the

organization – even when services are desperately needed. This becomes even more relevant when serving recent immigrants.

Documented or undocumented, immigrants will avoid agencies they believe work in collaboration with government agencies that will question or harass them, i.e., the INS, law enforcement, or child support enforcement.

“My primo (cousin) went to that program to get a job but they treated him bad. Forget it, I’m not going there— even if I have to keep working day jobs. It’s better than letting someone treat you like your an outsider. My father always taught us to be proud and not let anyone put you down. How can I teach my kids to have pride when they see their father treated like that? Forget it!”

Extended Family Values

Latino families are larger, younger, and live in extended family systems. At times, more than one family lives together, or families live in close proximity to one another. Men are taught to be responsible for the needs, concerns, and the financial well being of a large and far-flung family system, which may include family members in another state or country. This extended family system can be a tremendous benefit since families have a broader base of support from which to draw upon. However, these responsibilities can also complicate and extend a man's ability to provide for family in unexpected ways, since a man's personal responsibility extends well beyond his own nuclear family, a notion that often does not correlate with American expectations of individual self-sufficiency.

Latino dignity and pride also cause men believe it is better to work every day, even for very little money, rather than enter a program with the chance they may not complete it and no guarantee they will be better off in the end. As a result, it is more culturally acceptable for women to receive assistance from programs than for men to receive similar assistance.

“They’re making me pay \$600 a month for my kids, which would be all right if I didn’t have to send money to my mom in El Salvador and help my sister here to get on her feet. I told them that but they said my first responsibility is to my kids. How can they talk about first and second when you’re talking about family? They want me to choose between my mom and my kids. They just set you up for failure. Even though I’m a citizen, it might be better if I just go back to El Salvador.”

Language

“Some places make you feel dumb if you don’t speak English. I’m not stupid, I just don’t speak English!”

Language is a major barrier that prevents Latino from advocating for their needs, fully taking advantage of valuable resources, and successfully completing programs to provide a smooth transition into the conventional labor force.

More than 80% of Latino men participate in the labor force. However, most are stuck in low paying jobs with no health care or other benefits largely because of language and literacy issues.

The Department of Health and Human Services recently issued written policy guidelines recommending language assistance for persons with limited English skills, yet many programs suffer from a lack of adequate bi-lingual resources. Some programs are fortunate to have bilingual staff that can sensitively communicate with participants. Yet, too often, the available program, training, and curriculum, materials are in English or may be simply translated without sensitively addressing the cultural underpinnings of the issue. And since many Latino fathers have multiple needs, programs may need to draw upon the services of numerous organizational entities, further exacerbating language issues.

The low literacy level of many Latino fathers, in English and Spanish, and the exceptionally high drop out rate for Latino children further points to the need for remedial programs that work with fathers over an extended period of time to allow them to develop a solid base of language and literacy skills.

“You know they send these notices to my house but I can’t read them and if my son reads it for me we still can’t understand it.”

“I don’t like going to that program because they don’t have anyone that really speaks Spanish. They have someone that translates, but you have to wait a long time.”

““They sent me to this job and just when I got there I felt strange. Nobody spoke Spanish so I just went home.”

The measure of success?

“I’m trying to get these guys jobs, but most of what’s available are low-skilled and low-paying. These guys can find day-work almost every day if they hustle. And while it doesn’t pay much and there aren’t any benefits, when you have a family to feed, you can’t wait around for program training. And so many are skilled mechanics, carpenters, or plumbers but because they don’t speak much English, don’t have the right documentation, or can’t read or write, they’re stuck. Even if they pursue training, all too often they fail because they drop out to support their families or don’t have the basic education they need to pass the program.

How does this affect their self-esteem? How do they face their families? These are proud men, in spite of the hardships, and sometimes it’s easier to succeed at what you can do than take a risk and fail. And after several years, most of the best candidates have found work. We’re left with are the guys who are hard to train, hard to place, or hard to keep in a program. What that typically means is someone who only speaks Spanish, is illiterate, or just coming out of the joint (prison). It’s really tough.”

This case manager describes is the reality of working in a system that judge’s *completion* of a program or job *placement* as success.

Success is not measured by other factors, such as improved family living conditions, better health, or literacy – factors that may in fact represent success to the program participant.

Success is only measured by welfare roll reduction.

