



Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaboratives

**Fatherhood Education, Empowerment
and Development Program (FEED)**

Year One Evaluation Report

Compiled by Child Trends



Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Fatherhood Education, Empowerment and Development Program (FEED)

Year One Evaluation Report

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ABSTRACT

Background: In October of 2006, with funding from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, the Healthy Families/Thriving Communities (HFTC) Collaborative Council launched Fatherhood Education, Empowerment, and Development (FEED) program. Located in Washington D.C., the FEED program currently provides services to a diverse group of fathers in the D.C. metropolitan area aimed at promoting responsible parenting and strengthening fathers' relationships with their children. In February of 2007, the HFTC Collaborative Council contracted with Child Trends to evaluate selected components of its fatherhood initiative.

Purpose: The purpose of the current report is to summarize the first year of implementation and program start-up findings in the context of the program's objectives and goals. Results can be interpreted as findings for the universe of fathers served in the first year of the program enrolled between January 2007 and September 30, 2007. The report summarizes findings from two (2) key evaluation questions that would support efforts to develop the program:

- (1) How is the *FEED* program implemented and how does it operate? What are the features and characteristics of the program? What services are offered and how is the program designed? What types of services does the program provide, and how often? How did the program structure program activities? What are the most serious challenges to program implementation? What strategies are successful, and what lessons might be learned for subsequent years of the intervention?
- (2) Who are the program's target participants? What are the characteristics of fathers who are served by the program? What are their service needs?

Setting: Washington, D.C.

Subjects: A total of 204 fathers enrolled in the FEED program between January and September, 2007.

Intervention: Program activities consist of intensive case management for fathers, parenting skills-training for fathers, developing and supporting fathers as mentors, working with schools to involve fathers as volunteers, staff training, and outreach and marketing. The intervention relied on the use of (1) case management, (2) the National Center for Fathering's "Quenching the Father Thirst" Curriculum, and (3) the WatchDOGS (Dads of Great Students) Curriculum.

Research Design: The first evaluation includes aspects of an implementation study (focus groups and a review of program data from an MIS system). A more rigorous implementation and evaluation design are planned for subsequent years.

Data Collection and Analysis: The evaluation included data collected from focus groups with fathers and analyses of MIS data. MIS data were analyzed and focus group information was summarized by themes.

Findings: A total of 204 fathers enrolled in the study between January and September, 2007. The majority of participants (95 percent) was born in the United States and speaks English as their primary language (98 percent). Most fathers were not married at the time of enrollment (87.8 percent), and more than half of fathers (54.7 percent) had 2 or more children. Approximately 75 percent of fathers enrolled in the study had earned a high school diploma or higher, while about one quarter had less than a high school education. Fewer than 50 percent of the participants were employed for wages or in school full-time.

In terms of program experience and expectations, a little more than 10 percent of fathers (11.7 percent) had attended a fatherhood program prior to enrolling in the HFTC fatherhood program. Seven out of ten fathers (70.7 percent) reported attending the fatherhood program to learn about being a better father. Over half of fathers (53.5 percent) chose to attend to learn how to improve their personal relationships. A little more than 5 percent (6.6 percent) joined the program at the request of their partner.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In October of 2006, with funding from the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Assistance, the Healthy Families/Thriving Communities (HFTC) Collaborative Council launched the Fatherhood Education, Empowerment, and Development (FEED) program. Located in Washington D.C., the FEED program currently provides services to a diverse group of fathers in the D.C. metropolitan area aimed at promoting responsible parenting and strengthening fathers' relationships with their children. The FEED program was implemented by the HFTC Collaborative Council in partnership with seven nonprofit organizations, each of which operates in a specific target region in the District of Columbia. The seven nonprofit organizations include the Columbia Heights/Shaw Family Support Collaborative; the East River Family Strengthening Collaborative; the Edgewood/Brookland Family Support Collaborative; the Far Southeast Family Strengthening Collaborative; the Georgia Avenue/Rock Creek East Family Support Collaborative; the North Capitol Collaborative, Inc; and the South Washington/West of the River Family Strengthening Collaborative.

The program is guided by a theory of change and an underlying model that the program's target population is at an exceptionally high risk for challenges to effective fathering due to high rates of unemployment, a disproportionate number of single female headed households, and high rates of child poverty. The intervention with fathers consists of the use of (1) case management, (2) the National Center for Fathering's "Quenching the Father Thirst" Curriculum, (3) the WatchDOGS (Dads of Great Students) Curriculum, and (4) training for front-line social services staff. Elements of FEED include intensive case management for fathers, parenting skills training for fathers, developing and supporting fathers as mentors, working with schools to involve fathers as volunteers, outreach and marketing, and staff training including teaching front-line staff the principles, policies, and practices to engage fathers in their children's lives.

In February of 2007, the HFTC Collaborative Council contracted with Child Trends, a non-profit, non-partisan research organization located in the District of Columbia, to evaluate its fatherhood initiative. The evaluation addressed two (2) key questions that would support efforts to develop the program:

1. How is the *FEED* program implemented and how does it operate? What are the features and characteristics of the program? What services are offered and how is the program designed? What types of services does the program provide, and how often? How did the program structure program activities? What are the most serious challenges to program implementation? What strategies are successful, and what lessons might be learned for subsequent years of the intervention?
2. Who are the program's target participants? What are the characteristics of fathers who are served by the program? What are their service needs?

This report summarizes the first year of implementation and program start-up findings in the context of the program's objectives and goals. Results can be interpreted as findings from the universe of fathers served by the first year of the program between January 1, 2007 and September 30, 2007.

EVALUATION DESIGN

The first year evaluation of the program includes elements of an *implementation* study. A more rigorous outcomes study is planned for the second year.

- The *implementation* evaluation included data from a variety of sources including focus groups with fathers and analyses of MIS data.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Participant Demographics

- 204 fathers enrolled in the study between January and September 2007.
- Approximately 95 percent of participating fathers were born in the United States, and 98 percent of fathers spoke English at home.
- While the majority of fathers were not currently in a relationship (43.1%), comparable numbers of fathers were either in a romantic relationship (18.3%), cohabiting with their partner (17.8%), or married (12.2%).
- Over half (54.7) of all fathers had 2 or more children. Almost all fathers (92%) lived with at least one child under the age of 18.
- About three-quarters of study participants (76%) had obtained a high school diploma or higher, while 23.5 percent had not received any degree.
- More than half of fathers (53.3%) were unemployed at the start of the study. 37.4 percent of fathers were employed, and 6.7 were self-employed. Only 2.1 percent were full-time students.
- During the 12 months prior to the program, almost a third of fathers (32.4%) had earned an income of \$5,000 or below.

Other Characteristics of Fathers Served

- 11.7 percent of participants had attended a fatherhood program prior to enrolling in the HFTC fatherhood program.
- Seven out of ten fathers (70.7%) reported attending the fatherhood program to learn about being a better father. Over half of fathers (53.5%) chose to attend to learn how to improve their personal relationships. A little more than 5 percent (6.6%) joined the program at the request of their partner.
- Nearly two-thirds (67.2%) expected to receive parenting classes from the HFTC fatherhood program and 47 percent expected to participate in family activities. Similar proportions of fathers either expected to receive educational services (21.2%); parent group meetings (31.8%); social service support (38.4%); and employment help (39.9%).

Focus Group Findings

Focus groups were conducted with fathers to yield valuable information about their perceptions of the first year of implementation and program start-up. The focus group focused on issues related to program goals, program context and involvement, program structure, program activities, perceptions and challenges of fatherhood, father-child relationship quality, and father involvement.

- According to fathers, the main goals of the program were to help men become better fathers, to overcome barriers to being an effective father, and to unify the community's men.
- The main barriers to meeting program goals include unemployment, a lack of job support, conflict with mothers, and legal issues.
- Fathers suggested providing counseling and legal support services for themselves and their partners.
- Fathers cited sensitive and helpful staff as the major difference between the HFTC fatherhood program and their past program experiences.

- Overall, participants felt the program curriculum met their needs as fathers, and felt that all sessions were helpful in improving their parenting skills.
- Participants believed the program could be strengthened by reaching out to young men, using past program participants as mentors, providing additional resource such as financial aid or aid in securing housing, and offering additional program meeting times during the day.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Across the varied evaluation tasks, there is a positive portrait of the FEED program and preliminary support for parenting and family relationship based programs and their abilities to positively engage low-income fathers and their families. Parenting and family relationship based programs serving low-income urban, men are likely to attract many men. However, our study shows that these men are not a homogeneous group. These men had different service needs, have moved in and out of employment (both full time and part-time), and while some have had estranged relationships with their children, some have also been a part of their children's lives. Differences in the backgrounds and experiences of these fathers and their relationships with partners and children influenced their experiences about the program and the extent to which they sought program services.

