

# VOICES OF FATHERS AND THE PROVIDERS WHO SERVE THEM

Supporting Father Engagement  
In Alameda County





**“Through the work of the Fathers Corps,  
many lives are and will be changed in a  
very positive way.”**

-FATHERS CORPS MEMBER

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## **The Alameda County Fathers Corps dedicates this report to Jeff Gillenkirk**

Jeff Gillenkirk was a co-founder of the Alameda County Fathers Corps and played a key role in the planning and development of the Fathers Corps program. He was passionate about advocating on behalf of fathers and he challenged our systems to be more intentional about supporting the needs of fathers and father-figures. It was Jeff's idea to conduct focus groups with fathers who are not involved in the lives of their children. He believed that this particular group of fathers is often talked about but rarely spoken with and learned from. Jeff saw this project as an opportunity for fathers to share their stories, for readers to understand their journey, and for service programs and systems to consider how they can adjust their service models to better support the needs of fathers. On November 22, 2016, Jeff suffered a heart attack and passed away.

Jeff was a colleague, mentor, and friend. We miss him dearly.

-Kevin Bremond, First 5 Alameda County / Alameda County Fathers Corps





## THE NEED

A growing body of evidence demonstrates that when fathers or male caregivers are actively engaged in their children's lives, children are far more likely to achieve success in school, careers and relationships and live happier and healthier lives. Conversely, when fathers are not engaged, children are significantly more likely to suffer from depression and other mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, school failure, poverty, delinquency, and crime.

## OUR MISSION

Established in 2013, the Alameda County Fathers Corps (ACFC) is a joint effort of First 5 Alameda County, the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency and the Alameda County Social Services Agency. The mission of the Fathers Corps is to promote and support fathers and father figures to be meaningfully engaged with their children and families, and to advocate for family service providers to offer father friendly services and to assist fathers in strengthening their parenting skills.

Each year, for the past three years, the ACFC has convened a learning community of male service providers to offer training opportunities - on early childhood topics and topics specific to the needs of fathers - and a place for peer support and networking. Eighty male providers representing 40 agencies throughout the county have participated so far. The ACFC has also identified a set of seven Father Friendly Principles - adopted by the Alameda County Board of Supervisors in February 2015 - and has created a father friendly agency self-assessment tool for use by agencies and organizations serving families in the county.

## WHAT ARE BARRIERS TO FATHER ENGAGEMENT IN OUR COUNTY? HOW CAN WE AS PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS, BETTER SUPPORT FATHERS?



To learn more about barriers to fathers' engagement with their children and ways to better support fathers in our county, in Spring 2015, the Fathers Corps engaged in a data gathering project, with support from three members of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. ACFC surveyed over 100 family service providers from a variety of public and community-based organizations. ACFC also contracted with Your Message Media to conduct three focus groups and seven interviews with 31 fathers who were uninvolved in their children's lives. Our findings and recommendations are summarized here.



## Survey of Family Service Providers in Alameda County

In May 2015, the Fathers Corps surveyed service providers, from a variety of public and community-based organizations, about father engagement.

- ▶ 111 service providers completed an online survey with 14 items, mostly open-ended, that asked about barriers to fathers' involvement with their children, fathers' needs, successful father engagement strategies, and other topics
- ▶ Respondents were from 52 community-based and public agencies
- ▶ 67% were female service providers and 33% were male service providers
- ▶ A majority (66%) of providers had worked with fathers or father figures for 5 years or more
- ▶ Responses were coded and prevalent themes were identified

### Group “Listening Sessions,” Interviews, and Surveys with Uninvolved Fathers

To ensure that the voice of uninvolved fathers is included in planning for services, Your Message Media was asked to conduct a series of in-depth focus groups, offered as “listening sessions,” and one-on-one interviews with low-income, non-custodial African-American and Latino fathers in Alameda County—a subgroup of fathers who are among the most hard-to-reach for services.