“I went to a job program a couple of months ago but they made us read in the group and I felt stupid. I know they are just trying to help us get better in reading but I get embarrassed in front of all these guys so I just stopped going.”

Cultural Contributions. Cultural Memories.

Generations of Latinos have contributed to the social, cultural, and economic prosperity of communities – especially in the American Southwest. And many individuals have prospered and established positive bilingual, bicultural identities. But too often, these positive contributions are overlooked, and the poverty and legal status of newer immigrants becomes the focus of state and national debate. And unfortunately, a percentage of Latino fathers and their families are entrenched in an ongoing cycle of poverty, unable to effectively access services, frequently resulting in self-defeating, destructive behaviors.

Many Latino fathers, especially second or third generation men who have not escaped a world of poverty and illiteracy, carry burdens of substance abuse, family violence, illiteracy, gang involvement, criminal justice involvement, and poor family relations. They have become system dependent. Most are bilingual and bicultural, and some speak only English. Through generations of struggle and pain, these families have lost their cultural connections and cultural identities. The strengths of the “strong and true” indigenous cultures that formerly fostered resiliency and self-reliance are shadows, severely weakened and compromised.

To further complicate matters, many programs have historically rewarded system dependence and disconnection of fathers from the family home. Fathers and families, who have found the courage to navigate the system, are often confronted with programs and services insensitive to their culture, values, and daily realities.

Since many Latinos are able to speak English, programmatic responses are frequently based on the false assumption that English-speaking Latinos can be addressed in the same fashion as other populations – negating the importance of cultural influences. Those seeking services are essentially offered the choice of assimilating into western society and accepting its values and ideals, or accepting a life of subsistence-level survival. Both choices imply the forfeiture or suppression of one’s authentic cultural identity to ensure survival.

Yet in spite of these barriers, we discover that when Latino fathers, even those who with generations of family dysfunction, are challenged, treated with respect, their cultural identity reinforced, and offered access to network of elders to guide and support them – *they seek the generational memory of their grandfather.*

Latino fathers **have** the courage and the ability to reflect, to heal, to become responsible, honorable men once again when challenged to answer the question: “What would your grandfather do in this situation?”

Are we willing to acknowledge the unique cultural needs of Latino as a fundamental design requirement when developing public policy, establishing programs, and allocating resources?

With sensitive program development that truly *acknowledges* and *understands* Latino cultural imperatives, fathers will begin to listen to their grandfathers’ voice and once again become the active, responsible, nurturing force they have historically been in their families lives.

To form, coordinate, or blend into a functioning or unified whole



Incorporation as equals into society

INTEGRACION

Integration

In this section, we offer recommendations for assessment and consideration. Some recommendations could be used to improve the system for all people, and others are specific to the needs of Latino fathers.

The recommendations are briefly presented here, since dialogue and action are truly the next step.

Develop culturally competent, father-focused programs that promote the positive aspects of fatherhood and incorporate extended family resources.

- From a resiliency standpoint, the family structure can provide a wide variety of supportive elements. Latino families tend to be larger in numbers, younger in age and live beyond the “nuclear” blood related family system. Often, more than one family lives together in a dwelling or families live in close proximity to one another. In addition, even though other extended family members may live in another state or country there is often loyalty to extended family member’s concerns, needs, and at times their financial well-being.

Ensure fatherhood programs for Latino men and teens are offered in the primary language of the participants and are culturally competent, not mere translations or adaptations of western or other minority based programs.

- The low literacy competence in either English or Spanish of some fathers makes it difficult for them to succeed in conventional parenting and social service programs. Programs must be adapted to address the literacy levels of the fathers in the group.

Develop and invest in culturally competent child monitoring visitation programs that promote positive fatherhood development and incorporate extended family resources.

- Honor and trust are vital values in traditional Latino families. Even when problems exist within a family, it is expected family members will make every attempt possible to work out the issues within the extended family structure. Therefore, reporting someone for non-compliance with fatherhood responsibilities is often seen as a violation of this value.
- It is not uncommon for mothers to allow fathers to see their children, despite court orders against visitation. Pressure from the extended family to promote family integration and the need for children to see their father will take precedence over these events and issues.

Develop programs and support that address the need of fathers who have a history in the criminal justice system.