The results of this first year of evaluation findings have implications for subsequent years of program implementation. As such, the recommendations that follow are derived based on a synthesis of findings from the focus group with fathers. On the basis of these findings, the following are factors that may be considered to improve program delivery and implementation for subsequent years in the context of program goals and objectives.

- *Counseling Services*

Fathers suggested providing counseling services and mental health support for their child's mother as well as providing co-parenting support. They felt that supporting the child's mother could alleviate relational conflict between themselves and their child's mother. The program might consider hiring staff members with psychiatric and legal backgrounds to address such concerns.

- *Inter-Collaborative Partnerships*

Focus group participants suggested partnerships among collaboratives. For example, participants thought fathers who completed the program could support fathers beginning the program across the collaboratives. The program might consider continuing to build partnerships with other collaboratives as well as outside agencies.

- *Extend Job Network Resources*

Fathers mentioned that it would benefit them if the program offered a more extensive job network. They also thought the fatherhood programs could create a job bank across the collaboratives, unifying employment information and job contacts.

- *Time of Activities*

While the majority of fathers found the existing meeting times sufficient, some mentioned it would be helpful to include a morning program meeting time for fathers working evenings. The program may want to consider including additional and more diverse meeting times for its participants.

- *Additional Resources*

Finally, fathers thought it would be beneficial for the program to provide transportation, housing, and legal help to fathers in need. Transportation reimbursement, metro passes, or bus tokens could help fathers without transportation to attend meetings and job interviews. Fathers also mentioned help securing transitional housing and legal help for child support issues.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

In recent years, evidence has increasingly become available that fathers are important to children and families (Day & Lamb, 2004), and that fatherhood intervention programs can be effective; and, if successfully implemented, can positively impact the lives of fathers, their partners, and children (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007). As a result, interventions to improve parenting skills among fathers have been the focus of a number of Federal initiatives (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007). These programs have worked to improve fathers' well-being, improve the co-parenting relationship between mothers and fathers, and to improve overall family well-being in order to enhance responsible fathering and ultimately improve outcomes for children. Many programs are also aimed at improving men's education and employment to ensure that fathers become a primary and positive source of both economic and social support for their offspring.

Low-income and under educated fathers face higher risks for being uninvolved fathers. An inability to find jobs and maintain consistent employment often harms their potential as involved parents, and encourages conflicted and marginal relationships with their partners and their families, leaving gaps in our understanding of their contributions as parents (Roy, 2004). In addition to the failure to obtain work, many fathers lack the skills and knowledge to develop positive relationships with their partners, share parenting with the mothers of their children, and create a home environment that facilitates positive outcomes for children (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Roy, 2005). Although a body of work has slowly emerged supporting the importance of fathers to children's development (Lamb, 1997), the impact of fathers' participation in family based programming and their influence on child well-being remains unclear. Findings are inconclusive regarding which approaches are most effective, which outcomes can be influenced, and what are the most effective implementation strategies.

The *Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Fatherhood Education, Empowerment, and Development (FEED)* program represents a new vision for fathers as an intervention that can improve fathers' parenting skills, and ultimately improve father involvement with children. The FEED Initiative offers services in Washington, D.C., and currently offers services to a diverse group of fathers aimed at training men on skills to help them become responsible fathers, strengthening the relationship between fathers and the mothers of their children, improving fathers' education and employment skills, improving communication and co-parenting skills, and improving overall father, child and family well-being. The program currently uses the *Quenching the Father Thirst: Developing a Dad* curriculum (Williams, 2003), the *WatchDOGS* curriculum (Moore, 2000), and the National Family Preservation Training Program curriculum (National Family Preservation Network, 2001), along with intensive case management to serve a diverse group of fathers.

In February, 2007 the Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaborative Council contracted with Child Trends, a non-profit research organization located in Washington, D.C. to evaluate its FEED initiative, funded by the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Assistance (OFA). The first year evaluation addressed two (2) key questions that would support efforts to develop the program:

1. How is the *FEED* program implemented and how does it operate? What are the features and characteristics of the program? What services are offered and how is the program designed? What types of services does the program provide, and how often? How did the program structure program activities? What are the most serious challenges to program implementation? What strategies are successful, and what lessons might be learned for subsequent years of the intervention?
2. Who are the program's target participants? What are the characteristics of fathers who are served by the program? What are their service needs?

1.2. Study Context

Wards 1 through 8 in Washington D.C. The HFTC Collaborative provides the FEED program services to all 8 Wards in the District of Columbia. Fathers in Washington D.C. are at an exceptionally high risk for challenges to effective fathering. Over half of the households in the District of Columbia are female-headed households with children, with one third of children living in poverty (DC Kids Count Collaborative, 2005). There is also evidence to suggest that many fathers of the children in these families are not meeting their financial obligations. While ward specific data are not available, the Association for Children for Enforcement of Support (ACES) reports that in 2005, the District of Columbia had a child support collection rate of only 22 percent (compared to a national average of 53 percent). This failure to meet financial obligations could be attributed in part to high rates of incarceration and unemployment. A disproportionate number of African American men in the District of Columbia are also involved with the criminal justices system (D.C. Department of Corrections, 1997). Incarceration results in prolonged father absence and impedes stable employment. By 2000 (the most recent year for which statistics are available), the unemployment rate in the District of Columbia was 6.8 percent, compared to the 2000 national average of 4 percent (D.C. Office of Planning, 2000). Teen pregnancy is also prevalent across the wards of D.C. Young fathers are often the fathers of children born to teen mothers (Mincy et. al., 2004) and are the individuals most in need of interventions to strengthen their roles as fathers. Despite a lack of data on other fatherhood trends, the selected characteristics of fathers in the District of Columbia clearly emphasize a need for the proposed services in this area.

1.3. Theory of Change and Logic Model

The developers of the FEED initiative anticipate that their program will generate positive short and long-term effects for unemployed or low income fathers in terms of their increased knowledge of parenting and co-parenting skills, job skills and employment resources, improved father-mother relationships, and ultimately increased positive involvement in their children's lives. In this regard, staff developed a logic model that identified program inputs, activities, and desired outcomes. The logic model framework is illustrated in **Appendix A, Figure 1 (p. 32)**.

Assumptions. The common assumption underlying this model is that the program's target population (fathers in Washington, D.C.) are under-employed and unemployed and have limited participation in family relationship based programming and parenting programs. Improved and more accessible parenting information and program supports for fathers and mothers will improve father's individual well-being, parenting skills and the co-parental relationship, which in turn will be associated with positive outcomes for children. Children benefit from greater parental involvement by both fathers and mothers. This conceptual framework provides a foundation for the identification of program activities, inputs, outputs and outcomes for fathers served by the program.

Activities. The following is a list of activities and services offered by the program during the various sessions:

- Quenching the Father Thirst fathering groups;
- WatchDOGS school volunteer program;
- Citywide training on father-centered practice and policy;
- Public information media campaign;
- Intensive case management services;
- Family group conferencing.

Outcomes. The following are outcomes (short and intermediate term) expected for fathers served by the program:

- Fathers are responsible parents and contribute positively to the well-being of their children;
- Communities and social service providers encourage fathers to play a positive role in their children's lives;
- Fathers improve their relationships with the mothers of their children.

1.4. Participant Recruitment and Enrollment

Recruitment. A number of strategies were used to enroll fathers and their families during the first year of the program. Recruitment information was posted in community gathering places, such as churches, community centers, grocery stores, housing complexes in areas of high proportions of minority and low-income inhabitants. Moreover, staff contacted public housing facilities and churches to recruit participants. Fliers were also posted in strategic places throughout the District of Columbia. Such places included barbershops, grocery stores, bus stops and others. Participants completing the program were also encouraged to refer others. Other programs serving low-income families also assisted with subject recruitment.

Enrollment. Upon enrollment in the program, fathers completed an intake enrollment form where they reported demographic information such as their race/ethnicity, relationship status, requested services, number and age of children, and date of registration.

1.5. Data Collection

Prior to data collection for purposes of the evaluation, Child Trends obtained approval for its data collection procedures from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) (IRC Approval # 07168-01). An overarching concern was the need to protect the confidentiality, rights and privileges of study participants who participated in the evaluation. Obtaining the approval from an IRB ensures that the rights, privileges, and confidential information shared by study respondents would not in any way be compromised by the methods and procedures used during data collection. In addition, the study used active consents, so only fathers who provided consent participated in the study. High levels of consent were achieved because FEED program staff included the consent forms in enrollment packets containing information and worked closely with fathers as they enrolled in the program. Child Trends prepared the IRB protocols and study guides for approval including the consent forms that were used to obtain approval from participants who participated in the multiple components of the evaluation.

1.6. Program Curriculum

Program services consist of four components: (1) a case management component; (2) *Quenching the Father Thirst* curriculum (QFT) (Williams, 2003); (3) *The WatchDOGS program* (Moore, 2000); and (4) training for front-line social services staff (National Family Preservation Network, 2001).