The listening sessions were structured to be more open-ended and exploratory than is often the case with more formal focus groups. The intent was to uncover a range of experiences and issues that men who are disengaged with their children face as fathers in Alameda County, and to gain insight into the institutional, personal, and attitudinal obstacles they have experienced. Individual interviews were offered as an option to give fathers an opportunity to share their experiences in a private setting if they desired.

To recruit participants, flyers were distributed in a wide range of institutional and informal settings including churches, barber shops, street corners, parole offices, halfway houses, job training programs and other sites in African-American and Latino communities in the county. Incentives for participation included dinner and a \$75 stipend.

#### During October – December 2015:

- ▶ Three 2-hour listening sessions were held with 24 non-custodial fathers. The following sessions were held according to response rates:
  - Two sessions were held with 18 African-American fathers, ages 24-64
  - One session was held with 6 Latino fathers, ages 20-47
- ▶ Individual interviews, lasting 1-2 hours, were held with 7 additional fathers, 4 African American and 3 Latino, ages 27-53.
- ▶ Group sessions and interviews were recorded and transcribed and prevalent themes identified
- ▶ To help initiate the discussion and guide it to topics previously identified through national surveys and research about father involvement, fathers were asked to complete two short, one-page surveys prior to the group sessions and interviews. The first survey asked about common challenges to fathers' engagement with their children. Participants were asked to check off as many challenges as applied to them, to rank the three biggest challenges, and to note any additional challenges not listed. The second survey asked fathers to identify services they have used (e.g., parenting classes, couples counseling) and services they would be interested in using if they were available. 100% of participants completed both surveys.

Many of those who responded to the invitation to participate were seeking services to support their efforts to be involved with their children, or were looking for an opportunity to meet with other men and discuss the difficulties they were facing as fathers. When contacted to confirm his upcoming interview, one father said, **“I’ll be there. I’m hurting.”**

African-American father, age 21

**“This is perfect, you’re giving us a voice.”**

African-American, 27, father of 1



# SERVICE PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

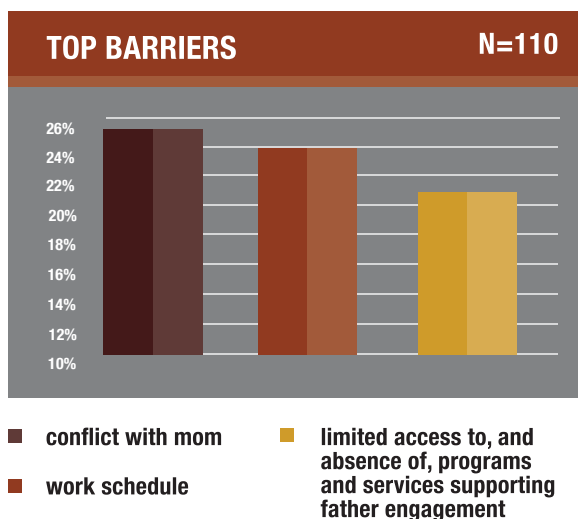
## Barriers to Father Involvement

**Conflict with the mother** was identified by providers as a significant barrier to fathers' involvement in the lives of their children. When mother-father relationships are strained, unhealthy, and/or combative, the time fathers spend with their children can be negatively affected.

Another top barrier identified by providers was **fathers' work schedules**. In many cases, fathers' traditional role as providers impacts their ability and availability to engage with their children.

Providers also felt that the **limited availability of community resources** that support fathers' engagement with their children was a major barrier. Describing ways in which their own programs were not father friendly, respondents noted that staff had not been trained to effectively engage fathers, programs were not geared towards supporting the needs of fathers, programs and services were offered during times when dads were working, and there was a minimal number of male service providers.

Other barriers mentioned by providers included **financial hardships, incarceration, lack of knowledge of the importance of the father's role, and an absence of trust in public systems**.