- Many times because of the history (criminal justice, violence, substance abuse) of some Latino fathers, they are often pressured into attending programs (job training, domestic violence, parenting) regardless of its relevance to their culture, language or real life conditions.

Develop and support a “compadres” extended kinship network as a positive support, education, and reinforcement system.

- We must recognize that fathers have the ability to reflect, to heal, and to become responsible, honorable fathers again when asked, “What would your grandfather do in this situation?” With the help and support of elders and other *hombres* they can answer that question. Despite many barriers, we have discovered that when fathers are challenged, treated with respect, their “true cultural teachings” reinforced, and offered the support of a network of elders and *compadres* to guide them, *they seek the generational memory of their grandfather*

Require Latino culturally competent training certification for all employees and ensure the support services are linguistically and culturally competent.

- Organizations that mirror Latinos in ethnicity and language and are sensitive to the social/historical realities of Latino fathers are viewed as demonstrating respect for the population. On the contrary, if an agency or organization is seen as insensitive, deceitful or disrespectful to the needs of Latino families, word of this will become known in the community. Fathers will be reluctant to take advantage of much needed services because they will not choose to be associated with such an organization.

Provide and integrate English and Spanish instruction in all educational development programs.

- Though some programs are fortunate to have bilingual staff that can sensitively communicate with participants, the majority of program materials, training curriculum, handouts and audio visual aids are still in English, limiting their effectiveness and overall impact. Programs that do have materials in Spanish often present poor translations and do not adequately address cultural issues.

Our organizations and agencies must provide for the needs of the Latino fathers and families in our communities and we must do all we can to advocate for the necessary resources. Some options to consider:

- Create culturally based English and Spanish language media campaigns reinforcing the positive cultural aspects of Latino fatherhood and family relationships.
- Require that supportive services such as domestic violence, mental health, substance abuse, and legal assistance be linguistically and culturally competent, not mere translations or adaptations.
- Redesign job search and other services to address the literacy level and language of participants.
- Offer free or affordable, father-friendly bilingual/bicultural childcare and respite services.
- Work with other resources in your community to create affordable housing opportunities as reinforcement for fulfillment of child support and responsible fatherhood duties.
- Develop culturally competent and affordable health care services for Latino fathers and their families as reinforcement for fulfillment of child support and responsible father duties.
- Assess the literacy levels of clients in both English and Spanish.
- Enhance data collection methods to track individual outcomes based on ethnic and cultural characteristics to better assess racial disparities in participation and identify characteristics of successful program models.
- Utilize evaluations of successful outcomes of Latino fathers (and other ethnic groups) in welfare reform initiatives as a standard component of evaluation of state programs work-related performance based contracts.

- Work to broaden the definition of child support to include the provision of food, clothing, health and education support, and child care assistance.
- Incorporate reality-based job-development programs, integrating the knowledge and experience of Latino fathers, building on their strengths.
- Assign immigrant liaisons to combat system discrimination.
- Support decent wage campaigns, approve living wage ordinances, and support raising the minimum wage.



A series of organized activities working toward an objective

MOVIMENTO

Moving to Action

Transference, by any means, from one situation to another

The programs presented in this section are based on a fundamental understanding and application of traditional, cultural, and indigenous teachings and reflect a philosophy that profoundly honors the family, community, and personal relationships.

In this section we will put all the information we have in front of us and begin to “move to action” and consider the practice of working with fathers. We explore each of these areas in the pages that follow:

- Family services and advocacy support
- Working with adult fathers
- Working with teen fathers
- Monitored visitation programs
- Family violence and substance abuse
- Fathers and childhood education
- Legal and paternity services

Family Services and Advocacy Support

When working with fathers and families do not lose sight of the importance of helping fathers remain *connected* to their families.

Many programs treat fathers as if they are not part of the family – labeled non-custodial, absentee, or dead-beat. Rarely is the father portrayed as loving, supportive and nurturing.

But many fathers are involved in positive, loving relationships with their families and many more are trying hard to become better fathers. The challenge is to help make and strengthen these connections.

What I find extraordinary about many Latino fathers is that, despite being overlooked by social service providers, underpaid in their work, and rarely represented in favorable light, they have a crystal clear objective to provide for their families and make their children's lives better than theirs. – Hector Sanchez-Flores

It is crucial agencies be “father-friendly,” even when there are lacking adequate male staff to serve the fathers who arrive. It is also not sufficient to simply announce the availability of classes and programs for fathers. Men must know they are truly welcomed. They need to feel the agency support them, their partners, and their nuclear and extended families. If poverty, isolation, homelessness, or other issues are disclosed, make available the necessary resources either within the program or via referral.