(1) Case Management. The intensive case management component of the program supports critical links to employment, education, housing, health care, and other resources that are crucial to empowering fathers to care for their children. Under the FEED program, Collaborative staff, working under the daily supervision of the seven Collaboratives, had caseloads of no more than 15 men at any point in time, assuring they had the time available to work with their clients intensely in both one-on-one and group settings. The primary focus of the services of the FEED case management component is parental responsibility. The Collaborative staff used a *Family Development Model* of engaging participants which is comprised of developing a partnership with the participant, assisting the participant in assessing his strengths and needs as an ongoing process, and developing a realistic plan for pursuing goals. Through this partnership, Collaborative staff assisted fathers in defining and achieving their roles as nurturers to their children and being involved parents. Addressing fathers' needs were foremost to getting fathers on track to accomplish these roles.

Collaborative staff conducted an initial intake assessment to develop personal goals and objectives of the father. The initial intake assessment sought information from prospective clients on their needs for services, such as substance abuse treatment and counseling. If these services were requested, or if the need for such services was presented later in the case management process, Collaborative staff made the appropriate referrals to established networks in the community. FEED took a strengths-based approach to case management, building on the fathers' existing skills and relationships with positive support networks in their community. Case management services were provided continuously throughout the program.

(2) Quenching the Father Thirst (QFT). The National Center for Fathering developed the “Quenching the Father-Thirst” curriculum for fathers in challenging urban situations. It was developed for fathers to become responsible fathers that love, know and guide their children to success. QFT is a research and theory-based curriculum, and is designed to (1) provide a framework for understanding the role of the father, (2) address the systemic barriers to fathering, and (3) provide training in specific parenting skills. The curriculum includes 12 lessons that cover topics related to the foundation of fatherhood and fathering skills. A total of 8 staff members received a two day training to prepare them to conduct the QFT curriculum. To achieve the highest possible graduation rate for fathers participating in the QFT program, participants were provided with a transportation stipend and a monetary reward for completing the QFT sessions.

(3) WatchDOGS. WatchDOGS (Dads of Great Students) provide fathers or father figures such as grandfathers, uncles, or other male adults to volunteer at least one day at their child’s school during the school year. Individuals sign up either at a kick-off event such as a “Dads and Kids Pizza Night” event or “Donuts with Dads” event or in the office at anytime during the school year. The program is overseen by a “Top Dog” volunteer dad who partners with the school administrator to coordinate scheduling and identify opportunities for WatchDOGS to provide assistance at the school. WatchDOGS perform a variety of tasks during their volunteer day. Examples of assignments include monitoring the school entrance, assisting with unloading and loading of buses and cars, reading to classes or small groups of students, assisting with recess, eating lunch side by side with the students and other activities that engage the WatchDOGS with not only their own children but other children in the student body.

(4) Training for front-line social services staff. The National Family Preservation Training Program curriculum was used to teach front-line social services staff the principles, policies, and practices to engage fathers in their children’s lives. The Collaborative staff provided a two-day training to Collaborative staff and social service providers who received referrals from the D.C. Child and Family Services and other community-based social service agencies in the District of Columbia.

1.7. Features of the Evaluation Design

The ultimate goal of the evaluation is to conduct an *implementation* study, as well as an *outcomes* study. For the first year of the evaluation, considered a year of *partial implementation*, selected components of an implementation evaluation were conducted. Key features of the year one evaluation are described below.

Implementation Evaluation

- *Management Information Systems Data (Program Records)*
Data from the MIS data system were analyzed to document characteristics of fathers served and aspects of fathers’ participation in the program.
- *Focus Groups with Fathers*
Focus groups were conducted with fathers to assess program participants’ perceptions of the fatherhood program. Focus groups provided information about barriers to participation that fathers encountered, how these barriers were addressed, recommendations for overall project improvement, and methods to effectively change and/or improve program activities to achieve overarching program goals.

Outcomes Evaluation

- *Outcomes Study (Outcomes for Program Participants)*
This being the first year of recruiting fathers into this family-based program and the first year in adapting the curriculum for urban fathers in the District of Columbia, pre-post test data were collected, but were not analyzed. A pre-post test outcomes evaluation is planned for Year 2,

which will examine how and in what direction fathers experienced changes in their outcomes (short-term and intermediate term) over time as they participated in the program.

1.8. Report Organization

This chapter (*Chapter One*) provided an overview of the Feed program, the evaluation design, and the context in which the evaluation was conducted. The remainder of this report is organized as follows:

- *Chapter Two* describes the characteristics of fathers served based on MIS data and program records.
- *Chapter Three* provides a summary of father focus group findings.
- *Chapter Four* provides conclusions and recommendations.
- *Appendices* supporting these sections present detailed information on data collection instruments.

CHAPTER TWO

CHARACTERISTICS OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

2.1. Introduction

This section of the report provides information on the demographic characteristics of all fathers who enrolled in the program in year one. These fathers participated in one or more of the following components: case management, QFT, or the WatchDOGS program. It also provides information about fathers' motivations for attending the programs, their previous fatherhood program experience, and their expectations for program activities. Data from the MIS data system were used to derive these findings.

2.2. Methodology

At program enrollment, data were collected on the characteristics of each program participant. Fathers completed a FEED Intake Form that obtained important demographic information, such as the participant's educational attainment, employment status, ethnicity, number of children, and relationship status (see **Appendix B, pp. 33 - 39**).

Table 2.1 (p. 14) presents the characteristics of the 204 fathers who enrolled in the study between January and September 30, 2007 (year one of the program). This section describes the baseline characteristics of these men.

Characteristics of Enrolled Fathers

- 204 fathers enrolled in the study between January and September 2007
- 95% were born in the United States
- 43.1% were not in a relationship; 18.3% were in a relationship; 17.8% were cohabiting with their partner
- 45.1% had one child; 31.8% had two children; 22.9% had three or more children
- 53.5% had earned their high school diploma or GED, while 23.5% had no high school degree
- 53.3% were unemployed upon entrance to the program
- 32.4% earned less than \$5,000 in the 12 months prior to the start of the program
- 89% had never participated in a fatherhood program

2.3. Characteristics of All Fathers Served

- *Cultural/Linguistic Background.* Approximately 95 percent of participating fathers were born in the United States, and 98 percent of fathers spoke English at home.
- *Relationship Context.* While the majority of fathers were not currently in a relationship (43.1%), comparable numbers of fathers were either in a romantic relationship (18.3%), cohabiting with their partner (17.8%), or married (12.2%).
- *Children.* More than two-fifths of fathers (41.7%) had one child, and about half had two or more children (50.2%). Slightly less than half of fathers had only one child under the age of 18 (45.1%) residing with them.
- *Education.* About three-quarters of fathers (76%) had obtained a high school diploma or higher, while 23.5 percent had not received any degree. Of the three-quarters of fathers with a degree, more than half (53.5) had earned either a high school diploma or GED. Less than 10 percent had obtained either an Associate's degree (1.5%), vocational degree (1%), or college degree (4%).

Table 2.1.
Selected Characteristics of Enrolled Fathers (January 2007 – September 2007)

	%/ Mean
<u>Demographic characteristics</u>	
Born in the U.S. (%)	95.0
Primary language spoken at home (%)	
English	98.0
Spanish	2.0
<u>Family status</u>	
Current Relationship Status ¹ (%)	
Married	12.2
Separated	3.0
Divorced	4.6
Cohabitation	17.8
Romantic relationship	18.3
Not in a relationship	43.1
Total number of children	
1	45.1
2	31.8
3 or more	22.9
Total number of children under the age of 18 in household	
0	8.0
1	41.7
2	26.1
3 or more	24.1
<u>Highest Level of Education² (%)</u>	
Less than high school	23.5
High school/GED	53.5
Some college	16.0
Associate's degree	1.5
Vocational degree	1.0
College degree	4.0
<u>Current Employment status (%)</u>	
Employed	37.4
Self-employed	6.7
Unemployed	53.3
Homemaker	0.5
Student	2.1
<u>Income (%)</u>	
\$0 - \$5,000	34.0
\$5,000 - \$19,000	18.6
\$20,000 - \$29,999	23.7
\$30,000 - \$34,999	4.1
\$35,000 or more	4.1
Unknown	15.5
<u>Program History</u>	
Has previous fatherhood program experience (%)	11.7
<u>Reasons for Attending the Program</u>	
Learn about being a better father	70.7
Learn how to improve personal relationships	53.5
Came with friends	2.5
Requested by spouse/partner	6.6
Other	1.0
<u>Expected Program Activities/Services</u>	
Parenting classes/workshops	67.2
Family activities	47.0
Education and literacy services	21.2
Parent group meetings	31.8
Social service support	38.4
Employment services	39.9
Sample size	204

¹ 1.0% of fathers selected "I don't know" when describing their relationship status.