### Conflict with the mother

*"Some big barriers that come to mind are communication (communication with the mother or whomever has physical custody of the child)."*

*"...not being able to communicate positively and cooperate with the mother."*

*"Conflict/issues with mother impeding presence."*

### Fathers' work schedules

*"If he works a lot, he just doesn't have enough hours in the day to also engage with his child. And when he is home, he's tired."*

### Limited availability of community resources

*"[There is a] lack of programmatic focus for fathers' inclusion/engagement."*

*"We are a program whose name says Women, Infants and Children so—sometimes fathers may feel they do not have a place at the program."*

*"We don't include men in...pregnancy care/labor and delivery enough. We don't talk to the men when talking with the mother. We don't invite them to appointments/classes/school."*

### Other barriers

*"Lack of knowledge on the importance of fathers' involvement in children's development."*

*"Not knowing how to successfully work in and through systems, a lot of our Fathers have been incarcerated, [they] learned not to trust the system, [the mistrust] carries over to other systems."*





## Dads Want To Be Involved

The feedback received from fathers during the listening sessions and one-on-one interviews powerfully mirrored the comments of providers, and provided new insights as well. Many of the men passionately expressed a strong desire to be good fathers. In one listening session, where just one of eight men was married, seven said they were present at the birth of their children. One young father talked passionately about being released from jail and arriving at the hospital just five minutes before his son was born. Others spoke about their strong feelings of attachment for their children.

**“I don’t know how to deal with being away from my daughter. I remember waking up every morning with her in my arms. I don’t know how to deal with it. I love my daughter with all my heart.”** -Latino, 28, Father of 1

**“I have a child out there that I genuinely love that possibly doesn’t even know me. To some people that may be okay, but that’s unacceptable...”** -African-American, 27, Father of 1

The majority of the men expressed the desire to “be there” for their children. Either at the time of birth or later in their children’s lives, many realized that they had something else to live for—their children. Fatherhood was often credited with being a catalyst for making positive life changes, for themselves and for their children.

**“I’ve been doing everything right. I’ve got a job, I’ve got my own place. I don’t have no violations with my PO right now, no dirty ways, nothing. I got certificates, I’ve got letters of... everything I could possibly need from a bunch of different organizations. I’ve been doing this the whole time so I can go in there and they can see that I’m actually trying to do something different. My child is all I got, so it’s like I’ve got to do something right.”** -Latino, 28, Father of 1

As they sought to become more involved and supportive fathers, these men often faced formidable, interrelated life challenges, not the least of which was the perception of having to navigate these challenges alone, a perception shared by many of the providers surveyed, who felt that the limited availability of father-specific services and resources was a major barrier to fathers’ engagement with their children.

## Barriers To Involvement

### ► Co-Parenting Difficulties

When fathers were asked about barriers to involvement with their children, they identified many of the same barriers that providers identified, along with some additional ones. The most common challenge identified by fathers was “relationships,” including contentious relationships with the mothers of their children and maternal “gatekeeping” behaviors, experienced by 58% of the fathers. Discussion with fathers elicited a large number of comments reflecting high levels of frustration and confusion.

**“My number one [challenge] was...difficult relationship with the child’s mother...I’ve experienced all of these [other challenges]...but that’s the number one, because you gotta go through her to see the child. They [are] the ones that got primary custody and it [is] just real difficult.”** -African-American, 26, Father of 1

**“My first...child, I don’t talk to her... It’s just due to the fact that I don’t get along with the mother at all. We had to do drop offs at the police station....”** -African-American, 44, Father of 5

**“When she feel good, feel happy, she let me see the kids, but when she get into that mood swing, it’s police, restraining order, fight for primary rights, full custody. I’ve been through all that.”** -Latino, 38, Father of 4





# FATHERS' PERSPECTIVES

## ► Complex Circumstances

A common factor that surfaced during discussions of the parents' relationships was that many of the relationships began casually, with little or no discussion as to the eventuality of having children. Some fathers reported having a number of children with different women, resulting in complex custodial, financial, emotional, and logistical arrangements, with an expanded group of parents, step-parents, grandparents, and children, often in multiple geographic areas.