Develop “*Palabra*” (*being of your word*) – a positive and trustworthy reputation in the community. This is best accomplished by implementing programs based on ancient indigenous beliefs and teachings of what it is to be a real man. These teachings and programs should stress the importance of treating fathers with respect, love, dignity, and trust to begin the healing process. Becoming culturally sensitive and including ceremonies and rituals in Fatherhood groups helps rebuild the spirit of the family.

Invite the fathers who have gone through a program to return to share their stories about the struggles of Fatherhood and offer testimony to how programs have improved their future. This should present a challenge to those who want to work with fathers to re-examine how they have perceived Latino fathers in the past and what they must presently do to effectively support and help these men to become nurturing and responsible fathers.

Make Your Facility Accessible

You will probably find yourself working with low-income fathers and families. Many individuals seeking services may be limited by a lack of affordable or convenient transportation. These actions can help ensure consistent participation by fathers:

- Arrange transportation services by providing bus schedules and tokens, taxi voucher, carpools, or offering shuttle services.
- Make car seats available for transporting infants and children under 60 lbs or ensure the family owns a car seat.
- When providing transportation services, gain the client's commitment to being there when the vehicle arrives.

Respond to Other Needs

- Provide respite services for families without childcare alternatives.
- Collaborate with other agencies to offer a broader range of services – i.e., housing, temporary shelters, food banks, mental health services, drug and alcohol rehab.
- Find funding to train staff about mental illness and substance abuse to enable caseworkers to recognize symptoms and recommend treatment options.

Working with Adult Fathers

Until recently, there have only been a handful of programs specifically geared towards the needs of Latino fathers. And when educators, child welfare institutions, and social service providers initiated work with children and families the father was historically ignored. Parenting classes were almost exclusively set up for moms and did not reflect the needs of Latino fathers.

By providing services for fathers, and addressing the cultural and language issues, programs can solve problems of recruitment and retention.

In traditional Latino culture, a strong work ethic and self-sufficiency are core values. Working hard to support one's family is viewed as a fundamental role for Latino men and women. This is best exemplified by the many risks Latino men take to cross the border illegally or the shame they are willing to endure just to feed their family. Latino men will sell oranges on freeway off-ramps, break their backs working in the fields, and stand in front of hardware stores looking for work. Working hard is a matter of pride and seen as an essential part of true manhood.

"I first went to the job program because the husband of my wife's friend went there and said it helped him a lot. He said a lot of *gente* (people from the same culture) work there and they treat you good. They even have coffee and *pan dulce* (Mexican sweet bread). You see, all that makes you feel like somebody really cares about you."

Establishing and Providing Fatherhood Programs

- Develop a program whose focus is the reinforcement of the positive involvement of Latino Males in the lives of their families, communities, and society.
- Based on the principle of *Un Hombre Noble*, "a Noble Man," the mission should be to strengthen, rebalance, and/or redevelop the traditional *compadre* extended family system. By using this process it is important to encourage and support the positive

involvement of Latino males as fathers, sons, grandfathers, brothers, *compadres*, partners, and mentors in their families and community.

- It is important to increase the positive support and influence of Latino males; this will also reduce the incidence of substance abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, teen pregnancy, gang violence, and other family and community problems.
- By using a culturally appropriate Latino fatherhood curriculum like *Cara y Corazon*, a culturally rooted interactive program, you can attempt to build on the positive strengths of the traditional Latino family structure and reinforce the males role as a caring, responsible, respectful partner in the healthy development of the children, family and community.
- It is important to be flexible and prepared to meet the fathers where they are.
- Establish a support network when men can have a place, or *lugar*, to gather in a *Circulo de Hombres*, or “Circle of Men,” where they can continue to assist and encourage one another to be a good father and partner.

Working with Teen Fathers

When working with young Latino fathers it is important to validate the different life stages men grow through as part of their development Men must past through the circular stages of Childhood (0-13 yrs); Adolescence (13-26 yrs); Adulthood (26-52 yrs); and Elderhood (52+ yrs). But many men grow older unable to pass through one ore more of these stages without help. Pain and neglect suffered in their childhood can be carried on by men into adolescence and even in to adulthood. This is why we witness grown men acting like children.

