



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



## Spotlight on South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families

An NRFC team visited the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families and three of their program centers on May 23, 24, and 25, 2017. This NRFC Spotlight highlights aspects of the organization and its programs that may be of interest to other fatherhood practitioners.

**Background:** Established in 2002 by the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina as an outgrowth of the Foundation's fatherhood initiative, *Reducing Poverty through Father Engagement*, the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families (SCCF or "The Center") is the umbrella organization for a statewide network of six local fatherhood organizations - Upstate Fatherhood Coalition, Lancaster Fatherhood Project, Man 2 Man, A Father's Place, Father to Father, Inc., and Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. The Center works in partnership with the local organizations to deliver services, increase awareness of the importance of fathers, and advocate for father-friendly policies and practices. The Center provides support for resource and partnership development, uniform program design and implementation, technical assistance and capacity building, quality improvement, and data collection.

**Financial Support:** The Center and the local fatherhood organizations operate with a mix of federal, state, local, foundation, and individual donor support. While the Center serves as the central structure for financial development and management, including monitoring and oversight of local programs, local executive directors are also responsible for additional fund development on the local level. The South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) has been a key supporter since the Center's inception and the 15-year partnership was solidified in 2015 with the award of contracts to expand services to non-custodial parents across the state. The Center has received two Responsible Fatherhood Grants (2006-2010 and 2015-2020) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance.

**Service Area:** The Center and the local fatherhood programs currently provide direct services for fathers in 34 of the state's 46 counties with plans to expand throughout the state by the end of 2017. These services are delivered through a network of full service Program Centers and Satellite Offices in the more populated counties, combined with regular outreach to smaller counties.

- [Map of Contractors and Service Area.](#)

**Demographics:** Services are available for all fathers, although many of the program participants reflect a vulnerable population of predominantly African-American, low-income, non-residential fathers who struggle to provide financially for their children. During 2016, there were 2,534 participants, ranging in age from 16 to 69 with an average age of 33. Eighty-two percent of program participants were non-residential parents and 66 percent were unemployed when they entered the program.

**Staff:** The Center and the local fatherhood organizations collectively employ 120 full-time staff and additional contractual employees. The largest local organization, Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, has 30 staff in 5 locations serving 16 urban and rural counties.

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**Program Philosophy:** As described by Patricia Littlejohn, Executive Director, the central tenet of the program is that *“you must reach the heart of the man”* to attain the larger goal of strengthening families and communities. *“We engage fathers in relational, economic, developmental, and supportive services that provide them with skills, knowledge, resources, and the confidence to fulfill their roles as great dads. Reaching the heart is essential; it is what makes everything stick.”*

**Program Engagement:** Richard Barr, Director of Community Development and Programming, explained that they keep fathers engaged by helping them achieve *“moments of success through completion of small steps.”* Other staff mentioned two key acronyms that capture the spirit in which they engage and serve fathers:

- **“BREAD”** – Services must be **B**eneficial, **R**elational/Resourceful, **E**ncouraging, **A**ctive, and **D**irectional.
- **“ACIR”** – The case management approach focuses on **A**ssessment, **C**ontinuation planning, **I**mplementation, and **R**eview. (Case managers meet with fathers every 15-30 days.)

**Intake and Assessment:** Following orientation, fathers complete employment readiness and career assessments and provide information on their family and work history, including a review of any criminal background.

- The [KUDER career assessment tool](#) is administered to identify skills, interests, personality, and suggested areas of study.
- Father and case managers work together to set goals and each father develops an individualized “One Man Plan” for achieving their goals.
- Intake and program data are documented using a version of Social Solutions’ [Apricot](#) data management system that the Center has customized based on its previous use of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources’ *Responsible Fatherhood Project Participant Management Information System* (2003).

**Curriculum Groups:** The Center uses a 6-month curriculum that draws on various curricula material.

- There are four curriculum components: Parenting/Co-parenting, Healthy Relationships, Economic Stability, and Men’s Health.
  - The Parenting component focuses on issues such as understanding a father’s influence; modeling behavior to help children learn; understanding children’s needs and developmental stages; providing effective discipline; and reinforcing healthy communication, co-parenting, and self-management skills.
  - Healthy Relationships emphasizes building strong relationships and developing good communication and decision-making skills.
  - To help fathers manage their financial situation, the Economic Stability component covers issues such as finances and budgeting, mentality towards money, and money management.
  - The Men’s Health sessions are designed to show fathers the connection between good health and a better quality of personal and family life,
- Each site operates on the same curriculum cycle and all sites cover the same topics each week. Some sites provide separate groups for younger fathers (ages 18-24).
- Each program center also offers a weekly peer support group, which is often scheduled in the evening to accommodate work schedules.



**Parenting Services:** In addition to the parenting component of the curriculum, the Center and the local programs have developed a range of other parenting services.

- Staff offer coaching to reinforce parenting skills.
- Parent/child activities are provided so fathers can build their confidence as parents.
- Mediation services are available to help parents discuss issues and develop co-parenting plans or visitation agreements.
- Through an agreement with the Child Protective Services (CPS) division of DSS, some fathers are now participating in parenting classes as part of their CPS parenting plan. Program staff keep CPS updated on progress or challenges that fathers are facing and provide support services to help fathers navigate the child welfare system and become more engaged parents.
- As part of the agreement with CPS, the Center is also working to erase institutional biases against noncustodial fathers and help create father friendly practices by building a trusting two-way bridge between the child welfare agency and noncustodial fathers.
  - Patricia Littlejohn: *“We are helping CPS improve their diligent search process for fathers who are not in the same household as their children. In return, we receive referrals of fathers for our parenting services and are able to help strengthen their parenting skills and possibly ready them for placement when the mother is having difficulty or facing termination of parental rights.”*

**Employment Services:** Each program works closely with their local employment office (SC Works) to identify job and training opportunities.