Geographic separation was identified by several respondents (45%) as a factor impeding involvement with their children. In all of the instances where this factor was cited, geographic separation was not the father's choice. Lack of resources for traveling, continued conflict with the mother, and legal barriers were identified as additional, contributing challenges.

**"I'm supposed to protect and provide for my [son] and [he] is being held from me not by my doing but by either the system or my counterpart. It's not right. What's best is both parents, and if that means going through therapy then that's the avenue that must be taken. But just complete separation and starting from there is unacceptable. It's painful."** -African-American, 27, Father of 1, whose former partner moved out of state with son

## ► Financial Issues

Another important set of challenges identified by the fathers involved financial issues. For 45% of the fathers, difficulties with providing financially for their child affected the amount of contact they sought. Many participants expressed great frustration about this issue, as the ability to provide for children is a large part of society's expectations of men – and men's expectations of themselves.

**"My number one issue is financial issues, not being able to provide for my daughter in Fairfield like I used to provide before I went to prison. I'm not as financially solvent as I used to be. I haven't been really seeking contact because of that."** -African-American, 45, Father of 4

For some men, economic pressures led them to having to work a number of low-paying jobs simultaneously, which exerted pressures on their relationships with their children and the children's mother.

Many of the men described childhoods marked by poverty and family instability, including absent fathers, exposure to substance abuse, conflict, and neglect. Participants shared that their early experiences often led to involvement in activities that resulted in arrests and incarceration. Many of the men had convictions and time served for misdemeanors and felonies in county jails and state prisons. For 61% of the fathers, past felony convictions limited their job opportunities. While aware of the debilitating impact of this challenge, few men knew about the possibility of clearing their record of felonies. Of those who were aware of this remedy, few had the resources to pursue it. Existence of a criminal record was also cited by many fathers as a significant factor in family court rulings against them in custody decisions.

**"Man, I been applyin' [for] hella jobs. You know, people say, 'I can get you in. I can get you in' and right when they do, a background check—drugs. I'm not an addict or anything like that, I stopped already, but it's my background. I'm a felon. They do background checks and when you be honest on an application, it don't work.... They turn you down."** -Latino, 24, Father of 4





## FATHERS' PERSPECTIVES

Child support orders created additional financial stressors. Difficulties in meeting child support orders was identified by 42% of the fathers as a contributing factor limiting involvement with their children. This was a troublesome issue for many participants. Already experiencing difficulty finding employment and making a living, the additional challenge of making child support payments, along with men's lack of resources or success in altering the child support order to fit their current financial circumstances, was cited as a major factor in keeping fathers from their children. Non-payment of child support and large arrears contributed to conflict and resentment between parents and was perceived as a potential barrier to securing visitation or custody.

**"I just feel that the child support thing shouldn't be the most important thing. If you want to be an active father, you should be able to be an active father, you know what I'm saying?"** -African-American, 26, Father of 1

**"I...have a crappy job working at Toys 'R' Us. So even if I'm up at 4 or 5 in the morning unloading the truck and stuff... when I get my check and...open...[the] envelope...I almost want to cry. I work 40 hours a week and then I look at my check and it's like 110 bucks. I can't live on that, you know what I mean? And they tell you it's child support. That's what's not fair about the whole thing. Why should me being a father be based off of financial status?"** -African-American, 45, Father of 4

**"I'm damn near paying a lot more in lawyer fees than I am in child support... In...[my] court case...[my lawyer] already made more than I've got to pay in child support every month and I could have spent that on my daughter and it's just like...crazy."** -Latino, 20, Father of 1

For a smaller number of participants (19%), not having the resources to pay for supervised visits with their children was identified as a barrier to father involvement.