² 0.5% of fathers selected "Other" for their highest educational attainment.

- *Employment and Income.* More than half of fathers (53.3%) were unemployed at the start of the study. 37.4 percent of fathers were employed, and 6.7 were self-employed. Only 2.1 percent were full-time students. During the 12 months prior to the program, almost a third of fathers (32.4%) had earned an income of \$5,000 or below.
- *Family-Based Program Experience.* A little more than 10 percent of fathers (11.7%) had attended a fatherhood program prior to enrolling in the FEED program. Fathers were able to choose among five reasons for attending the HFTC fatherhood program. Seven out of ten fathers (70.7%) reported attending the fatherhood program to learn about being a better father. Over half of fathers (53.5%) chose to attend to learn how to improve their personal relationships. A little more than 5 percent (6.6%) joined the program at the request of their partner.
- *Services Requested.* Nearly two-thirds (67.2%) expected to receive parenting classes from the HFTC fatherhood program and 47 percent expected to participate in family activities. Similar proportions of fathers either expected to receive educational services (21.2%); parent group meetings (31.8%); social service support (38.4%); and employment help (39.9).

2.4. Conclusion

The information presented in this chapter provides a snapshot of the demographic characteristics and service needs of fathers enrolled in year one of the program. These results suggest that fathers that participated in the FEED Initiative are a diverse group of men with varying program needs and expectations. A total of 204 men enrolled in the program. Most of the participants were unmarried and had at least one child. In general, participants had low levels of education and many were unemployed. Fathers that participated in the program had little prior experience with fatherhood programs and hoped that their participation would help them learn to be better fathers, improve their personal relationships, provide activities where they could interact with their children, and receive guidance on educational services and social services support and referrals.

CHAPTER THREE

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

3.1. Background

This chapter summarizes the findings from a focus group of fathers who participated in the Quenching the Father Thirst (QFT) and/or Case Management Programs. The focus group was conducted to learn more about the experiences and needs of these fathers.

3.2. Methodology

On December 20, 2007, Child Trends conducted a focus group comprised of nine fathers who had completed either the QFT and/or case management programs. Focus group participants were recruited by the HFTC Collaborative Council, who asked its seven collaboratives to send a father from each collaborative that had completed the FEED program. Child Trends staff collaborated with HTFC program staff to identify the issues to be addressed during the focus group discussion. Child Trends staff then created the Focus Group Protocol which outlined the specific questions to be posed during the focus group (**Appendix C, pp. 40 - 45**).

The focus group lasted approximately two hours. The discussion was held during an afternoon program meeting, a time found to be convenient for fathers. Program staff were absent during the focus group to encourage fathers' open discussion. Focus group participation was further encouraged by posing open-ended questions to fathers and offering them a gift card, transportation reimbursement, and lunch.

Fathers were informed of their rights as focus group participants. In particular, fathers were assured that their anonymity would be preserved, and their names would not be included in the report summary. The focus group discussion was tape recorded at the permission of participants to maximize the report's accuracy. Therefore, the quotes and analysis included in this report are direct reflections of fathers' opinions.

Study Limitations. This focus group has a number of limitations that limit the generalizability of the results. The sample of fathers participating in the focus group were not necessarily representative of the jurisdictions in which the focus group was conducted, and is certainly not representative of the nation as a whole. All focus groups were conducted in English, so the number of Hispanic fathers or fathers from other ethnic groups was less than we would expect had groups also been held in other languages. Child care was not available during the focus group which may have affected the population in the focus group. While the information provided during the focus group may not be fully representative, it provides insights into the experiences and opinions of the fathers who participated. Finally, the summary that follows is based on self-reports of fathers and the findings are not validated with quantitative evidence.

3.3. Focus Group Study Population

Fathers were asked to complete a brief questionnaire that gathered information about their demographics (**Appendix D, pp. 46 - 47**). The focus group comprised nine fathers. All participating fathers were African-American, and every father, with the exception of one who had completed college, had less than a college degree. To identify fathers' overall impressions of the program, participants were asked to rate the program on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "I do not like it" and 5 being "It is perfect: I would not change anything." Of the 9 participants, 3 rated the program as very good and 6 rated it as perfect.

Finally, fathers were asked to report on the top 3 things they "enjoyed" and "disliked" about the program. Over half of the fathers reported enjoying the camaraderie between themselves, program staff (including their case managers), and other participants. About one-fourth of participants also mentioned enjoying information gained from the program as well as the results achieved by sessions. In terms of program dislikes, while the majority of fathers (7 out of the 9) did not have any dislikes about the program, two fathers mentioned wanting more program resources (including counselors), sessions available at additional times, and extending the length of the program.

3.4 Focus Group Topics

The focus group discussion covered the following topics:

- Perceptions of Fatherhood;
- Goals of the Program;
- Program Context & Involvement;
- Program Structure;
- Program Activities;
- Challenges as a Dad;
- Fathers' Parenting Skills;
- Fathers' Co-Parenting Skills;
- Father Child Relationship Quality/Father Involvement.

3.5. Study Findings

Program Goals

The focus group facilitator asked fathers what they thought were the goals of the Fatherhood Program as well as what their personal goals were in participating in the program. Fathers had the following ideas:

- To become better fathers

“It’s showing them how to be a father. It’s a lot of dudes that are out here who are dads, but really don’t know how to be one, Ya know what I’m saying? So I think my man was saying something real good—we’re trying to be good fathers and hopefully, the program can make us better fathers, giving us the whole schabang, ya know?”

- To overcome barriers to being an effective father

“The program has allowed me to break the cycle and provided me with the information to break barriers that have prevented me from being a father. That’s what it has done for me. Personally, it has rewarded me tremendously because I just got in contact with my son after an absence of twenty years. And the information that I got from getting involved in the program gave me the information where I could go about finding him...”

“The program has helped me realize that this is breaking the cycle. This is something that is needed in our Afro-American communities. We have been taught not to become good parents. This program teaches us how to become better dads. They provide us with information that helps us understand our children and our role as fathers.”

- To unify the community’s men

“It also showed that it brings us together as men as a unit. In order to have community, you have to have unity, ya know? And the thing is that especially as an African-American brothers, they always want to put us down, ya know? We the negative crowd of everything. We pick out to kill one another and put each other behind the bars and still do crazy things to one another. Whereas when we come together in these meetings, we bring a lot of power...”

The fathers believed that these goals would help them by:

- Setting a precedence for positive father-child bonds

“They are good goals because they’re setting a precedence towards developing and establishing a positive bond with relationships between father and son and father and daughter...”

- Restoring families

“[They are good goals] by healing families. I know, my family’s broken and uh, my son had a mother, but he didn’t have a father... It’s [the program] enabled us to come together as a unit. Now he sees a whole family—a mother and father, he don’t just see the mom, ya know? He sees father, too.”

- Repairing the negative image of African-American fathers

“I, additionally, think that Afro-American men have actually been stripped of their rights to become fathers. And it’s programs like this that have enabled us to come together and not stand behind the foolish pride that was embedded into us and machoism and learning how to share and open our emotions up towards our family. And I think this program has allowed us to break down a lot of those barriers that’s been put in place for the destruction of the Black family.”

- Educating fathers

Most of them [Fatherhood Program staff] been through some of the stuff we’ve been through. So they are not sitting up there, ya know, like someone giving book knowledge. They got experience, ya know what I mean?... We all learn from one another, we gain from one another.”

Barriers to Meeting Program Goals

While the fathers agreed that there were many program advantages, they identified several difficulties to meeting program goals.

- Unemployment

“I mean that the FEED program provides information, which is great, but the thing that we lack the most as Black men is employment.”

- Lack of job support (i.e., transportation help, transitional housing, and job opportunities)

“Along with the resources we need to have our own inner job bank. I don’t know how many exact fatherhood programs exist in D.C., but if all of them come up in collaboration and develop a job bank, in addition to the employment services that already exist, that is just tremendous, because we’ll have our own bank, our own contact with future employment. That’ll shortstop a lot of stuff, and the transportation freeze and resources and stuff like that.”

- Relations with the mother of their child

“You know what’s really, really vital to this thing is you want to have some kind of rapport with the child’s mother. They could probably have some counseling as well as for us... because believe it or not, as much as I know for me, I’ve had it out with my baby mother on numerous occasions. I still know how vital her information to my son is as well as mine. You know what I mean? She plays a key part with him too.”

- Legal Issues (e.g., child support)

“What I think is we should have an advocate to deal with issues when we have baby momma drama or relationships can’t be formulated, like you mentioned. Have partnership with some legal agencies, and they provide pro bono services to the Fatherhood Initiative clients and participants...”