- During the last week of every month, each local program offers a “boot camp” designed to simulate a 20-hour work week, build on the concept of W.O.R.K. (**W**illingness, **O**penness, **R**esponsibility, and **K**nowledge), and give fathers the opportunity to learn and practice soft skills.
- Representatives of SC Works attend the boot camp sessions to provide information on training programs available through Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding and other sources.
- Job Coaches and Job Developers work with fathers and employers on an ongoing basis to identify job training and employment opportunities, reduce barriers to employment, and ensure that program participants are job-ready.
  - To help fathers who have criminal records, the Center has developed an [Expungement Guide](#) that explains how fathers can obtain court orders to remove some convictions from their records.
  - JV Mott, Employment Developer at A Fathers Place: *“We make them employable before they get employed ... our focus with employers is not ‘I’ve got someone who needs a job,’ but how the program can help employers.”*
- Of 2,534 fathers served during 2016, 789 (31%) participated in job readiness training and 1,819 (72%) either gained or maintained employment.



**Child Support Services:** The Center and the local programs provide extensive assistance to help fathers navigate child support issues.

- Through their DSS partnership and contracts, the Center has built a mutually beneficial relationship with DSS's Child Support Services Division (CSSD) whereby their local programs receive referrals from CSSD and assist fathers who are having difficulty meeting their child support obligations.
  - Program staff help fathers navigate the CSSD system, identify barriers to payment, provide classes in financial and employment skills, and work with CSSD to ensure that orders are modified according to individual circumstances.
  - CSSD staff also forward phone inquiries for program staff to provide "father-friendly" information that relieves the burden on child support staff and makes the process friendlier for parents.
    - Steven Yarborough, South Carolina Child Support Services: *"It's like having additional staff for our offices – and they are trained to do more than we can with the dads."*
- Gale DuBose, Esq., a former child support attorney, serves as the Center's child support services and legal coordinator. In this role, she provides training to local program staff on child support issues and oversees "**Jobs, Not Jail,**" an Alternative to Incarceration program for low-income fathers having difficulty meeting their child support obligations.
- The Center also maintains a website page [All About Child Support](#), which provides information about paternity establishment, how to navigate the child support system, and what to do if you can't pay your child support.
- The Center has developed video tutorials and online guides to help fathers understand [Visitation](#) and [Modification of child support orders](#) and to access a website to complete forms necessary to represent themselves in court for visitation or modification of child support.

**Men's Health Services:** In addition to the Men's Health curriculum sessions, health screenings are provided by a nurse practitioner at four locations for low-income fathers who would otherwise not have access to such care.

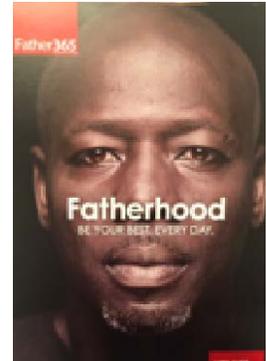
- Dawn Pender, MSN, Nurse Practitioner: *"They [the fathers] often mistrust systems, ignore health conditions, and suffer multiple health problems. The non-judgmental, trusting environment existing within the fatherhood programs has proven to be ideal for introducing and integrating fathers into existing community healthcare services."*
- The nurse practitioner provides health education, screenings, treatment, and referrals to over 50 medical providers, many of whom are willing to treat fathers at no cost or on a sliding fee scale. The nurse practitioner also helps with scheduling of appointments.
- During 2016, 250 fathers received 2,400 health services for hearing, dental, or vision problems and conditions such as hypertension, obesity, and severe depression.
- The Center recently received funding to hire another Registered Nurse and replicate these services in an additional county.

**Other Support Services:** Support services not offered directly through the local programs are accessed through extensive networks of community partners.

- The Center and the local programs have developed state and local partnerships to link fathers with job skills training, physical and mental health services, substance abuse treatment, legal services, housing, and resources to assist with other needs.
- The Center's website includes a list of [Local Program Partners](#) who work with each of the six local programs.

**Other Innovative Services:**

- Some of the fatherhood centers have **Man Caves**, which are safe spaces for fathers to hang out, play pool, and connect with other dads.
- The **Reading with Dads** initiative encourages fathers to read with their children and take an active role in their education. The Center compiled a list of over 700 books with recommendations of age-appropriateness and has asked each local office to work with a local school to encourage father involvement.
- The **Father 365 Campaign** is a statewide campaign to build awareness of the local fatherhood programs and recruit fathers. A communications team led by Wayne Thornley, Director of Communications, held focus groups with fathers and identified key words and phrases such as “Strength,” “Commitment,” and “Be Your Best Every Day” that are now featured on billboards, posters, and 5x7 cards. The team also produced video profiles of fathers that are featured on [father365.com](http://father365.com), a website designed specifically for access with handheld devices
- [What Young Fathers Need](#), a video on the Center’s YouTube channel, features young men discussing choices and challenges of becoming fathers at a young age.

**In the words of the fathers:** *“Why does this program work? Because they care.”*

The NRFC team spoke with four young fathers at **A Fathers Place** in Conway.

- When asked what they appreciated most about the program they mentioned *“Genuine caring from staff,” “Follow-up calls and visits,”* and *“The ability to call or text staff 24/7.”*
- Other comments included: *“I feel like I’m not alone anymore”* and *“I like it that some of the staff are young too.”*