### ► Mental Health and Substance Abuse Issues

Many participants talked about challenging experiences and conditions early in their lives including exposure to poverty, violence, stress, illegal drug use, drug dealing, and gang membership. These experiences contributed to difficulties with finding or maintaining a job and developing stable family relationships. Emotional and mental health issues were identified as a challenge to being an involved father by 58% of the participants, and alcohol and substance abuse issues by 48% of participants.

**"Drugs and alcohol, that's what mainly kept me separated from my son.... Now that I'm out, I'm free – free of drugs and of alcohol. And now we have a better relationship. It's comin' back together... 'Cause I'm sober!"** -African-American, 53, Father of 2

**"It gets to a point where you get old enough to where you finally realize—something finally clicks in your head all that shit that I did, all that time going to jail... it's really for nothing. Look what I've got... nothing but a...record, all of my friends are dead, the rest of them are in prison doing life or 20 years or 15 years and the rest either in Mexico or a junkie somewhere. I mean that shit was for nothing. It's a loss, man."** -Latino, 28, Father of 1

### ► Legal Issues

A number of legal issues were identified by the fathers as having an effect on father involvement and on custody and visitation arrangements. These included past and ongoing interactions with the criminal justice system, experienced by 48% of the fathers; restraining orders and other actions related to domestic violence issues (35%); and caregivers failing to abide by legal custody agreements (32%).



## FATHERS' PERSPECTIVES

Many fathers related specific instances in which they believed custody decisions turned against them due to their criminal records.

**“What I trip off of, they bring the criminal record up in a family court. This is just for custody of the child.... Why is it even relevant? But this is always brought up as an issue and it puts you in a bad light...when you go through the court system, it seems like...the deck is always stacked against you. Whatever you say gets shut down. It really hurt my heart.”** -African-American, 44, father of 5

**“It’s because we’re ‘criminals;’ I think that’s what it is. If you have a record, you know, they look at you like a criminal.”** -Latino, 38, father of 4

**“But when it came down to when me and the baby mama went to court, the thing that hurt me was already having a criminal record. They were like, how you gonna take care of a child when you can’t stay out of prison? Then when she up and went down to Texas, well, it’s like, are they allowed to do that? The courts didn’t help out with that.”** -African-American, 26, father of 2

Only a few participants said they were able to afford legal representation to help them respond to restraining orders or other legal issues. Some fathers related instances in which the courts and law enforcement did not help to enforce their rights to see their children.

**“I’m here to tell my side so maybe it can get to the right people so some things can be changed. People that want to see their children can’t see them. You go to see your child and they say, ‘Oh, they’re not here’...so you go back to court and the court doesn’t do anything about it. So that’s what I’m here for. Maybe somebody here can take this and get it changed. I just came from court today – 4 hours on this matter at the county, but the same thing.”** -African-American, 59, father of 3

**“Once I...[went] to court and...[participated in] mediation and all that, I was granted a few visits. It was only two hours a day...[and] it wasn’t even every day. They kept saying that the mother could only have her because I couldn’t provide breast milk, but the mother was working eight hour shifts so obviously she’s leaving milk behind for somebody to take care of her [daughter]. The judge wasn’t buying it though. He’s like, ‘She has to be with the mother.’ My lawyer was fighting but couldn’t get much.”** -Latino, 20, father of 1

### ► Lack of Role Model/Support from Own Father

Father absence was cited by 39% of participants as a factor negatively affecting their own involvement with their children, and having an unsupportive father by 16% of participants. During the group sessions and interviews, participants described the challenges they experienced growing up without a father present or with an unconnected or abusive father. While this topic was not identified as a top barrier to involvement with one’s children, it nevertheless elicited some of the most emotional discussions. The men described how the absence of positive father role models meant that they were on their own in terms of learning how to be a good parent. As noted above, one challenge identified by providers was fathers’ lack of knowledge about aspects of fathering and a father’s role.