It is far easier to help guide and teach a boy than to try to change a man. On the other hand, it has been my observation that the love of a child can easily change a man.

– Refugio “Cuco” Rodriguez

There is a process all men must experience to cross the “Bridge to Manhood,” and it takes other men to help boys learn how to become a man. Practitioners providing family services and fatherhood programs can help fathers to become *hombres nobles*.

Poverty is a major obstacle in the lives of most young fathers. Many teens drop of school to work and support their children. Most live with their parents, not their baby, or the baby’s mom. And too many young fathers lack their own fathers as role models and mentors in their lives. However, many are determined to change their own children’s experience and be a steady presence in their children’s lives.

Family and gang violence

Many young fathers may be involved in gang activity or violent relationships at home. While in the program many of them learn that this is something they no longer want to be part of, if they want to provide a safe environment for their children. They learn that their children will not be safe, if they themselves are not safe. Many of the young fathers, who are involved violent behavior, actually disclose that they became a father in order to live the life style of a father. The Latino community has a long-standing history of living in various (*barrios, colonias, ’hoods*) areas of this country. Many Latino communities have prospered economically and have been able to develop a positive bilingual, bicultural identity.

I have good memories of my father and I know his example helped me become a good father to my two daughters. But if you have no father or your only memories of your father are ones where he puts your life in danger while robbing a liquor store, or where you see him abusing your mother, how do you learn to become a noble man and a good father? It is my job-- and the job of all *hombres* in the community-- to come forward to teach and guide our children--so they will know how to become good parents.

Bobby Verdugo

On the other hand, for a variety of reasons, there are many Latino communities that did not achieve the same prosperity. Within these communities, Latino fathers and their families have been caught in the recognized cycle of oppression, poverty and pain for generations. Through the systems exclusionary practices and its inability to effectively respond to the needs of these communities, we find a portion of Latino fathers and their families impoverished and struggling to survive resulting in inappropriate and self-defeating behaviors.

Many of these fathers today carry burdens of substance abuse, family violence, illiteracy, gang involvement, and criminal justice involvement and poor family relations.

Criminal justice system involvement

Young fathers may not always disclose a past or pending record during the intake resulting in complications when referred to services. For example, a fifteen-year-old dad came to our program looking for help finding a job so he could begin to support his young family. We explained he needed to concentrate on going back to school and getting his high school diploma so that he could look for a better paying job and plan for a career. He agreed, and leaving his young son in the agency's care, went to enroll at a continuation school run by the County. He should have been able to enroll and return in less than two hours, but after four hours the young dad had not returned. We were concerned, wondering if he had forgotten his son or maybe even abandoned him. Eventually, the baby's mother showed up at our agency.

When we questioned her about the missing young father she answered, "You know that school you sent him to? It is a County Probation school and they have a probation officer

Effective fatherhood programs must help young fathers:

- understand their children's growth and development
- understand their own rights and responsibilities
- encourage positive and nurturing relationships between the father, children, and partner
- assist fathers of all ages to develop positive relationship skills with their children and their family
- strengthen their ability to be active, responsible participants *in their lives*

on site that does background checks. It turns out my boyfriend has outstanding warrants and they arrested him right there at the school!”

When working with young fathers, one must acknowledge and appreciate the fact that many of these young men do not have their own father in their lives to teach them how to be a good father.

The practitioner must also understand and appreciate that although most of the young Latino fathers who they will serve may be the “Non-custodial” parent, this does not necessarily mean they do not want to be involved in their child’s life. Many, in fact, feel a sense of powerlessness dealing with the legal system and with child support and custody issues. This is an area where we can help.

Consider the case of Oscar, a 19 year old, father of two.

Oscar is an ex-gang member who grew up and still lives in a Los Angeles housing project. There is a family history of substance abuse, family violence and struggle to survive on a day-to-day basis. Oscar's family is presently on welfare and is the second-generation being dependent on the system for sustenance.

With these overwhelming problems Oscar did poorly in school, was pushed out and hasn't graduated. A few months before the birth of his second child, 6 months ago, he was released from the Youth Authority Camp. The birth of this baby has motivated him to turn his life around.

