

2010

**Title:** Tarrant County (TX) Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF) Subgrant; Site Visit Report

**Grantee:** Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, NewDay Services for Children and Families (on behalf of the Fatherhood Coalition of Tarrant County), and Child Trends

**Award #:** 90CO1025

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## SUMMARY

The National Quality Improvement Center for Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF) awarded subgrants in 2008 to projects in four States for fatherhood classes for nonresident fathers whose children have been removed from their homes. One of the four subgrants was awarded to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Child Protection Services (CPS) Division to conduct a project in Tarrant County in partnership with several local organizations. Tarrant County includes the cities of Fort Worth and Arlington and is adjacent to Dallas County. The project has three main components:

- Identifying and locating potentially eligible fathers whose children are in foster care
- Providing curriculum-driven fatherhood classes
- Raising awareness among child welfare workers about the importance of father engagement.

The fatherhood classes meet for 20 weeks and use a curriculum developed by the QIC NRF to support nonresident fathers in engaging their children. The curriculum covers topics such as navigating the child welfare system, supporting their children, the juvenile court system, and workforce issues. Between August 2008 and March 2010, the Tarrant County subgrant held fatherhood classes for seven cohorts of fathers.

Project staff and participating fathers offered various observations about the project, including:

- Those who participated in the classes gained valuable support, although the small size of the classes negatively affected the implementation of the curriculum.
- The fathers noted that persistent phone calls were the best way to encourage their participation in a class.
- The males-only dynamic in the classes was very beneficial for the fathers.
- Common barriers to the fathers being able to attend the classes included transportation issues and conflicting work schedules, and common barriers to initially engaging the fathers included distrust of the child welfare system, personal issues (e.g., substance abuse, mental health problems), fear of the unknown, their fragile state (i.e., being overwhelmed by the situation), and paternity questions.

Project staff felt that the project made its biggest impact on the understanding and practice of CPS staff regarding engaging fathers. The subgrant conducted several trainings on this topic, including one for 350 workers from 19 counties. The majority of workers surveyed after the training indicated that they had increased their knowledge about the importance of father involvement and the barriers fathers face with the child welfare system. Other trainings focused on topics such as pulling historical paternal information from case files and locating fathers.

The subgrant ends on March 31, 2011, and the Tarrant County subgrant continues to work on ways to disseminate the information they collected and sustain various components of the project, such as family finding, support for fathers, the Fathers Advisory Council, and changes to the data collection system to make it focus more on paternal information.

Reprinted from *Children's Bureau Express*, "Site Visit: Supporting Nonresident Fathers in Texas" (<http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov>).

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The National Quality Improvement Center for Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF) awarded one of its four subgrants to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Child Protection Services (CPS) Division ([http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child\\_Protection/About\\_Child\\_Protective\\_Services/](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/About_Child_Protective_Services/)) to conduct a project in Tarrant County, which includes the cities of Fort Worth and Arlington and is adjacent to Dallas County. The CPS Division is partnering with the Fatherhood Coalition of Tarrant County (FCTC) (<http://www.tarrantfatherhood.org/>), a group of 21 organizations that seeks to support responsible fatherhood and strengthen the role of fathers, men, and families in the lives of children in Tarrant County.

Project partners include:

- NewDay Services for Children and Families (<http://www.newdayservices.org/>), a faith-based nonprofit serving as the lead FCTC member for the subgrant
- Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County (<http://www.workforcesolutions.net/>), an FCTC member that provides job-related assistance to project participants
- Child Trends (<http://www.childtrends.org/>), which is conducting the subgrant's evaluation
- Other members of FCTC on an *ad hoc* basis

The Tarrant County subgrant's model, like that of the other three subgrants, consists of locating and recruiting nonresident fathers to participate in 20 weekly fatherhood classes designed to strengthen the fathers' engagement with their children who are involved with the child welfare system.

(Note: The term "father" in this report will be used interchangeably with "nonresident father" unless otherwise clarified.)