**“I didn’t know how to be a parent, not because he [my father] wasn’t in my life, but I didn’t have any examples in my life... I wasn’t sure what was going on, so when my kid turned 6 [months] I was worried he couldn’t walk. I thought he was supposed to be walking (laughter).... So it was just...my lack of knowledge being a parent. I just learned how to do it myself.”** -African-American, 26, father of 2

**“I’m not trying to be no deadbeat like my dad was. He wasn’t there. He didn’t teach me how to be a man. The streets taught me how to be a man.”** -African-American, 38, father of 4



# SERVICE PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

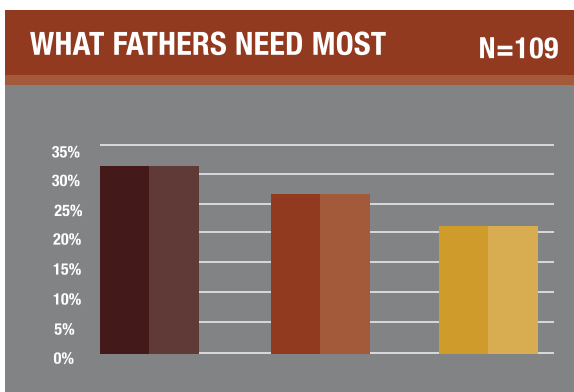
## What Do Fathers Need Most?

Survey respondents identified **father-specific supports and resources** as one of the things that fathers need most in order to be engaged parents. Providers felt that the needs of fathers are unique; in order to effectively engage and serve fathers, services and programs must be tailored to meet those unique needs. This means that programs must be created intentionally and specifically to serve fathers.

Providers also felt that **parenting education** and opportunities for father-child interaction would help to enhance fathers' knowledge of child development and their understanding of how fathers can support children's development.

Fathers also need a better understanding of **the importance of their role**, according to providers. Provider responses suggest that if fathers knew how important their role was, they would be more engaged and play a more significant role.

Other needs mentioned by respondents included **acceptance and acknowledgement, co-parenting education and support, mentorship and quality employment.**



- father-specific supports & resources
- parenting education
- better understanding of the importance of their role

### Father-specific supports and resources

*"Fathers need appropriate supports whether it's an opportunity to talk about their concerns to specific services tailored to fathers."*

*"Opportunities to interact with their kids in low-stress, low-stakes environments."*

*"Opportunities need to be created when the men can bond and be able to create positive memories with their children."*

### Parenting education

*"Education/support that specifically focuses on fathers and their role in the family."*

*"Examples of how to be more engaged parents that reflect the father's role (which looks different than a mother)"*

### Importance of the father's role

*"...knowledge on how their absence affects their children."*

*"Feeling that they are an important figure/role model in their lives and their presence is needed and wanted."*

### Other needs

*"Extended supportive networks of encouragement, as sounding boards and as role models of hope."*

*"Linkage to a community of fathers that place their children as priorities in their lives."*

*"Outreach that acknowledges how they are different than mothers, but equally important in the lives of their children."*





# FATHERS' PERSPECTIVES

## What Do Fathers Need Most?

### ► Father-Specific Supports and Resources

The fathers expressed a strong desire for services and supports that would help them become better fathers. A major contributor to participants feeling alone as fathers was their perception that the level of services for fathers in the county is inadequate compared to those available for mothers, and not geared to helping men like themselves in their role as fathers.