This couple has the motivation and desire to provide for themselves, but simply do not have the resources. Oscar found a job making minimum wage but this meager income didn't provide enough to support his girlfriend and their 2 children. Because of probation regulations, he is required to go to school, pay child support (even though he is paying rent and living with his girlfriend and children) and must attend anger management classes.

With this overwhelming pressure, he is in danger of reverting to "hanging out with the homeys," creating additional problems in his family relationships and further putting him at risk of re-incarceration, leaving another generation of children fatherless.

Oscar sees no escape from these pressures anytime soon and feels trapped.

From *'A Reflection on Latino Fathers Sustaining and Survival through Welfare Reform'*

Jerry Tello, Nov. 2000

Establishing a Monitored Visitation Program

A high percentage of fathers have a negative history with the child support system, preventing fathers from becoming involved in the life of their children. Supervised visits and supervised exchanges are two components designed to help fathers and children experience a safe parent-child relationship. This service may be necessary when the ongoing parent-child relationship has been interrupted due to alleged or substantiated reasons.

Appointments are scheduled separately because both parents usually want to avoid each other. This also prevents from staff becoming involved in the couple's conflicts or other problems. The child's needs are paramount when making decisions regarding supervised visits and exchanges, and the parents can also benefit.

Supervised visitation and exchanges should not be viewed as a negative or stigmatized service. It is a tool to help families through difficult and/or transitional times. Some of the benefits for the various family members are as follows:

For the children

It allows the children to maintain a relationship with both of their parents, an important factor for children involved in a family dissolution. It allows children to anticipate visits with parents with less stress by placing them in a safe, comfortable, supervised environment, shielded from parental conflict.

For the custodial parent

Custodial parents can permit children to visit with non-custodial parents, while avoiding communication or contact with individuals who might frighten, threaten, or intimidate them. A neutral party (the visit monitor) makes the visitation arrangements, eliminating the need for contact before, during, or after visits.

For the non-custodial parent

Parent can be confident that contact with their children does not have to be interrupted regardless of any personal or interpersonal problems they may be having. If allegations have been made, which is often the case when supervision is ordered, a non-custodial parent can visit without fear of new accusations because another party is present to verify what happened during the visit. Monitors are neutral and objective observers; not present to judge or give evaluations. A program should always refer to state guidelines and requirements in pursuing this area.

Managing Family Violence and Substance Abuse

It is important to believe that all men have the desire to be “Men of Honor.” Based on this principle, a man who keeps his word and understands or embraces the importance of maintaining an honorable relationship with himself and others has the foundation for developing and maintaining a positive relationship with his children and significant others. Through the process of sitting in a circle with other men who collectively reflect the reality of their gifts and their baggage, men can begin to acknowledge and accept that aggression and violence is not acceptable and realizes it causes irreparable damage to themselves and others.

Through the intake process of *conocimiento*, or acknowledgement, fathers are screened as to where they are in their relationships. Based on the strengths and/or trauma that have occurred in the father’s life, an organization needs to make a determination of what services will best fit his needs. We find many fathers have a multitude of issues including relationship violence, substance abuse, and involvement with the criminal justice system.

Many men that come to a program may be referred as a mandatory requirement of a court order. Whatever the situation, agencies working with fathers who have a history of violence and/or substance abuse must be prepared to insure the safety of the father’s partner and children. Some men will need a structured certified program to deal with their

issues of violence, and every fatherhood program should address the issue of relationship violence at some level.

Create an environment where men can learn in a harmonious and peaceful manner. Participants must recognize and understand the rules of your facilities and of the group. Be sure to emphasize the importance of respect for oneself and all relations.

Encourage participants to “show up” and consistently attend the sessions. Consistency is a key success factor for growth and change. In addition, a monthly *circulo* or support group circle for men provides a forum where men can help each other become better fathers. Men with an active substance abuse issue may need to be simultaneously involved in a substance abuse treatment program.

Finally, we have discovered programs have a greater impact when they incorporate the development and maintenance of a positive relationship with children as a focus of the healing and growth process.

Involving Fathers in Childhood Education

Research shows that when fathers are involved in the education of their children, children do better all around. Therefore it is important to offer services and programs that develop confidence and help motivate fathers to become involved the education and development of their children. We cannot assume every father knows how to read or play with his child. In many cases this father may not have had his own father around to teach him how to do this.