### ***Locating and Contacting Fathers***

The process for determining if a father may be eligible for the classes begins upon the child's removal from the home. The CPS Grant Coordinator (a grant-funded staff position housed within CPS) reviews the Petition Information Sheet used by CPS workers to document the removal. This form includes fields about the father that match the disqualification factors for the program, including whether the father:

- Resides in the home
- Has been convicted of a sexual offense or crime against the child
- Has been convicted of criminal assault against the mother
- Is the subject of a permanent protection order
- Is the designated perpetrator in the case

If the form is incomplete, the CPS Grant Coordinator will request that the CPS caseworker provide additional information or explain why the fields cannot be completed (e.g., the father's identity is unknown or not provided by the mother). If the father's identity is unknown, the CPS Grant Coordinator will keep in touch with the caseworker over the life of the case to determine if his identity and contact information have become known during court hearings, family group conferences, or other case proceedings. She also reminds the caseworker, especially if he or she has recently been assigned the case, to continue to probe the mother, other family members, and others about the father's identity.

If an eligible father is identified but the caseworker does not have any contact information, the caseworker is asked to coordinate with the CPS Legal Unit to place a notice in a local publication or file an affidavit for a diligent search. The Legal Unit will then forward any known information about the father and other relevant case information to the State's Diligent Search Unit. This unit had primarily been used to search for relatives for older youth in the child welfare system, but the Tarrant County subgrant reached an agreement with the unit to prioritize search requests for the project. The Diligent Search Unit has since expanded its prioritized searches to all fatherhood cases in Texas.

Once a potentially eligible father's contact information is found, the CPS Grant Coordinator forwards that information to NewDay. A male staffer contacts the father by mail or phone to discuss the program, determine if the father wants to participate, and set up a face-to-face meeting. If the father decides to participate, the staffer will obtain his informed consent and conduct a baseline interview. (For more information about data collection and outcomes, see the Outcomes tab.) The father is then assigned to a class cohort.

Fathers in need of career services are referred to a caseworker at Workforce Solutions, an organization that provides employment training and support to community members, for free, intensive employment assistance.

### ***Fatherhood Classes***

The first 12 of the 20 fatherhood classes are based on a curriculum developed by the QIC NRF. Titles include:

- Introduction
- Dad as Part of the Solution: Overview of the Child Welfare System
- Dad as Planner: Service Planning in the Child Welfare System
- Dad as a Healthy Parent: Taking Care of You
- Dad as Community Member: Identifying and Accessing Resources
- Dad as Cultural Guide: The Role of Culture in Parenting
- Dad as Parent: Understanding Your Children
- Dad as Part of Children's Placement: Visiting With Your Children
- Dad as Part of the Juvenile Court Process: Legal Advocacy and Court Etiquette
- Dad as Provider: Supporting Your Children
- Dad as Team Player: Shared Parenting
- Dad as Worker: Workforce Readiness

The first three classes are conducted in the order listed; the remaining nine can be conducted in any order that meets the cohort's needs. Classes are led by one of two NewDay facilitators, one of whom is the fathers' initial contact. Several classes, such as those on the child welfare system and the juvenile court process, are led or attended by guest speakers.

The remaining eight classes are based on a NewDay curriculum, Fathers Offering Children Unfailing Support (FOCUS), that was originally developed with funding from the Texas Office of the Attorney General to support fathers who were noncompliant with child support enforcement orders. The purpose of the FOCUS classes is to help fathers understand the importance of their role, improve their fathering skills, enhance child support payments, and increase the quality of time spent with their children. Titles include:

- Reflecting on Your Father
- Focus on Manhood
- Valuing Your Role as a Father
- Honoring the Co-Parenting Relationship
- Influence Versus Control-Seeking Behavior
- Building a Stronger Kid
- Leaving Your Imprint
- Putting Your Plan into Action

As an incentive to attend the classes, the Tarrant County subgrant provides the fathers with a meal at the beginning of each class and Walmart gift cards that maybe used for gas (most Walmarts in the area have gas stations) or other expenses.