Program Context and Involvement

The focus group facilitator asked fathers how they first heard about the fatherhood program and why they decided to participate. Fathers mentioned hearing about the program from HFTC Collaborative staff, child support officers, child support orders, a counselor, fliers, friends/co-workers, and the Gospel Rescue Mission Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program.

“I heard about it through the Georgia Avenue Collaborative, Dr. James Cunningham. I had lost a daughter in May, and I was at a point where I was in a real destructive mode. And I think I was headed back to prison. And he [James Cunningham] pulled me off.”

“Well, I was with my mother getting her food box for Bread for the City, and I saw a flier with Daniel McRae.”

“I heard about it through one of the Council members in Ward 7.”

Why Participate in the Program?

Fathers decided to participate in the program because they found the information beneficial and they wanted to positively contribute to their community.

“I decided to join because I know I needed some help. I know I needed some information, too, on how to be a father. [I joined] to be a positive role model for other youngsters, because at that time my son wasn’t involved in my life. But I wanted to be an asset to my community with regards to helping the young men in my area.”

“After reading some of the information and putting some of the information to use, I found that the program works. And that’s the bottom line.”

“First of all I’d like to say, I’ll give it a try and see how it works. But after I did that in one session, and then, the first time I met my coordinator...this was one of the first programs, for me anyway, that jumped and gave me some assistance. You know what I’m saying? I was like, yeah, if they’re gonna roll with me, I’m gonna roll with them.”

What Makes FEED Different from Other Fatherhood Programs?

When asked about their participation in other fatherhood programs, most fathers reported that they had not participated in any other programs. Of the fathers that had participated in other fatherhood programs, they cited sensitive and helpful staff as the major difference between the HFTC fatherhood program and their past program experiences.

“I’ve participated in some programs in Bridgewater, Connecticut, because that’s where my first wife is...But what I like about this one is if you’re going to come you’re coming for yourself. You’re not just coming for yourself, you’re coming for your children’s sake, to be there for your child. Whereas the other one people were just doing it for child support, to get the little notch or they were doing it to get the little certificate that showed he did complete the program. But did you learn something behind the program?”

“I had never experienced the type of program that the Fatherhood Program presented to me. It was always shortchanged in the services and personnel involved. They weren’t sensitive to my needs. Whereas the Fatherhood is sensitive to my needs and helped me to address them as best as they possibly can. And then if they can’t help me they refer me to someone who can.”

Program Structure

Fathers reported that the program meeting times and site locations were convenient for their attendance. Fathers also appreciated the program’s male staff and holistic approach.

“What I mean in more detail is that this is the Father Initiative Program, which cannot be overran by females, no disrespect, because the female, as long as they live on this planet will never ever have the chance of being a man and knowing how a man feels like. See Fatherhood Programs is a social service and is mostly for a social service. But most of the caseworkers are women and it’s causing a major, major problem.”

“I like its male structure. It centers more around the man, the father. It helps the fathers. Not saying anything bad about the women but we need programs. A lot of programs are for the mother. We need some programs for us, some place we can come where we can talk about our children, our children’s lives. They count us out of our children’s lives and we want to show that, you know, that we can take back our rights to be parents.”

Program Successes Voiced by Fathers in the Focus Group

- Concerned and invested staff
- Diverse and challenging sessions related to fatherhood and parenting
- Pre-employment/job readiness training
- Enabled fathers to contribute positively to the community

Program Activities

Participants felt the program curriculum met their needs as fathers. In particular, they found the pre-employment/job readiness training, referrals to vocational training, and bonding with other fathers beneficial. One father also appreciated the program’s aid in reuniting his family.

“It brought my child back. I mean, they went out and did a lot of work for me. They went out and contacted his mother and they brought us together. And we went on outings, ya know? They had picnics at parks, ya know? It was family-oriented, mother and child. You know? They just helped us come together as a unit. So that’s really what I liked about the program. Even though it’s a fatherhood program, they want to try to bring the whole family together.”

Description of Program Sessions

In describing the program sessions, fathers appreciated the variety of session topics. They also mentioned that the level of intensity for each session discussion differed depending on the session topic. Overall, participants felt the sessions challenged them to become active participants in the program and better fathers.

“They [the sessions] make you wanna go like, “Dang! That was good conversation. That was a good thing, ya know?” It makes you want to keep coming back and back and back.”

“One thing about some of the sessions we had was they wasn’t all sugar-coated. They really got down to the root of it. You know, it hit some nerves. They make you want to stand up and be accountable. It’s not really soft-spoken.”

“I think that’s the key to the whole program—it’s to get you involved. You can come to the point in another program you can sit back. I’ve done that! Sit back, chill, go to sleep, wake up, and it’s a done deal. But here you’re going to get involved. You’re gonna speak. You’re gonna say what’s on your mind before you roll up outta there. That’s for sure.”

“They actually challenge your manhood.”

Fathers’ Favorite Sessions

The majority of focus group participants had difficulty identifying a single session that they found the most important, because they felt all of the program sessions were useful in improving their parenting skills. However, some fathers found the following sessions especially important:

- The program interview

“I think my interview was the first introduction with the program with regard to what I really have to do to establish a relationship with my children. That was most important to me...And I’ve been rolling ever since.

- The session on fathers’ relationships with their child’s mother

“I think for me, what was touched on for one occasion was when they were saying you need to have someone there that would be there to counsel your child’s mother. We were talking about what is your relationship like with the child’s mother. And whoever is going through it with that, esp. the child support thing, that’s gonna touch a button. We went into it. Matter of fact, we all was into it until 7:30, quarter, 8:00 [pm].”

Concerns Voiced by Fathers in the Focus Group

- Need to engage young men
- Need for additional job support and financial support
- Need for mentors
- Need for additional program meeting times during the day

- The session on knowing your child:

“We had to write about some things about our child. It made me feel bad. It’s like I got the paper and I really didn’t have much, because I really haven’t been around my kid. So that really made me hungry. It really made me want to get in touch with my children.”

Suggestions for Program Improvement

Most of the fathers appeared satisfied with the current program organization and activities. However, the fathers did have a few ideas on how to strengthen the program:

- Reach out to young men

“Just having more resources, making our availability to, like I say, I’m talking to the youngsters who are still in school. To show them because, to believe it or not, it’s real, real important in a young man’s life showing him that a job is necessary for anything...Because believe it or not when I was coming up I thought jobs were for suckers, to be honest with you. I did. I thought poking the hustle was a thing folks did until four or five years ago. Now I know. I know that men who wake up at 5:00 every day and provide for their kids, those are the real men.”

- Use past program participants to motivate others

“If all of us come together, I mean all the collaboratives come together and we have one big session, see where everybody at....you see how another person’s develop. You see a person who is just getting into the program they say, ‘How I know this program’s gonna really work for me? How I know it’s gonna do what it really says it’s gonna do?’ ... If somebody else that went through it, through that program that can share with that person that this is what we can do. You can make it.”

- Provide financial help

“We need resources. I remember one of the programs we had some brothers were supposed to get tokens and bus passes and all that there. And you can see their spirits being broken. They want to come. They want to be here... So I’m saying that the program itself needs to do a better job of getting fathers these resources, cuz coming from jail and trying to make a transition back, you need these resources.”

- Add additional program meeting times during the day

“We got times at night. They can also make times in the day or morning. Because for me, I work at night. Sometimes if I come in the morning, I’m still up. I could come in and have a little time then. In the night time we have a meeting, I’m not really going to knock it, but I really got no rest...”

Perceptions of Fatherhood

The focus group discussion began with fathers sharing their perspectives on “responsible” fatherhood, the role of fathers, and good fathering.

Responsible Fatherhood

According to fathers, involvement, resources, and guidance were the primary components of responsible fatherhood.

“I think fatherhood means being totally involved in every aspect of my son’s life and valuing the information that aids him in being a positive and productive citizen of society as he grows and develops into manhood...”

“I think the most important thing about fatherhood is being a provider, ya know, and providing resources for your child to exist and maintain a certain level of self-esteem and confidence.”

“You don’t want your child doing everything. You want to show them right from wrong, to have respect for each other and the people around them, cuz right now they can grow up to be a better person one day and a better father.”

Role of a Father

In addition to discussing the characteristics of responsible fatherhood, the focus group participants described the role of a father as:

- Leader of the household

“I think that it’s important for the male to be present in the home, to be a leader, and show forth the lead and show forth the guidance with a stern heart and stern hand if need be. Not just to be in the home but to be active in the home, in the child’s life, going to school for PTA ...”

- Provider

“The role of a father is provider, to lead by example. Give them a positive spin on how to approach life. And be there for them no matter if they are right or wrong.”

- Role model

“Also, the role of the father is to continue to provide information to the child from birth until our lives perish. That’s what our roles are as fathers to be positive role models and all it takes.”

Good Fathering

Fathers said that good fathers live a positive lifestyle, worthy of being imitated by their children. Participants also said that good fathers know when to discipline their children.