**“Y’all go to courthouses and listen to what’s going on and hear how they treat the fathers, you’re gonna see, hey, this is what we need. ...they don’t want to hear from the father. And a lot of times, the father is the better parent, providing for the child, because the mother may be on crack and the father might not be, but the judge don’t want to hear nothing about it.”** -African-American, 59, father of 3

**“You’ve got to really dig, dig, dig and keep pushing, pushing, pushing in order to get something done, but it seems like everywhere I turn to, they just close the door on a person.... The system needs to work for us a little bit. I know we ain’t all angels. There’s a lot of men that do damage out there, but there’s a lot of good men, too, that care about their children.”** -Latino, 47, father of 6

**“That is exactly how I feel because nobody—who can I ask for information? The way I feel is like nobody sees how much I be trying. I be trying to be a good dad, that’s what I’m saying, but it seems like nobody seems to see it.”** -Latino, 28, father of 1

Topping the list of services and programs the men would try if they were made available, were the following:

- Fathers’ support groups and parenting classes
- Legal help for custody and child support issues, and assistance with removing felony convictions
- Job training, counseling, and placement services

**“The fathers gotta have support, not just the mothers.... In most cases the father is underserved.”** -African-American, 26, father of 1

**“I would love that [a fathers’ support group]. There’s a lot of us struggling with different types of things, but we love our kids. We want to be there for them – you know, how to become a good father. That’s all I want to do.”** -Latino, 28, father of 1

**“One thing I would like to see is legal help for custody and child support [applause from group]...some discounted legal services that would help facilitate fathers, the father and child, you know?”** -African-American, 52, father of 2

### ► Multi-Purpose Support and Service Center

Participants also expressed interest in having a multi-purpose support and service center specifically for fathers in the community.

**“[A] Dad’s House? Yeah, of course. ...you can Google right now and there’s plenty of women’s shelters, support groups for a variety of things. The only thing for men is drug and alcohol, abusive, negative things.... [Maybe] you’re going through some problems with your son and you need help and you’re a felon and this is like, ‘Look, we’re not going to judge you.’”** -African-American, 27, father of 1

**“I can see a lot of...[these services] being offered, all at the same time. It’s not just somewhere I’d go, I’d encourage other guys to go, all the time...[And] I love the idea of being a mentor for younger guys.”** -African-American, 26, father of 1



# SERVICE PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

## Successful Father Engagement Strategies

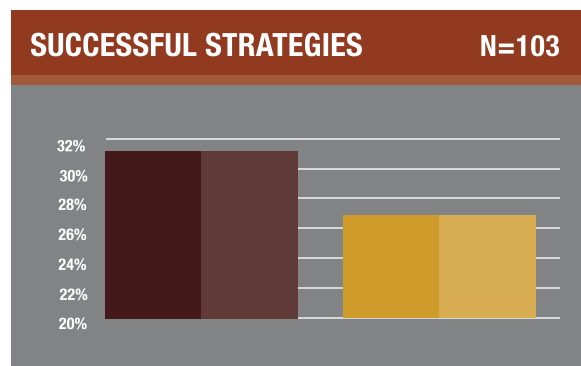
Providers described some of the successful father engagement strategies they are currently using, including offering services and programs **specifically for fathers** (e.g., support groups for fathers), as well as altering their general services to be more inclusive and supportive of fathers (**father-friendly services**):

*“We recruit males and fathers to become facilitators for teaching our curriculum; invite fathers as guests to class to share experiences.”*

*“Engage families in sports/recreational activities for kids and their parents.”*

*“[Offer] evening services for fathers that include child care, dinner and transportation when needed.”*

*“Activities that are more kinetic or hands on have helped fathers ‘bond’ and be much more open to hearing feedback and discussing issues/topics.”*



■ father-specific programming

■ father friendly services

The importance of **acknowledging and appreciating the role of fathers and father figures** was mentioned several times.