### ***Trainings and Awareness***

The Tarrant County subgrant has provided several trainings for CPS and other staff, including:

- **February 2009:** A training on the importance of engaging fathers for approximately 350 supervisors from Region III, which includes 19 counties.
- **September 2009:** A training on engaging fathers for court-appointed attorneys in child welfare cases, conducted by NewDay and the American Bar Association Center for Children and the Law (a QIC NRF partner).
- **October 2009:** A workshop for frontline social workers on engaging fathers in child welfare situations, conducted by American Humane and the National Fatherhood Initiative (two of the QIC NRF partners).
- **May 2010:** A training for social workers on pulling historical paternal information from case files.

The subgrant also conducted other smaller trainings for groups such as court-appointed special advocates and community social services agencies.

In April 2010, FCTC put on a conference, "Bringing Back the Dads." The focus of the conference was on the importance of responsible father involvement and practical ways to engage fathers. Although the Tarrant County subgrant did not fund the conference, the QIC NRF and the subgrant were involved in several ways:

- Six fathers who had completed the program discussed being nonresident fathers and their experiences with the program during a session.
- American Humane funded a National QIC NRF board member to serve as a keynote speaker.
- American Humane and DFPS staff led breakout sessions.

### ***Fathers Advisory Council***

The subgrant has established a Fathers Advisory Council to provide input for activities in Region III and throughout the State. This group also provides input on materials created by the Tarrant County subgrant and the QIC NRF. Most council members have participated in the fatherhood classes, but some have just been involved with CPS or attended FOCUS classes. Attendance at the meetings varies; eight fathers attended the council meeting just prior to the site visit.

Several of the council members also participate in the National Fathers Advisory Council, which is led by the QIC NRF. Texas plans to eventually create a statewide council.

### ***Future Plans and Sustainability***

The funding from the QIC NRF for the Tarrant County subgrant will end on March 31, 2011. The group has begun to strategize how it will disseminate project information and continue its work.

To disseminate lessons learned, the subgrant would like to:

- Produce a toolkit for caseworkers about the importance of involving fathers and how to engage them
- Create a toolkit for nonresident fathers about how to become more involved with their children and navigate the child welfare and judicial systems
- Develop a video in which participants in the fatherhood classes tell their stories and offer advice to other nonresident fathers
- Coordinate with other subgrants on dissemination projects, including journal articles written by the evaluation teams

Two lasting changes are being explored as a result of the grant:

- In May 2010, the subgrant had a training with Kevin Campbell of the Center for Family Finding and Youth Connectedness about the Family Finding program. This model uses Internet-based search tools to help locate family members (including fathers) and a Blended Perspective Meeting, during which family members and friends discuss the importance of positive adult connections to the child's development and well-being. This meeting reinforces the importance of family involvement in the family group conference. CPS leadership in Region III, which includes Tarrant County and 18 other counties, has designated funding to continue Family Finding in Tarrant County through 2012.
- Another change being considered at the State level is adding fields for fathers' information into the State's child welfare information system. This system is currently focused on the mother's information; the father's is entered in a field for "other family members." This causes caseworkers to focus on the maternal family and often results in more services being provided to the mother than to the father.

The State and NewDay also are exploring funding options to continue the project as a whole. They are considering changes to the project's format, such as combining the QIC NRF and FOCUS curricula into one 10-week program and targeting all fathers rather than just nonresident fathers.