“Being a good father to me means being a positive, having a positiveness about myself that reflects an image to my children.”

“Having a good life so that my kid can look at my life and be like ‘Man, I wanna be like my father.’”

“To add to what he’s saying, a good father knows when to say ‘no.’ Uh, he knows when to uh...be stern, he knows when to be gentle. Good fathers don’t always say ‘yes’ to everything...”

Challenges as a Dad

Participants discussed several challenges to being a father:

- Conflicts with their child’s mother

“I just want her to accept me for what I’m trying to be now. Don’t judge me for my old. That’s dead and gone. I’m trying to change. I want change. I want difference. I want to be in my life a whole lot more. And I want not only to be a good father; I want to be a better father. A father better than me. You know what I’m saying?”

- Stereotype of a Deadbeat Dad

“I think one of the greatest challenges is removing that negative stereotype of me being a Deadbeat Dad. And also, erase that stigma that’s associated with that and that mindset that associated with that.”

- Wanting to become a better father

“My biggest challenge is myself. I’m going to step out there because I was a Deadbeat Dad. I was that type of person, so my biggest challenge was myself. Once I got myself in order through Christ, then my life became better...It was just me being a parent.”

Despite the reported challenges fathers faced, they also reported that the Quenching the Father Thirst and Case Management Programs taught them the following strategies for handling these and new challenges:

- Become a better listener

“It taught us to respond calmly and become better listeners. That’s how you become a better person with case management, listening. Because at one time in my life it was so destructive you couldn’t hear anything.”

- Improve treatment of others and themselves

“We have ways to alter the way we were treating ourselves and other people. The programs provided us with information and sessions to allow us to do that.”

- Have patience

“It also gives us patience.”

Fathers’ Parenting Skills

The focus group facilitator also asked fathers how their parenting skills were affected by the fatherhood programs. Some fathers felt the program equipped them with new approaches to disciplining their children.

“I used to correct my son physically. I’ve learned from the Fatherhood Program there are alterative ways to handling and disciplining your children without raising your hand. And over the last year, I have not put my hand on my son and our relationship is so much better. He’s not afraid anymore. He’s doing excellent in school. And like I said, I can’t speak for no one else but the program works.”

Fathers attributed their improved discipline and parenting skills to the “cohesiveness of the program” as well as the:

- Ability to learn from other fathers

“By coming here and listening to other fathers who have children older than mine, that are 12 years old, 20 year old. As long as I continue to do

Perceptions of the Role of a Father as Voiced by Fathers in the Focus Group

- Leader of the household
- Provider
- Role model

what I'm doing, the process is gonna work. That's the strength of the program for me. I come because I can hear things that I can identify with that may not even happen right now, but I can foresee some of the things that I may put my own self in and put my son in danger by thinking what I'm thinking."

- Resources that aid fathers in improving family interactions

"Resources for child and stuff—they [program staff] helped me. They gave me some leads and stuff like that. They wrote letters to the judge. They even called her. It helped me with the patience. They teach you to have different things than always doing the attack and stuff like that."

Fathers' only suggestion for how the program could strengthen their parenting skills was by adding additional sessions, like the focus group, to discuss ways of improving the program.

Fathers' Co-Parenting Skills

Of the fathers who commented on the relationship with their child's mother, some felt their relationship with their child's mother had improved.

"It's [the relationship with their child's mother] all right.. It ain't all that. It's better though."

"Me and my daughter's mother we just got real cool. We both went to her graduation and I was able to admit some things that I should have been admitted to her, like thank you for giving her to me. Ya know what I mean? And letting her know that this was your doing, not mine because I was in and out of jail and wasn't there to help with child-rearing, and these are some things that I should have been told her. And one thing she told me was I don't know what program you're in, but you better keep going to it, because I ain't never seen this side of you in all my life..."

Other fathers felt the mothers were neither supportive of their program participation, nor their attempts to implement the program's parenting skills.

"My relationship is—it seems like she's supportive, but I don't think she really is."

"I don't use physical force. She [his child's mother] still does. And when I constantly try to let her know that my system is working with the child, she still continues to display her way of child-rearing."

One father has found the program helpful in supporting his spouse's acceptance of his son.

*"My son's mother is deceased. The knowledge that I've gotten from *Quenching the Fatherhood Thirst* has allowed me to somewhat give my wife information to receive my son. You know, because at first she had some apprehensions. But with the information I was able to relate to her about what I had received from participating in the program has been able to open her up to receive."*

Father Child Relationship Quality/Father Involvement

Fathers reported that they were able to see their children as often as they liked. Since their program participation, they also noticed a change in their relationship with their children; in their desire to have more contact with their children; and they gained a better understanding of the importance of a positive father-child relationship for their children's development.

Suggestions for How Program Can Improve Father-Child Relations

The fathers felt the current program activities were helpful in improving father-child relations. However, they did feel the program could be more helpful in providing additional resources, such as transitional housing.

“We still need some kind of step in that helps us to live on. Someone may not have a place to stay. They want to come to the program, but they don’t have a house to stay. How can you get involved if you don’t have a foundation?”

3.6. Conclusion

The purpose of the focus group was to strengthen the HFTC Fatherhood Program by gaining insights from fathers about their program experiences and about the first year of program implementation. The focus group discussion produced valuable information about program strengths and weaknesses. Overall, fathers held positive feelings about the fatherhood program. They especially appreciated the program’s male staff, camaraderie with fellow fathers, and activities that challenged them to become better fathers.

In spite of positive feelings toward the programs, fathers faced several challenges, including relational conflict with their child’s mother and unemployment. However, they felt the program could help them overcome these challenges by providing legal assistance (i.e., child support issues), additional employment help, and resources, such as transportation reimbursement and transitional housing.

3.7. Recommendations

The recommendations that follow reflect what we have learned from the circumstances and challenges voiced by fathers attending the focus group. The following are factors that may be taken into consideration to improve program activities to achieve the overarching program goals.

- *Counseling Services*

Fathers suggested providing counseling services and mental health support for their children’s mothers as well as providing co-parenting support. They felt that supporting the child’s mother could alleviate relational conflict between themselves and their child’s mother.

- *Inter-Collaborative Partnerships*

Focus group participants suggested partnerships among collaboratives. Participants thought fathers who completed the program could support fathers beginning the program. They also thought fatherhood programs could create a job bank across the collaboratives, unifying employment information and job contacts.

- *Time of Activities*

While the majority of fathers found the existing meeting times sufficient, some mentioned it would be helpful to include a morning program meeting time for fathers working evenings.

- *Additional Resources*

Finally, fathers thought it would be beneficial for the program to provide transportation, housing, and legal help to fathers in need. Transportation reimbursement, metro passes, or bus tokens could help fathers without transportation to attend meetings and job interviews. Fathers also mentioned help securing transitional housing and legal help for child support issues.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a summary and conclusion of findings across the varied evaluation tasks. It also provides recommendations for program improvement.

4.2. Conclusion

What is the bottom line? Did the HFTC *Fatherhood Education, Empowerment, and Development Program* achieve its goals in the first year? The answer in part depends on the weight that is placed on the results for each of the components of the evaluation that are included. Giving equal weight to each of these components, there are overall positive results based on perspectives provided by fathers served by the program. The evaluation data presented here provide a positive portrait of the FEED program, and provide preliminary support for interventions aimed at promoting responsible parenting and strengthening fathers' relationships with their children, and their abilities to positively engage fathers in the District of Columbia.

Parenting and family relationship based programs serving men and their families are likely to attract many men. The FEED program adopted an aggressive enrollment strategy and was successful during a nine-month period (October 2006 - September 2007) in enrolling 204 fathers, most of whom were low-income and unemployed residents of Washington, D.C. These men were not a homogeneous group. The men had different service needs, have moved in and out of employment (both full-time and part-time), and, while some have had estranged relationships with their children, some have also been a part of their children's lives. Differences in the backgrounds and experiences of these fathers and their relationships with partners influenced their perceptions of the program and the extent to which they sought program services. The program grew rapidly in its first year and this growth is likely to continue.

4.3. Recommendations

We conclude this report by summarizing recommendations based on what we have learned from our contact with fathers about how the program can best help men make a successful transition to stable employment and improve relationships with partners and children. The recommendations that follow reflect issues to consider and are derived from the aggregate findings across focus groups and MIS data collected in the first year of the project.

- *Counseling Services*

Fathers suggested providing counseling services and mental health support for their child's mother as well as providing co-parenting support. They felt that supporting the child's mother could alleviate relational conflict between themselves and their child's mother. The program might consider hiring staff members with psychiatric and legal backgrounds to address such concerns.

- *Inter-Collaborative Partnerships*

Focus group participants suggested partnerships among collaboratives. For example, participants thought fathers who completed the program could support fathers beginning the program across the collaboratives. The program might consider continuing to build partnerships with other collaboratives as well as outside agencies.