Father/child reading programs, play groups, family field trips, and other interactive activities are important to help fathers and become comfortable with being involved in their child’s education.

- Offer sessions dedicated to teaching fathers how to read with their children. Teach them to read with enthusiasm and not to be afraid to make faces and jump around if needed during the storytelling. Help them make it fun.

- Take young fathers and their children on field trips to fun and educational places like zoos and museums to introduce them to activities that they can do with their children. Many of these venues may offer discounts to groups.
- Teach fathers how to play with their children. Encourage them to get down on the floor with their children.

These efforts are not only important for children but many times it's the first time someone has read to a young dad. At a recent reading session, a program facilitator was demonstrating how to read to young children. Reading *Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak, with expression and animation, the facilitator soon realized the young dads were listening with the fascination of a very young child listening to the story for the first time. It was clear these young parents probably had not been read to them when they were children.

A child's success at literacy and in school is enhanced when a father reads, plays, and interacts with his child and play can help heal the wounded void many fathers experienced in their own development. An example of an effort combining father's involvement in their children's literacy and the prevention of domestic violence is a campaign called *Respetar y Leer* (Respect and Read) that gets fathers involved in a community effort focusing on these issues. Visit www.nationalcompadresnetwork.org for further information.

Offering Legal and Paternity Services

Legal and paternity clinics offer fathers an opportunity to get answers, receive help, and find solutions to problems. Many calls will be from fathers asking for help with child support orders, visitation and custody conflict, or others legal issues. Your organization may be able to provide some help and answers, but it will also be crucial to seek additional help from attorneys and other resources with legal expertise.

A successful legal/paternity program will include a paternity clinic that offers fathers an opportunity to learn more about their legal rights and options available to them. Trust needs to be developed between the client and legal staff because many fear they might be arrested for not paying child support. When fathers don't pay child support in a timely fashion, they can find themselves in arrears, their licenses suspended, and an unsympathetic court system.

"What's the problem with the system? I'll tell you.

First, I was raised that a responsible man takes care of his family "hombre responsable," so I try and do that. They want me to get into a program to learn a trade or something. At the same time, they say I have to pay child support. I don't mind paying because since my wife and I broke up, I've always paid for them. But now they want me to pay \$600.00 per month. That's too much. I tried to explain that I help take care of my parents and I send money every month to my **abuelita** in Mexico, but they said that doesn't count. What do they mean my parents and my grandmother don't count? They count to me. Now what am I going to do? I can't afford every thing. It makes me feel like just going back to Mexico."

According to many men interviewed, negative, accusatory attitudes from the system are prevalent, and affect fathers from every culture. The system does not understand the demographic cultural and linguistic characteristics of the ever-increasing Latino community and is not prepared to deal with the bi-national issues Latino families face, making them ill equipped support the father's struggles and needs.

Many fathers want to regain visitation and custody rights of their children but are unable due to the lack of knowledge of how the system works. It is important to develop relationships with the child support system and family court system. Once you establish a working relationship with these agencies, you will find resources that you can offer your clients. The child support system and family court system are important government agencies that fatherhood programs need to work with. Here are some suggestions on working with these systems and other elements to put together a successful legal/paternity clinic:

Child Support and Family Court Systems

- Establish relationships with child support enforcement representatives that share your mission of changing the behavior and attitudes of fathers, to gain financial and emotional commitment for children.
- Create collaborative relationships so clients can be referred to a known county representative.
- Schedule a facilities tour and an overview of agency capabilities so the county knows how you can help.
- Invite a child support services representative to attend client meetings and directly explain requirements, procedures, and offer answers to questions.
- Communicate clearly the rights of fathers to visit their children – even if child support payments are not yet established or are in arrears.

- Become familiar with all the paperwork required by the county and other agencies to simplify and facilitate the process for clients, especially Child Support, Child Custody and Visitation, Establishment of Paternity, and Restraining Orders.
- Learn the location, hours, and offices of the local the court.
- Provide referral information assistance to help fathers access Legal Aid Counsel, Family Law Centers, low-cost or pro-bono legal services.
- Assign staff members to help clients understand and correctly fill out daunting paperwork and forms
- Accompany clients to court, whenever possible.

