

Position Statement

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The Family Success Institute is committed to a set of transformational changes in the policies, funding, and practices related to the support of the well-being and quality of life of families in New Jersey. Our vision is for all families to have the resources, opportunities, and support they want and need to successfully raise their children from birth to young adulthood. Fathers, either biological or those adults that play the "father" role to their children and families, are crucially vital to the fulfillment of the family success vision.

Fathers matter. **All fathers impact their children.** When it comes to parenting. The Working Group recognizes five fundamental ways fathers impact child development \* (from the Father Center of NJ).

**1. Increase Intellect.**

An active father can help increase a child's emotional intelligence and problem-solving capabilities. Children raised with active tend to score higher on verbal and math tests and are less likely to drop out of school or commit a juvenile crime.

**2. Boost confidence.**

The emotional support provided by a father to a child is a priceless gift. By helping kids understand how much they are valued and loved, children with supportive fathers are more likely to have high self-esteem and are generally happier and more confident. They also show greater tolerance for stress/frustration, less hesitation/fear in new situations, and an increased ability to resist peer pressure and stand up for themselves.

**3. Someone To Look Up To.**

**Fathers provide a positive male role model for their children and help to promote/reinforce good behaviors. As a result, children with more involved fathers tend to have fewer behavioral and impulse control problems, longer attention spans, and a higher level of sociability. These children also tend to be more compassionate and generous, with an increased awareness of the needs and rights of others.**

**4. Provide A Different Perspective.**

**Children are naturally full of questions, and mothers and fathers approach those questions differently. Active parents with different approaches to parenting can be a great way to expose children to a broad range of thinking and problem-solving. Active fathers have a unique opportunity to share their perspectives on life and teach their kids valuable life skills!**

**5. Feel The Love!**

**It's the most obvious thing to say, but that doesn't make it any less important – having an active father makes a child feel loved! Dads who provide a steady source**

of love and encouragement helps ensure that children grow up happy and healthy, with high self-esteem.

Being an actively engaged father is one of the most important things to increase a child's well-being.

## Fathers, Families, and Communities

The Work Group also recognizes fathers' crucial role in family and community life, as bread winners, community members, and role models. To help children grow into prepared, productive adults, parents need jobs with family-sustaining pay, affordable housing, and the ability to invest in their children's future. They also need access to quality health and behavioral healthcare. When parents are unemployed or earn low wages, their access to resources to support their kids' development is limited" (Annie E. Casey, Kidscount 2020)

www.datacenter.kidscount.org. In addition to healthy relationships and father engagement strategies, the need for workforce and job development programs that align with current employment trends and follow identified career pathways are critical to fostering economic stability and self-sufficiency by creating an environment in which families can thrive.

- Statement about changing roles, marriage statistics, etc.
- Statement about social, economic inequities, disparities, mass incarceration, and under-resourced communities
- Karen – for further discussion
- While most of the focus on fathers has to do with low-income dads, the data related to youth alienation and the changing nature of the workforce in terms of gender and the relationship of these factors to the opioid epidemic and teen suicide indicate a broader need to support the role of fathers in all families as we move into the future.

## Vision for Fathers for the Future:

### Elements of a Fathers and Families Initiative

**Policy – T** – To enhance the well-being of men, fathers, and caregivers to become better parents, partners, providers, and role models within their families and communities.

, and role models within their families and communities.

Develop a clear, simple statement that enunciates the importance of fathers to families and that the State of New Jersey understands and supports all fathers. Given the attention to racial and ethnic equity as well as alternatives to mass incarceration, this statement should address the importance of support to fathers in these contexts. Caring, supported, responsible, employed,

contributing, and tax-paying fathers are suitable for all—related communication campaigns about the importance of fathers to families.

The five action steps are ideas based on what we are capable of doing when fully operational as a workgroup. The goal is to one day, as part of FSI, become a contractor or subcontract out the following to include training, technical assistance, coaching, and related services to fulfill the following objectives:

### **Five Action Step Ideas**

1. To mobilize state, county, and city officials in developing a plan to support and motivate fathers toward responsible and committed involvement with their children, families and communities.;
2. To stimulate/motivate community partnerships to embrace the importance of fatherhood;
3. To provide community-based organizations, cities, and counties with funding, training, resources, and tools to successfully conduct inclusive fatherhood programming;
4. To provide community-based organizations with links to resources that can give them male-friendly posters and other materials that are inclusive of all fathers, father-figures, and male caregivers;
5. Establish support groups for all men (through non-stigmatizing, inclusive branding).

**Consolidated State Leadership and Local Partnerships**— As with many population-based state programs, the locus of responsibility, authority, and resources is diffuse and scattered across several departments, primarily based on funding sources, not people (DHS and DFD; DCF, DOL, etc.), with little overarching strategies, management, pooled funding or relationships with county and municipal governments. The states that have successfully launched fatherhood initiatives have begun by creating a central office with gubernatorial support to lead these efforts and coordinate cross-departmental resources.

We propose that an Office for Fathers and Families be established in state government to concentrate, guide, implement and evaluate a demonstration project that would develop comprehensive services for fathers and families in select communities throughout the state. This Initiative would be closely aligned with our more comprehensive legislative proposal related to a state Council on Family Success and local planning.

We further recommend the creation of a small Task Force of experts, fathers and family members, advocates, and state and local leaders (public and private) to advise the launch, implementation, and performance evaluation of a fathers and Families Initiative.

**Local Service Projects** - There are and have been several fatherhood programs in many New Jersey communities that have demonstrated great success in supporting the well-being of fathers

and families. These programs have been primarily self-initiated by advocates and non-profit organizations with some assistance from state and federal governments. These programs, primarily evidenced-base or evidence-informed, have shown solid outcomes and can form the basis of a robust community-based state-wide system for fathers. I have included a listing of several of these programs for your review. In each instance, program managers creatively develop effective services without coherent state policy, service definition or sustainable funding.

These programs include;

The Father Center of NJ, based in Trenton and Burlington

Parents, Inc. – Father Time in several communities

Center for Family Services – Framing Fatherhood – Camden

Blessed Ministries – DADS – Newark

In addition, the well-regarded Success Centers for fathers in Newark and Camden that were funded and then de-funded by the state government were highly successful in those communities and bear review and consideration.

We propose that the new Office for Fathers and Families, with the advice of the aforementioned Task Force, launch a Fathers and Families Initiative that would develop a select number of community-based program sites to implement evidence-based, evidence-informed, and promising practices. These services could be expansions of existing ones, the sustainability of faltering ones, or brand new programs. Each would embrace the vital importance of fathers as dads and partners in their families, their role as breadwinners and taxpayers, their role as responsible community members, and their role in supporting one another. As with our larger Learning Community, we propose that the new office create a Learning Community of local advocates, providers, dads, and family members to build expertise and support for fathers across the state.

We believe that a demonstration initiative of 10-15 sites, with clear expected outcomes set up-front and an independent evaluation, would be crucial to the social and economic future of the state.

Discussion/ thoughts about the importance and approach to fathers by state departments regarding policies and practices (DCF, DOL, DHS/DFD, Corrections, etc.)

Funding:

- Discussion of proposed legislation and funding strategies
- Council on Community Recovery and Family Success
- County/local planning and service delivery

Additional recommendations:

Review all state(fed?) statutes, rules, and regulations through a father-friendly lens (DMV; DFD; DOC; DOL, DLPS, etc.)

Entrepreneurship; small business development; self-employment as workforce development activities

*SNAP E and T; TANF, ARPA, other funding sources*