

## Texas Fathers' Challenges and Needs

At the second Texas Fatherhood Summit, attendees participated in a Data Walk that showed information about the role fathers play in their families, as well as the challenges they face to remain involved with their children. Attendees were asked to discuss the challenges of Texas fathers, make recommendations for addressing fathers' needs through programs or policies, and share their observations at the Summit. CFRP compiled and organized these submissions in the list below.

### Fathers' Challenges:

- **Education and skills**
  - Academic education
- **Employment**
  - Work expectations
  - Under- or unemployment
  - Work schedule conflicts and when services are available
  - Fathers working multiple jobs and don't make time for parenting
  - Inability to earn good wages makes fathers stay away if they can't provide for families
  - Education gap
- **Poverty, lack of resources**
  - Homelessness
- **Fewer services for men**
  - Services leave men out of the loop
  - Changing support system/nontraditional home
- **Child support arrears**
- **Lacking money to buy items for children or pay for activities to do together**
  - Understanding that value of relationship is not always what fathers can buy
- **Lack of parenting education**
  - No education on how to be a parent, no biological connection
  - Need to learn to be nurturers
  - Expectation that it is "mom's job" to do the family
  - Don't know how to just "be" with their kids
  - How to bond with infant? Can't go play sports
  - Lack of confidence—even with a court order, fathers won't assert their rights to visitation if the mom says no or if policy won't help enforce
  - Fathers without own father don't have tangible ideal for fatherhood

- **Lack of education of the legal system**
  - Lack of legal knowledge, fathers don't know their rights
  - Custody laws, logistics, beats fathers down and limits all
  - Parenting plans
- **Legal barriers & criminal record**
  - Dad isn't allowed in public housing/Section 8 (felony)
  - Family can't use supports if dad is in the household: policy barriers incentivize nonresident parenthood (public housing)
  - Criminal justice history
  - Lack of drivers licenses
- **Substance abuse**
- **Mental and physical health**
- **Personal problems (domestic violence, substance abuse, etc.)**
- **Self-efficacy**
  - Lack of role model
  - Breaking cycle is difficult
  - Reinforced negative messages
  - Cultural stereotypes
    - Cultural messages that dads' only role is to provide
    - Social/cultural norms that mom is the more important parent and dads believe this message—think they don't have value
    - Limited gender roles
    - Ideal of being “high-guarded” [not nurturing or vulnerable]
  - Not knowing how to deal with failure
  - Need confidence to carry on
  - Self-esteem/confidence
  - We must be careful with how we speak of statistics, do not want fathers to feel paralyzed or that the cards are stacked against them—must reinforce that fathers are the makers of their “destiny”
  - Bridging gap from ideal to reality
- **Maternal gatekeeping and co-parenting**
  - Relationship issues between parents
  - Learn co-parenting
  - Learn how to handle relationships with other family members (grandparents, etc.)
  - New partner for mom—interferes with dad's participation
  - Mother's family not supportive of dad

## Fathers' Needs to Address their Challenges:

- **Break generational cycle—education, services, contact**
- **Change discourse on fatherhood:**
  - For social policy—placing equal emphasis on fatherhood-human development
  - Integrative
  - Make training practice instead of reactive
  - Present picture of extended family
  - Acknowledgement of fathers
  - School—needs to teach and set expectations of fatherhood
- **Finding role models who can give advice**
  - Individualized coaching
  - Positive reinforcement/confidence
- **Basic needs**
  - Incentives to address basic needs
  - Finding better ways to connect current resources already available to fathers that need them—this needs more funding to find those connections
  - Community support and resources
- **Legal services (free)**
- **Reentry services and second chance**
  - Assist with picture ID, birth certificate, etc.
  - Need programs in prison. Let kids go to parenting classes in prison.
  - Tap into the talent of young men in prison by providing programming that connects kids and their talents to make money
  - Ban the box
- **Free counseling**
- **Child support debt forgiveness**
- **Employment/job training**
  - Need resources in fatherhood programs that help fathers access employment, such as temp agencies
  - Blend/integrate fatherhood programs with those that come in for workforce programs
  - Nurture entrepreneurship
- **Teen fathers**
  - Communicate differently with teen dads and address their unique needs with unique solutions (maybe through schools)

- **Parenting support**
  - Everyone wants to be a better father. Fathers just need someone to tell them that it's okay to seek help to become a better dad
  - Need programs that focus on what kind of parent you're going to be
  - Support doing it alone—not easy, scary
  - Parenting classes
  - Educate fathers on postpartum depression
  - Handbook? Increased education/training?
  - Support and encouragement that sometimes dad's way IS the right way
  - Education that just being there is good for kids—"any time is good for kids"
  - Broaden the definition of fatherhood as more than just providing
  - New father resources, paternity leave... encourage fathers to take an active role in their child's life from the start
  - Places where dads and kids can interact and learn with kids the basic culture and social norms of parenting.
    - Sober homes for men with children—including classes and play time within the homes
    - Help fathers think of activities to do with kids because sometimes they are unsure of what to do
  - Fathers feel there is no role for them, that they don't matter (define your role as father, no buildup of skills in childhood/adolescence for parenting)
- **Co-parenting**
  - Equal support between mom/dad
  - Moms need to let dads be dads and participate in their child's life
  - Relationships/co-parenting counseling