Attorneys and Other Experts

- Establish relationships with local attorneys and legal aid resources willing to provide services on a pro-bono or reduced-fee basis.
- Arrange training sessions with identified attorneys to educate agency staff about legal processes including: court orders, appeals, and paperwork requirements.
- Research and obtain software resources to help simplify and/or reduce paperwork.
- Include child support services, child enforcement, and other county and government agency representatives in clinics.

Clinic Format

- Limit clinics to 20 participants. Ask participants to pre-register for event to give staff an opportunity to determine the legal issues facing prospective participants.
- Schedule clinics in late afternoon or early evening. Limit to 2.5 hours or less.
- Determine a suitable clinic format for your community:
 - Lecture and Q/A
 - Panel discussion
- Scheduled times to meet individually and confidentially with attorneys.
- Brief presenters individually or as a group prior to the clinic by supplying available background information about registered participants including current legal status, concerns, and expectations.
- Publish a press release and /or media advisory with date, time, sponsor, and purpose of clinic. Distribute to print and broadcast media via fax, email, or post.
- Create and distribute flyers to other agencies that work with your target population.

Suggested Clinic Topics

- Fathers: Rights and Responsibilities
- How to Establish Paternity
- Let's Talk About: Custody and Visitation
- Let's Talk About: Child Support
- Dealing with Arrearages and Penalties
- Understanding US Immigration Requirements
- Immigration Amnesty – Do You Qualify?

Immigration is a very important topic. Strive to recruit more legal experts to provide immigration information and assistance.

Be prepared to deal with clients who come with anger issues regarding their legal situation, especially child support issues. If you invite a representative from an agency such as child support services, inform the presenter that some clients will be angry because of who they represent.

Latino Fathers and Health

When addressing the needs of Latino fathers it is important to consider their health needs. Latinos are most medically uninsured population in the nation, are at a greater risk for diabetes, heart disease, and other conditions, and Latino men are grossly underserved by the health care system. It is not enough to simply provide access to health care services. Programs must connect men to health education and direct clinical services that are linguistically and culturally appropriate.

Community outreach and health care events such as an annual Latino Male Health Fair can help inspire men to learn more about their health and provide an opportunity for families to receive health care screenings and referrals. As part of an overall health education campaign consider programs to address the diversity of father's needs.

- **Annual Latino Male Health Fair**—in cooperation with community health and education programs, invite men and their families to receive free health care screenings, bilingual health education materials, and access to community based services.
- **Safer Sex Teen Clinic**—offers teen-focused pregnancy and STI prevention services aimed at adolescent males and teen fathers.
- ***Circulo de Salud/Circle of Health***—train *teen health promoters* to provide outreach, education, and support and deliver family planning services to adolescents at schools and clinical service sites. Topics can include male responsibility, respect, family planning, birth control, diabetes, and high blood pressure, eating healthier and other health issues.

- Develop bilingual/bicultural brochures and posters on a variety of health topics pertinent to the local population's needs.
- Develop a relationship with a health care service provider. Become familiar with services and eligibility. Establish a business relationship to facilitate services.
- Identify target sights where men congregate and organize a health care presentation. Offer materials such as information packets, resource cards, flyer, your business cards and incentives (pens, key chains, condoms, gift certificates).
- While conducting presentations pass out a sign in sheet to gather information from potential clients and facilitate follow up.
- As the fathers receive services and begin taking care of their own health needs, cultivate relationships with these men to become advocates and educators within the community.

Related Websites

Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement	http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/
Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (FORUM)	http://www.childstats.gov/
National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF)	http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/
National Child Support Enforcement Association (NCSEA)	http://www.ncsea.org/
Federal Office of Minority Health in HRSA	http://www.hrsa.gov/omh/
Administration for Children & Families' Welfare Reform	http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/news/welfare/
National Strategy to Prevent Teen Pregnancy	http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/teenp/intro
Domestic Violence	http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/hspother
TANF/Welfare	http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/hspwelfare.htm
Teen Parenting	http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/hspparent
Joint Center for Poverty Research (JCPR)	http://www.jcpr.org
Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP)	http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp
National Council of La Raza	http://www.nclr.org
Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund-MALDOF	http://www.maldef.org
Annie E. Casey Foundation	http://www.aecf.org
Public Welfare Foundation	http://www.publicwelfare.org
The National Compadres Network	http://www.nationalcompadresnetwork.org