- *Extend Job Network Resources*

Fathers mentioned that it would benefit them if the program offered a more extensive job network. They also thought the fatherhood programs could create a job bank across the collaboratives, unifying employment information and job contacts.

- *Time of Activities*

While the majority of fathers found the existing meeting times sufficient, some mentioned it would be helpful to include a morning program meeting time for fathers working evenings. The program may want to consider including additional and more diverse meeting times for its participants.

- *Additional Resources*

Finally, fathers thought it would be beneficial for the program to provide transportation, housing, and legal help to fathers in need. Transportation reimbursement, metro passes, or bus tokens could help fathers without transportation to attend meetings and job interviews. Fathers also mentioned help securing transitional housing and legal help for child support issues.

In sum, the first year of findings suggest a strong start towards larger and more valuable goals.

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**Appendix A: Logic Model for the
HFTC Fatherhood Education, Empowerment and
Development Program (FEED)**

Figure 1. FEED Logic Model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs/Quality Measures (per year)	Target Outcomes		
			Initial	Intermediate	Longer-term
<p>Program staff with experience in community organizing and fatherhood outreach</p> <p>*Established infrastructure of the seven partner Collaboratives</p> <p>Outreach and Recruitment to both fathers and organizational partners</p> <p>Assessment of the needs and goals of the fathers in the program</p> <p>Funding, resources</p>	<p>Quenching the Father Thirst fathering groups</p>	<p>210 fathers attend 12 sessions of fathering classes</p>	<p>Fathers increase knowledge about six core fathering skills</p>	<p>Fathers put fathering skills into practice with their children</p>	<p>Fathers are responsible parents and contribute positively to the well-being of their children</p> <p>Communities and social service providers encourage fathers to play a positive role in their children's lives</p> <p>Fathers improve their relationships with the mothers of their children</p>
	<p>WatchDOGs school volunteer program</p>	<p>245 fathers volunteer at their child's school</p>	<p>Fathers increase knowledge about their child's school</p>	<p>Fathers increase involvement in their child's education</p>	
	<p>Citywide trainings on father-centered practice and policy</p>	<p>Collaborative, partner agency, and public agency staff who work with the fathers attend 1 training</p>	<p>Collaborative and partner agency staff increase knowledge about father-friendly practices</p>	<p>Collaborative and partner agency staff routinely discuss the role of fathers with their clients</p>	
	<p>Public information media campaign</p>	<p>700 flyers and information packets distributed to the community; 2 media spots on local radio or television</p>	<p>Community members read/hear information about the impact of fathers on children</p>	<p>Community members are knowledgeable about the importance of fatherhood</p>	
	<p>Intensive case management services</p>	<p>105 fathers receive six months of intensive case management services</p>	<p>Fathers are provided flexible funds, linked with housing, financial management, mental health, and substance abuse treatment programs</p>	<p>Fathers overcome psychological, physical and financial barriers to reunifying with their children</p>	
	<p>Family Group Conferencing between fathers and the mothers of their children</p>	<p>20 interested fathers and the mothers of their children engage in facilitated family group conferences</p>	<p>Fathers and mothers of their children gain awareness of co-parenting roles and expectations</p>	<p>Fathers overcome mother relationship barriers to reunifying with their children</p>	

* Housing this program within the seven Collaboratives leverages pre-existing resources and relationships with community-based partner organizations located within each Collaborative's target region.

Appendix B: FEED Intake Form

FEED Intake Form

Welcome to the FEED Program! This form is being given to all fathers participating in this program in Washington, DC. These questions will help us learn about the fathers we work with, and how we can provide better programs and services.

When filling out the form, please:

- 1) Choose answers that are most true for you.
- 2) Use a pencil.
- 3) Make dark marks.
- 4) Erase completely if you need to change an answer.

All answers will be kept private. No information will be shared with any outside entity without your permission. Completing this form is necessary for enrollment in this program.



Once you have completed the form, please return it to the program staff member who gave it to you.

Now please turn the page and begin.

Thank you very much for your help!

TODAY'S DATE (MONTH-DAY-YEAR): _____ - _____ - _____

MY NAME: _____
FIRST MIDDLE LAST

ADDRESS: _____ APT. # _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP CODE: _____

HOME PHONE NUMBER: (_____) _____ - _____

CELL PHONE NUMBER: (_____) _____ - _____

DATE OF BIRTH (MM/DD/YYYY): ____/____/____

SECONDARY CONTACT

CLOSEST RELATIVE: _____
FIRST MIDDLE LAST

HOME PHONE NUMBER: (_____) _____ - _____

CELL PHONE NUMBER: (_____) _____ - _____

THIRD CONTACT

CLOSEST FRIEND (DIFFERENT FROM ABOVE): _____
FIRST MIDDLE LAST

HOME PHONE NUMBER: (_____) _____ - _____

CELL PHONE NUMBER: (_____) _____ - _____

Internal Use Only: Today's Date: _____ ID Number: _____

INTEREST IN FEED

1. Do you already participate in any of the following programs? **MARK ALL THAT APPLY.**
 - 1 Quenching the Father Thirst
 - 2 WatchDOGS
 - 3 Case Management
 - 4 Neither
 - 5 Don't know

2. Which FEED programs are you interested in joining? **MARK ALL THAT APPLY.**
 - 1 Quenching the Father Thirst
 - 2 WatchDOGS
 - 3 Case Management
 - 4 Neither
 - 5 Don't know

3. How did you hear about the FEED program?
 - 1 Program staff came to my work/office
 - 2 My spouse/partner told me about it
 - 3 My friends told me about it
 - 4 A court officer told me about it
 - 5 Other (please explain): _____

4. Have you ever attended a fatherhood program, class, or workshop before?
 - 1 Yes
 - 2 No

5. Why did you choose to attend this fatherhood program? **MARK ALL THAT APPLY.**
 - 1 To learn about being a better father
 - 2 To learn how to improve my personal relationships
 - 3 My friends were coming
 - 4 My spouse/partner asked me to come
 - 5 A court ordered me to come
 - 6 Other (please explain): _____

6. Please check the box beside the main activities/services you expect to get from this program. **MARK ALL THAT APPLY.**
 - 1 Parenting classes or workshops
 - 2 Family activities (activities for parents and children together)
 - 3 Education and literacy services or activities (for example, GED)
 - 4 Parent group meetings (for example, peer support network)
 - 5 Social service support resources or referrals (for example, help finding housing or medical care)
 - 6 Work-related services or activities (for example, job search, job placement)
 - 7 Other (please explain): _____

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

7. How would you describe your racial background?
- 1 White or Caucasian
 - 2 Black or African American
 - 3 Native American or American Indian
 - 4 Asian American or Pacific Islander
 - 5 Hispanic/Latino
 - 6 Biracial
 - 7 Other: _____
8. Were you born in the United States?
- 1 Yes
 - 2 No
 - 3 Don't know
9. What is the primary language spoken in your household?
- _____
10. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
- 1 Less than high school
 - 2 GED, high school diploma, or high school equivalency certificate
 - 3 Some college
 - 4 Two-year/Associate's degree
 - 5 Technical/vocational degree
 - 6 College degree
 - 7 Other (please explain): _____
11. Do you have a physical or mental health problem now that limits the amount or kind of work or activities that you can do in or outside the household?
- 1 Yes
 - 2 No
12. What is your current employment status?
- 1 Employed for wages
 - 2 Self-employed
 - 3 Unemployed/out of work
 - 4 A homemaker
 - 5 A Student
13. Thinking about the last 12 months, did you or anyone in your household have income or benefits from any of the following sources? **CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.**
- 1 Job earnings
 - 2 Public assistance, welfare, or food stamps
 - 3 Free or reduced school lunch program
 - 4 Unemployment insurance, workmen's compensation, disability, or Social Security benefits
 - 5 Family and friends
 - 6 None of the above
 - 7 Other (please explain): _____
 - 8 Don't know

14. Thinking about the last 12 months, how much did you earn from your work, including tips and overtime pay?
- 1 \$0 - \$5,000
 - 2 \$5,000 to \$19,999
 - 3 \$20,000 to \$29,999
 - 4 \$30,000 to \$34,999
 - 5 \$35,000 or more
 - 6 Don't know

15. What is your current relationship status? **MARK ONE ANSWER.**

- 1 Married
- 2 Married but separated
- 3 Divorced
- 4 Living together
- 5 Romantic but living separately
- 6 Not in a relationship
- 7 Don't know

16. If you are married, how long have you been married to your current spouse?
_____ (years)

17. Including biological, adopted, foster, step, or other children and other relatives, how many children do you have?
_____ (number of children)

18. Including biological, adopted, foster, step, or other children and other relatives, how many children under the age of 18 live with you?
_____ (number of children)

19. Are you interested in strengthening your relationship with any of these children?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Don't know

20. If so, please describe how you would like your relationship to change.

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

21. Are you participating in this program voluntarily?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Don't know

22. Do you have any past or current violation involving a firearm?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Don't know

23. Have you ever been involved in a domestic violence dispute?

Yes

No

Don't know

24. Are you currently on parole or probation?

Yes

No

Don't know

25. Do you have more than one show cause for probation or parole violation?

Yes

No

Don't know

26. What is the best time of the day or day of the week to contact you?



YOU ARE DONE! THANK YOU FOR FILLING OUT THIS FORM!