### **SITE VISIT HIGHLIGHTS**

The site visit took place on May 20–21, 2010, in Fort Worth, TX. The following meetings occurred at the NewDay office unless otherwise noted:

## Day 1

- Overview of project and NewDay with NewDay staff (Karen Bird, Project Coordinator; Elna Vanderberg, Executive Director; and Tommy Jordan, Program Manager for Fatherhood Programs/Facilitator)
- Discussion of challenges and lessons learned with NewDay staff (Ms. Bird; Ms. Vanderberg; Mr. Jordan; and David Taylor, Recruiter/Facilitator)
- Lunch with NewDay staff (Mr. Jordan and Mr. Taylor) and two fathers (Matt and Mike) who had participated in the fatherhood classes (see below for additional information about this meeting)
- Discussion of Child Protective Services' (CPS) involvement in project with staff from CPS (Debra Pohlman, CPS Program Administrator for Region III and Leslie Berg, Administrative Assistant to the Region III Program Director) and NewDay (Ms. Bird, Ms. Vanderberg, and Mr. Jordan)
- Meeting with Charles Scoma, Fatherhood Coalition of Tarrant County chairman; Mervil Johnson, Workforce Collaboration Manager, Workforce Solutions; and Ms. Vanderberg
- Discussion of successful strategies and recommendations with NewDay staff (Ms. Bird, Mr. Jordan, and Mr. Taylor)

## Day 2

- Meeting with Judge Kim Brown from the Tarrant County Juvenile Court and Mr. Taylor of NewDay
- Overview of the subgrant's evaluation with staff from Child Trends (Karin Malm) and NewDay (Ms. Bird, Ms. Vanderberg, and Mr. Jordan)
- Lunch meeting with NewDay staff (Ms. Bird, Ms. Vanderberg, Mr. Jordan, and Mr. Taylor) about sustainability and future plans
- Observation of a standing project meeting at a local CPS office that was attended by staff from NewDay (Ms. Vanderberg, Ms. Bird, Mr. Jordan, and Mr. Taylor) and various CPS program directors from Tarrant County, including Ms. Pohlman

On Day 1, the author met for lunch with two fathers—Mike and Matt—who had participated in the fatherhood classes. Both fathers mentioned that part of the reason for participating in the program was that it could help them get their children back. Mike said that his caseworker was very happy when he showed her his program completion certificate. Matt described how father engagement has now become a calling for him. He has become a mentor for other nonresident fathers and talks to service providers and others about the program. Mike stated that the classes teach the fathers about issues they will eventually come across in the child welfare system. Being familiar with these issues helps make the process smoother.

Both fathers stated that the gift cards eliminated a transportation barrier for them and made it easier to attend the classes. Mike mentioned that he had to borrow a car to attend the classes and that it did not always have enough gas.

The fathers said that the topics they found most helpful during the classes were legal issues, how to navigate the systems, and workforce issues. They also appreciated having representatives from the legal system present to them.

One effect of the fatherhood classes that came up during the lunch and other site visit meetings was that they empowered the fathers. One story that came up several times was how Matt was having difficulty receiving a particular service because the provider had not received a payment

voucher from CPS. After checking with the provider several times, Matt went to CPS directly to obtain the voucher himself and delivered it to the service provider.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

### **Lessons Learned**

#### ***Recruitment and Engagement***

- Persistent phone calls were the most successful initial recruitment method. Home visits and letters to the fathers were less effective but should not be eliminated.
- Due to Child Protective Services (CPS) mandates, high case loads, and budget constraints, it is difficult for caseworkers to shift to an approach that engages nonresident fathers and the paternal families. However, caseworkers are willing to make the extra effort when prompted by project staff or others.
- Fathers are less likely to join a cohort if classes have already begun. However, the fathers also are less likely to attend if there is a long gap between the child's removal and the initial contact, or between the initial contact and the start of the next cohort. Additionally, the sooner the face-to-face meeting with the father occurs after the initial contact, the more likely he is to attend classes.
- The fathers usually have heard about the removal of their child before the subgrant contacts them.

#### ***What Is Important to the Fathers***

- The fathers were very interested in knowing how the fatherhood classes could help their children and their relationship with them. They also wanted to know more about their legal rights, finding an attorney, and visitation with their children.
- Workforce issues were one of the fathers' top priorities.
- The fathers often stated that they wanted more communication with their caseworkers.

