



2014 FIRST 5 STAFF DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT

21ST CENTURY FATHERHOOD: ENGAGING FATHERS TO STRENGTHEN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

First 5 San Mateo County, Chonne Sherman, Communication & Operations Liaison, csherman@smcgov.org

Fatherhood Collaborative of San Mateo County, Vice-Chair and Program, Policy and Planning Committee Chair

SUPPORTING THE WHOLE CHILD WITHIN THE WHOLE FAMILY – FATHERS MATTER

Programs aimed to improve the health and well-being of young children and families often fail to address a key family member. It is not possible to completely address the needs of women, infants and children in families without addressing the needs of a child's father, whether or not he resides with the child's mother. Historically, the rare data collected about fathers were based on maternal report, while fathers themselves remained a virtually unheard voice.¹ Yet, fathers play a unique, significant and irreplaceable role in influencing a child's development. To "support the whole child within the whole family"² and significantly advance the strengthening of families and communities in San Mateo County, the following must occur: 1) Convene individuals who walk the halls of influence to advocate and affect policy change that includes the needs of fathers in the structure and delivery models of family services provided by county agencies and community organizations; and 2) The intentional fostering of constructive engagement of fathers in the life-long care and upbringing of their children.

PROJECT: COUNTYWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT - FATHERS IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

FUNDER: First 5 San Mateo County (F5SMC)

PARTNERS: Fatherhood Collaborative of San Mateo County; San Mateo County Health System (Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Program (MCAH); Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center

CONTRACT: July 2001-June 2003 BUDGET: \$50,000

PROJECT SCOPE: Realizing the paucity of data available concerning fatherhood, F5SMC funded a county-wide needs assessment to ask fathers of young children about their personal and service-related needs in order to assist local stakeholders in expanding and improving services for families in San Mateo County. The survey did not specifically address possible solutions to problems or issues, but rather focused on the identification of personal and service-related needs of fathers.

METHODS: Both quantitative and qualitative strategies were utilized in order to collect data that represented the views of fathers of young children (ages 0-5 years) in San Mateo County. A 35-question confidential survey was developed, piloted and administered to collect quantitative data from fathers including: demographic information; general needs, services-related needs, and health care needs; available community support services; and their role identification as fathers. A total of 204 fathers completed the survey. In addition, 80 fathers and community representatives participated in nine focus groups which provided qualitative data on parenting needs, social supports, and community resources.

RESULTS: A complex set of needed services for fathers in the county emerged from the assessment, including: father-child activities; parks and recreational activities; housing, employment, parenting classes; support groups; high quality, affordable childcare; and legal assistance; one-half of participants felt the county was doing a good or excellent job in supporting fathers.

CONCLUSION: The assessment was to collect data *about fathers, from fathers*, in order to shape programming to better serve families and to perhaps serve as a model for other programs interested in improving services for fathers and families. During focus groups fathers generated ideas for improved county services for fathers, including: 1) Fatherhood Resource Center providing comprehensive services including housing, legal aid, case management, parenting education and support groups in one central location; 2) Creating a Young Dad's Council that would help serve the needs and advocate for all fathers in San Mateo County; and 3) Developing a strategic advertising campaign on television, radio and in print media that focuses on showing fathers as competent parents, leaders in the community, and important in their children's lives.

Additional feedback included: *Negative perception of non-custodial fathers* – the negative perception of a few non-custodial "deadbeat dads" carried over to all fathers, regardless of their involvement both financially and personally in their child's life; and, *Lack of father focused services* – A need for father-focused serves was repeatedly mentioned as family services were considered by fathers to be focused exclusively on the mothers.³

OVER

¹ Buckelew SM, Pierrre H, Chabra A. What fathers need: A countywide assessment of the needs of fathers of young children. *Matern Child Health J* 2006;10:285-91.

² 2015-2020 First 5 San Mateo County Strategic Plan

³ A Needs Assessment, The Fatherhood Collaborative of San Mateo County, 2003

IMPACTS: Fatherhood Involvement Program: The 2003 Needs Assessment was the foundation for the Fatherhood Involvement Program (FIP), funded by F5SMC and administered by the 4Cs-Child Care Coordinating Council. The goals of the three year FIP project (2005-2007) were to provide comprehensive, father-focused programs and support services through referrals, parent education, and support groups for fathers as well as to improve the social and emotional health of young children by supporting Fathers and Father Figures in becoming more involved parents. As a result of the FIP services, participating fathers and male caregivers will become more involved in the lives of their young children and families.