REMEMBER: Please return it to the program staff person. All of your answers are private.

Appendix C: Father Focus Group Protocol

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
The Healthy Families Thriving Communities
Quenching the Father Thirst and Case Management Programs



Hello, my name is _____, and this is _____ and will be taking notes today. We work at Child Trends, a non-partisan research organization here in Washington, DC. We would like to thank [names HTFC staff] for coordinating this group discussion today, and most importantly, we would like **to thank all of you for agreeing to come here and meet with us.**

Purpose

First, let me tell you about why we wanted to meet with you all today.

We are working with the Healthy Families Thriving Communities Collaborative men to learn more about the experiences of fathers participating in the Fatherhood Initiative. We want to hear about how you have been affected through the program.

The information that you share with us will help us learn about father's experiences and needs, what has been most helpful about the Fatherhood Program and what could be done better. Your input will be used to help strengthen the program so that it can better meet your needs and the needs of other fathers.

Ground Rules and Expectations

Time. Our discussion with you today should last about an hour and a half. We thank you for sharing this time.

Anonymity. I want to assure you that any information you give us will be kept anonymous. That means no one, including HTFC staff will know what any specific person tells us during this discussion. Because we're keeping your responses anonymous, we want you to be honest about how you feel. To ensure privacy, I won't even be asking for your names.

Confidentiality. Further, so that we can make everyone comfortable to say what they really feel, we ask that you keep this discussion within the group. Please do not talk about what you or others say during this discussion after we are done.

Voluntary. Also, this discussion is voluntary. Although we encourage everyone's active participation so that our findings aren't based on any one person's opinion, you do not have to respond to any question.

Request for permission to tape. Before we get started, we'd like to request your permission to tape our discussion. We [Researchers at Child Trends] will be the only ones who will use these tapes to catch anything we miss. Taping the interview will help us focus better on what you are saying, while we are here, but again, no one else will be listening to the tapes.

Do we have your permission to tape this discussion?

Wait to ensure that you receive a YES from all of the participants.

Please speak one at a time. Please be sure to speak one at a time. That way we will be able to hear each other. When we listen to the tape, we also want to be sure we hear you clearly.

Questions. Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

Warm- Up Discussion

Ask each father to go around the room and give one word that describes what being a father is to them.

- In one word, what does it mean to you to be a father?

Perceptions of Fatherhood

We would like to begin our discussion today with what you feel it takes to be a man and to be a father.

- What do you think is meant by “responsible” fatherhood?
- What is the role of a father?
- What does being a good father mean to you?

Goals of Program

We are interested in hearing about what you believe are the program goals, and would like to hear about your individual goals in deciding to participate.

- What do you believe are the goals for the Quenching the Father Thirst and Case Management Programs? Do you think that these are good goals?
- What did you hope to get out of this program?

Probe:

- What were your goals in attending the program?
- Are there things in the program that have made it difficult for you to work towards your goals?

Program Context and Involvement

Now we would like to talk with you about how you first came to know about the fatherhood program and why you got involved.

- How did you first hear about Quenching the Father Thirst or Case Management Program?
- Why did you decide to participate in the program?
- Have you participated in other programs similar to this fatherhood program in the past?

Probe:

- What is the difference between the program you are participating in now and other programs that you have participated in the past ?

Program Structure

The way a program is designed and organized can affect a person’s experiences in the program. Now we would like to discuss how you felt about the program structure and overall design.

- Do you think the program; the way it is organized is effective in achieving its goals or delivering its message

to fathers?

- Are the times that activities are held convenient so that you can attend most of the events?
- Are the location(s) where activities are held convenient for you to attend?

Program Activities

Now we are interested in hearing your perspective about Quenching the Father Thirst and Case Management Programs' services and activities.

- Do you think the program curriculum meets your needs as a father?
Probes:
 - Describe what the curriculum teaches/covers.
 - Describe session organization and structure.
- What do you believe are the most important sessions of this program that you have attended?
- Are there approaches or things that have been done in this program that have made this experience valuable to you?
- Which activities/services did you like the best?
- Are there things you would like to see changed or improved?
Probes:
 - The program curriculum
 - The overall program
 - The sessions
 - The services
 - The location of program activities
 - The facilitators/staff
 - The case manager program
 - Timing and frequency
 - Access to additional services
- Is there support for you and your role as a father in the program?
- Do you feel that your input is worthwhile? Is your input reflected in final decisions?

Challenges as a Dad

Now we would like to talk with you about some of the challenges you face being a dad.

- What are some challenges that can get in the way of you being a dad?
- How has Quenching the Father Thirst or Case Management Program influenced the way you deal with the problems you face as a dad?

Probes:

- Do you deal with stress differently now since you have been attending the program? If yes, what has changed? If no, why?

Fathers' Parenting Skills

Parenting skills are something that you will continue to develop your entire life. Can you please discuss with us how Quenching the Father Thirst or Case Management Program has affected your parenting skills?

- Has the way that you parent as a father changed? If so, in what ways?
- What do you think that the strengths of the program have been in supporting your parenting skills?
- What could the program do differently to help parent skill building?

Fathers' Co-Parenting Skills

Now we would like to hear about if the program influences the relationship between you and the mother(s) of your child (ren).

- What is your relationship now with the mother(s) of your child (ren)?
- Has the relationship with the mother(s) of your child (ren) as it relates to parenting, changed since you started this program? If so, in what ways?

Father Child Relationship Quality/ Father Involvement

Children are a ray of sunshine and one of the reasons many of you have participated in this program has been to become a better father. Now, can you please share with us a little about your relationship with your child (ren).

- Do you get to see your child (ren) as often as you like? Why or why not?
- Has your relationship with your child (ren) changed since you started this program?
- Did attending the program change your desire to have more contact with your child (ren)?
- Did attending the program help you to gain a better understanding of the importance of having a good father-child relationship for your child's development?
- What changes would you make to the program that would help you improve your relationship with your child(ren)?

IF TIME PERMITS:

Family Childhood Background/ Family of Origin Characteristics

Now we would like to talk with you about your relationship with your father and discuss ways that you are like your father and ways that you are different.

- In what ways did your relationship with your father shape the man and father you are to your family and child (ren)?

Probes:

- Do you know your biological father?
- Is/was your biological father involved in your life? Do you think this has influenced the type of father you are?
- Do you find yourself trying to be like your father?
- Do you find yourself trying not to be like your father?

Our father is not the only one who helps shape our life. The whole family makes an impact on who we become.

- In what ways did <formal name for the responsible fatherhood program> help you identify things in your family background and how they influence the type of father you are?
- Did this information help you understand the type of father you are?
- Did this information encourage you to improve or continue to enhance the relationship you have with your children?

Probes:

- If yes, why? If no, why not?

Child Support

Finally, we would like to talk with you about your experiences with the child support system.

- What is your understanding of the District's child support program?
- What are some of the supports available to fathers like yourself, with regard to the child support system?

Probe:

- Were you aware of these resources prior to your participating in the HFTC program?
- What has been your experience with the child support enforcement system?
- What ways, other than child support payments, can fathers support their children?
- Do you think that the penalties for not paying child support are too strong, about right or not strong enough?

Marriage

Lastly, please discuss with us your opinions about marriage.

- Do you see marriage as being necessary for being a "good" parent to your child(ren)?
- Please describe what "would be" or "is" the benefit of marriage for you? What "would be" or "are" the drawbacks?

Appendix D: Father Focus Group Questionnaire

**The Healthy Families Thriving Communities
Quenching the Father Thirst and Case Management Programs
INFO SHEET**

We would like to know a little bit about the people we are talking with. If you feel comfortable, please answer the questions below. Note that *completing this form is entirely voluntary*. Also, we want this form to be anonymous so please *do NOT put your name on the sheet*.

1. Please rate the program on a scale of 1 to 5.

Check on one box

- 1- I do not like it
- 2 - It is okay
- 3 - It is good
- 4 - It is very good
- 5 – It is perfect: I would not change anything

2. How old are you?

_____yrs old

3. What is highest level of education you have achieved?

- ___ Less than a college degree
- ___ College Degree
- ___ Masters Degree
- ___ Higher than Masters Degree

4. What are the top 3 things you enjoy about this program?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

5. What are the top 3 things you dislike about this program?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____



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