#### ***Courts***

- Judges value the fatherhood classes because they provide the fathers with necessary skills and support.
- Judges feel more comfortable making decisions when they have input from more than one party, so having the subgrant staff's input and recommendations is helpful to them. Additionally, the fathers may not be vocal during the process, so it is helpful for the judges to know that they have an advocate.

#### ***Assumptions***

- The grant work has challenged some NewDay staff member's assumptions about CPS. For example, NewDay had expressed concern at a subgrant meeting about some fathers' visits with their children being cancelled or rescheduled. It appeared as if CPS was being unfair to the fathers. When CPS explained the reasons for the visitation issues (e.g., funding, transporting the children, foster parent issues) and the complexities of visitation, NewDay and the fathers gained a new perspective about the agency. Agency staff also learned how visitation issues can affect fathers' case plans.

- Staff assumptions about nonresident fathers also were challenged. For example:
  - Most fathers in the classes already had some involvement or frequent contact with the child who was removed. Some fathers therefore experienced a *decline* in contact with their children after beginning the classes, due to the infrequency of visitations.
  - Nonresident fathers often had amicable relationships with the mothers; in some cases, they were still in a dating relationship but not cohabitating.
  - Most custody arrangements had been determined informally by the father and mother.

## **Recommendations**

- Project staff should try to keep the fathers involved while not giving them undue hope about getting custody of their children.
- CPS investigators should be trained to engage mothers and other family members about providing information on nonresident fathers. They should keep trying to find information about the fathers throughout the life of the case (e.g., investigation, foster care) and from all involved family members.
- Courts should hold caseworkers and mothers accountable for providing or gathering father contact information. Each class should be interesting and pertinent. Fathers may think, “If it wasn’t interesting this week, why would it be next week?”
- Projects should have a point-of-contact to help keep the fathers moving through the process and to remind them of what they discussed in class and the resources available to them.
- Nonresident fathers should be encouraged to participate in child welfare case planning.
- CPS agencies should have internal discussions about how additional nonresidential father involvement affects cases in which reunification is the goal (i.e., if the father obtained custody, would that meet the case goal of reunification?).
- Recommendations from fathers who attended classes include:
  - The first contact for the project should be empathetic and earnest in his approach, and should help the father understand that the project is there to help. The father is likely already feeling bad about the situation and will not want to work with someone who is being insincere or has his “nose in the air.”
  - The fathers should be involved in shaping the curriculum and class agendas.
  - It is important to explain the roles of the various staff in the child welfare and legal systems. The process can be very overwhelming and make fathers feel powerless. Knowing the roles of the staff with whom they are (or should be) working is essential.
  - Having “hook” classes (i.e., classes that will catch the fathers' attention) and incentives (e.g., gift cards) in the beginning is important to boost attendance.

## **Challenges**

### ***Research***

- Some of the original requirements of the National Quality Improvement Center for Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF) research design presented challenges for the subgrant:

- The subgrants initially needed to contact the fathers within 45 days of the child's removal in order for him participate. Issues with locating and contacting fathers made this difficult.
- The subgrants also initially were required to have a treatment group and a control group. Low contact and participation numbers made it difficult to assign fathers to both groups and maintain enough participation in each.

### ***Father Participation, Engagement, and Attendance***

- The following are common barriers to engaging the fathers during first contact:
  - Lack of emotional readiness
  - Paternity questions
  - Issues with the mother
  - Other personal issues (e.g., substance abuse, mental health, incarceration)
  - Other relationships or children
  - Distrust of the system or program
  - Viewing the situation as a setback rather than an opportunity
- The following are common barriers to fathers attending the classes:
  - Transportation
  - Work schedule
  - Taking other actions to follow their case plans (e.g., visitation)
- It is difficult for the fathers to juggle employment, the fatherhood classes, visitations, and other scheduled events. Visitation slots are often assigned to them; they are not asked what times would work for them. One father stated that he had to choose between showing up for work and attending a visitation and ended up choosing the visitation.
- Some fathers give consent to participate and then do not attend the classes. Reasons for this may include:
  - The father is awaiting paternity confirmation.
  - The father moved out of the area.
  - The child was placed with the father or mother.
  - The father works nights, which is when the classes generally occur.
  - Subgrant staff were unable to recontact the father because of phone issues, which could include the father's phone not having any additional minutes or the phone being disconnected.
  - The father is tending to other life issues (e.g., substance abuse, mental health, incarceration).