During the 3 years of its existence, the FIP was able to assess many of the challenges facing fathers in San Mateo County and learned that more collaboration, better resources, more advertising, broadening the net of fathers seeking service, (beyond 0-5 yrs.) as well as uniting other community-based organizations with a goal of serving men will allow for a larger impact of services for fathers in need and in doing so, will allow men to become better fathers resulting in stronger communities.⁴

The FIP 2008 Final Report and all documents referenced in this document can be found at www.first5sanmateo.org.

Fatherhood Collaborative of San Mateo County (<http://www.fatherhoodcollaborative.org>): Upon completion of the 2003 Fatherhood Needs Assessment, the Fatherhood Collaborative has successfully established its name and has effectively engaged fathers and individuals in the community for over 12 years with events including, but not limited to the Dad & Me Series, Annual Dads Count Breakfast and Fatherhood Conferences targeting community needs. The following is a brief overview of programming:

Dad & Me Series:

- *Dad & Me @ the Park:* Annual free picnic the day before Father's Day – BBQ, games and activities, music, wall climbing, kite flying, resource and business booths, First 5 California Hands on Health Van, etc., and presentation of annual Fatherhood Awards. Attendance: 2013 - 700+; 2014 - 500+
- *Dad & Me @ the Library:* Puppet show highlighting the connection between fathers and their child's literacy; 24 shows annually at every city and county library in San Mateo County. Attendance: 2013-14 – Dads: 491; children: 1094; Moms/Other Adults: 487; Total: 2072 (Duplicated, Data provided by San Mateo County Library System)
- *Dad & Me @ the Pool:* Focus on teaching men and their children life safety in the water in underserved areas. Attendance: 2014 (March-June) - Families: 29; Dads: 27; Children: 51; Moms/Other Adults: 16; Total: 94

Conferences:

- *2014-“Stepping Up: The Urgency of Fatherhood”* - How public agencies and community organizations are supporting fathers and fostering a “Father-Friendly” approach to services including a panel discussion around the gaps in services for fathers in San Mateo County. **On October 29, 2014 the Fatherhood Collaborative will convene a follow-up community meeting to discuss and map gaps in services for fathers as the first step in furthering partnerships to increase direct services for fathers.*

FIRST 5 SAN MATEO COUNTY – ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING FATHERS – PAST AND PRESENT

SPONSORSHIP AND EVENT SUPPORT: Provided scholarships to direct service agencies to attend Fatherhood Conferences including: The 2011 “The Impact of Incarceration on Families.” Service League attendee reported, “Communities can play a part in stemming rather than perpetuating the intergenerational cycle of crime and incarceration by promoting policies that recognize the impact of incarceration on family and community life (arrest protocols, family visitation, public housing reform) and by providing more supportive resources (such as parenting skills classes).” Sponsors Dad & Me @ the Park and Dads Count Breakfast events; First 5 Staff Liaison provides communication outreach, event planning and implementation support (2010 to present).

PROGRAMMING: Family Connections FY2014-2015: Engage fathers and male caregivers in their young children's growth and development; increase father and male caregiver active participation rate in Nurturing Families from The Start Program

EVALUATION: 2013 Parent Story Project

2014 STRATEGIC PLANNING: F5SMC aspires to strike a good balance between funding effective direct services and being a catalyst for longer-term systemic changes that will improve the prospects of children and families for years to come. As part of First 5's 2014 Strategic Planning Process, the Commission approved the following for inclusion in the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan:

Core Values - We believe that our work must:

- **Support the whole child within the whole family:** We understand that young children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development are interdependent, and that children grow and learn within their family relationships and the larger community.
- **Embrace the importance of fathers and male role models in the healthy development of children:** We expect intentional inclusion of fathers/male role models and consideration of their needs within the structure and delivery models of family services and supports.

With the completion of our 2014 Strategic Planning process, F5SMC through the newly established Early Childhood Policy Cabinet and staff efforts in the focus area of Family Support and Engagement, will lead and work with county agencies and community partners to advocate and develop policies and strategies to support fathers in San Mateo County.

⁴ Father Involvement Program Final Report, Child Care Coordinating Council, First 5 San Mateo County, 2007.