*“Confirming their importance in their children’s lives, equal to the importance of mothers, and offering mini examples of positive communications between parents.”*

*“Treat them as a parent, instead of asking them to prove that they are.”*

*“...reinforce fathers’ efforts, how much their child loves them and how the child show[s] it, how what the father is doing supports their child’s development...”*

## What More Do Providers and Agencies Need to Better Support Fathers’ Engagement?

In addition to the father-friendly practices they are currently using, survey respondents identified a need for additional **father friendly services** to support both their own work and that of their agency. Providers highlighted the need for:

- ▶ Offering services at times that are conducive to father participation
- ▶ Including images of fathers on materials and in spaces where families are served
- ▶ Recruiting more male service providers
- ▶ Conducting father specific outreach
- ▶ Training staff on how to be more father-friendly
- ▶ Securing additional funding to support changes

*“I think that all providers need help in understanding how to engage fathers.”*

*“...creating a more welcoming environment for father— Pictures on the wall, bathroom where they can go if they have their child with them...”*

*“If I were to dream big...male infant development specialist, male mental health workers.”*

Even more than father-friendly services, access to **father-specific supports** was identified by providers as a key need for their own work (40% of respondents), as well as the work of their agency (34% of respondents). Providers described a need for services and programs to be set up to address the unique needs of fathers.

*“Have more functions, classes, workshops focus on fathers as care takers.”*

*“...a special unit focused on men/fathers that is not tucked under the umbrella maternal and child health.”*

*“Being more intentional in targeting fathers groups rather than hoping to get a few fathers in any parent/ caregiver workshops.”*

Providers also noted that they needed more awareness of the services currently in place in the community to serve fathers and address their unique needs.

*“To know more resources and people who can be of support for our programs and the families we work with.”*

*“Knowing referral sources for other services that could meet fathers’ needs.”*



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OUR COUNTY

Based on the results from the provider survey and the focus groups and interviews conducted with fathers, as well as lessons learned over the past three years from the ACFC learning community, members of the Fathers Corps Leadership Team drafted the following set of **policy and programmatic recommendations**. Leadership Team members included representatives from Alameda County Public Health Department, Alameda County Social Services Agency, First 5 Alameda County, Through the Looking Glass, and UCSF Benioff's Children's Hospital.

The barriers some fathers experience when attempting to engage in the lives of their children are complex and deeply rooted in the fabric of our community and family service systems. Effectively responding to the issues that surfaced requires the support of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and practice change on the part of government agencies, family court systems, community-based organizations, and family support programs.

- ▶ **OFFER** family and father-specific services after hours to accommodate the work schedules of fathers
- ▶ **TRAIN** family service providers on how to engage fathers and father figures in a father-friendly manner that welcomes full participation, and increase the number of male staff within family service organizations at all strategic levels
- ▶ **PROVIDE** ongoing programs, through Alameda County Family Court and family service systems, that support fathers and mothers to develop and maintain healthy co-parenting relationships
- ▶ **ADEQUATELY FUND** and staff County expungement resources to remove barriers to employment and housing opportunities for eligible fathers and father figures with past criminal convictions
- ▶ **ENSURE** family service program models funded by and contracted out with County funds include a fatherhood component and are effectively engaging and supporting the needs of fathers/father figures
- ▶ **REQUIRE** that father friendly principles be reflected in measurable contract outcomes for family services providers doing business with Alameda County agencies
- ▶ **CREATE** an Inter-Agency Fathers and Families Council to monitor proposed and existing policies and practices within the family court system, Social Services Agency, Health Care Services Agency and Probation
- ▶ **REVIEW** the 'best-interest-of-the-child' standard utilized by Family Court staff and the judicial bench to ensure that irrelevant criminal histories are not given undue evidentiary weight by the staff against fathers or father figures

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**For more information and full reports visit:**  
[www.first5alameda.org/alameda-county-fathers-corps](http://www.first5alameda.org/alameda-county-fathers-corps)

**KEVIN BREMOND - FATHERS CORPS ADMINISTRATOR**  
[KEVIN.BREMOND@FIRST5ALAMEDACOUNTY.ORG](mailto:KEVIN.BREMOND@FIRST5ALAMEDACOUNTY.ORG)  
TEL: 510.227.6932

**GARY THOMPSON - ALAMEDA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPT.**  
[GARY.THOMPSON@ACGOV.ORG](mailto:GARY.THOMPSON@ACGOV.ORG)  
TEL: 510.667.4343