### ***Fatherhood Classes***

- It would be beneficial to have more fathers in each cohort; five or six would be ideal. For the first seven cohorts, zero to five fathers attended the first class, and zero to four completed the program. Small cohort size makes it difficult to implement some of the planned activities and provide peer-learning opportunities.
- The subgrant has not been able to serve some Spanish-speaking fathers. They have a volunteer translator, but having a translator in the classes might detract from relationship building and the group dynamic.

### ***Other***

- Including a genogram in the case file would help track family connections and contacts throughout the case and assist in finding other permanency options. Texas is currently conducting a feasibility study to determine how expensive it would be to add a genogram to its information system.
- Not all caseworkers know that the fatherhood classes are available.
- The subgrant is still trying to determine how to continue to engage fathers after the classes end.

## **Successful Strategies**

### ***Contact and Engagement***

- In the beginning, project staff highlighted the fact that the Tarrant County subgrant was not part of CPS, but this approach was not very successful. Saying the subgrant was partnering with CPS worked much better, because the fathers saw the subgrant as being closer to the system and not just another hoop they had to jump through.
- If CPS told the fathers that subgrant staff would be contacting them, there was a better chance of a face-to-face meeting or other contact than if CPS did not tell them. Subgrant staff believe that having CPS alert the fathers helped build trust in the subgrant.
- The subgrant hired a full-time staffer to recruit, locate, and contact the fathers. The workload involved with those tasks was much greater than originally anticipated, and it greatly helped to have someone available full time to the fathers and CPS.
- Providing gift cards and a meal greatly helped with class attendance. The fathers said they initially attended the classes for the gift card and the meal but stayed for the content.
- The way the fathers were approached by the subgrant is critical:
  - Fathers reported that persistent calling is effective.
  - One father stated that the way he was approached (direct, straightforward, highlighting benefits) was the most important factor in his participation. He also liked the idea that the program was part of a study and that his participation could assist other fathers.
  - It is important to give fathers the chance to tell their stories, which they often feel they do not have the opportunity to do.
- Having subgrant staff available at the courthouse has made it easier to refer fathers for services or to make connections.

### ***Locating Fathers***

- Working with the Diligent Search Unit and raising awareness among caseworkers about the importance of engaging fathers have helped the subgrant locate and contact more fathers.
- Using subgrant funds, DFPS hired a full-time CPS Grant Coordinator who works for and at CPS. She determines eligibility, gathers contact information, and routes information between CPS and NewDay. Having a CPS staffer do these tasks makes the father and case information more accessible, alleviates confidentiality concerns that caseworkers may have if providing case information directly to a non-CPS person, and allows for greater contact between the subgrant and CPS staff.
- The subgrant worked with CPS to have nonresident father information, including items that reflected eligibility criteria, added to the Petition Information Sheet. This assisted in gathering contact information, prompted caseworkers to seek that information, and made

it easier for the CPS Grant Coordinator to quickly determine if a father might be eligible and if contact information is available.

### ***Fatherhood Classes***

- Successful strategies identified by fathers who attended the classes:
  - The males-only group dynamic helped fathers feel more relaxed and open up more than they would have in a male-female group. They felt more comfortable showing emotions and talking about taboo topics without judgment.
  - The classes' central location near public transportation made it easier for the fathers to attend.
- The fathers appreciated being able to review their case plans during the class led by a CPS Legal Liaison. The facilitators also review the case plans with the fathers during other classes and contact CPS for clarification, if needed. The fathers do not always understand what is being asked of them in their service plans. The CPS caseworkers review the plans with them, but the fathers may be overwhelmed by the CPS terminology and the amount of information. Additionally, the case plan often outlines several requirements of the father, including attending several classes, drug testing, proof of paternity, and a psychiatric exam, even though the father is the non-offending parent.

## **OUTCOMES**

### ***Design***

A common evaluation design for all four subgrants was developed by the National Quality Improvement Center for Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF).

Interviews with participating fathers are the primary evaluation method. After a father consents to participating in the study, a subgrant staffer (e.g., the contact person or the class facilitator) conducts a 25- to 30-minute baseline interview with the father. Follow-up interviews (approximately 10 to 15 minutes each) are conducted at Week 8 and Week 16. Interviews cover the father's employment, education, health, transportation, prior contact with CPS (as a parent and as a child), child support obligations, and relationship with the mother, as well as the number and ages of his children and their likes and dislikes. Follow-up interviews may include additional questions about income over the previous month and interaction with social services agencies. The interviews might occur by phone, at one of the classes, or at another location.

Two elements of the original evaluation design were changed in June 2009:

- The evaluation originally was to follow an experimental design, with four or five fathers randomly assigned to each cohort of treatment and control groups. This requirement was eliminated, and all eligible fathers were assigned to the treatment group, because the subgrants had difficulty recruiting enough fathers.
- The original evaluation design also required that contact must be made with the fathers within 45 days of their children's removal in order for them to participate in the study. This requirement was eliminated after the subgrants alerted the QIC NRF to difficulties in gathering contact information and contacting the fathers, resulting in the exclusion of

many fathers who might otherwise be eligible. When this requirement was removed, subgrants were permitted to contact fathers who had previously been deemed ineligible due to the 45-day contact requirement.

## **Findings**

- The Tarrant County subgrant received information on 794 fathers from August 2008 to March 2010:
  - Of the 794 fathers, 579 (73 percent) were nonresident.
  - Of the 579 nonresident fathers (NRFs), 21 (4 percent) were deceased or had their parental rights terminated, and 41 (7 percent) were deemed ineligible for safety concerns.
  - Of the 517 remaining NRFs eligible for the subgrant, 168 (32 percent) had valid contact information. This is 21 percent of the initial 794 fathers.
- From the first 54 days of the subgrant to the most recent 54 days (as of the site visit):
  - The percentages of NRFs found ineligible for the subgrant (due to incarceration, order of protection, etc.) remained relatively constant.
  - The percentage of NRFs that cannot be contacted has dropped. During the first 54 days of the project, 80 percent of potentially eligible fathers (N=20) could not be identified or had limited or no contact information. During the most recent 54 days, only 48.1 percent of potentially eligible fathers (N=27) could not be identified or had limited or no contact information. The remaining 51.8 percent were contacted.
- Seven cohorts of fathers have participated in the fatherhood classes. On average for each cohort, 7.1 fathers provided consent to participate, 2.6 fathers attended the first class, and 2.4 fathers completed the program. Completion data were not available for the two most recent cohorts, so that average is only for the first five cohorts. (For fathers to be considered as having completed the program, they must attend the first two classes and at least one other class. Most fathers, however, attend many more than the minimum of three.)
- Subgrant staff have conducted 47 baseline interviews, 13 first follow-up interviews, and 2 second follow-up interviews.
- The subgrant staff state that the biggest effect of the project has been on caseworker practice and the CPS system.
- The project evaluator highlighted the following preliminary findings:
  - One of the early assumptions was that many of the fathers would be new to the child welfare system, but half had prior experiences with CPS as a child.
  - A high percentage of participating fathers are engaged with their children, but that might not be the case for the universe of NRFs (i.e., those who did not consent to participate). It may be that fathers who are already engaged are more likely to participate.
  - The fathers gained a valuable support group through their class involvement.
  - The small size of the cohorts negatively affects program implementation.