**Fatherhood Engagement in Home Visiting Programs in Allegheny County**

**October 3, 2022**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Attendance:**

* 1. Amy Malen - DHS
  2. Emily Bengel - DHS
  3. Claire Wever - DHS
  4. Jace Ransom - DHS
  5. Lori Vollman - AIU
  6. Art Terry - Healthy Start, Inc.
  7. Larry Klinger - AIU
  8. Joshua McKinley - East Liberty FC
  9. Neil Walker - Homewood Early Learning Hub and FC
  10. Toni Beasley - Homewood Early Learning Hub and FC
  11. Dawn Reese - South Hills FC
  12. John Burwell - Braddock FC
  13. Isaac Kivuva - Penn Hills FC
  14. Rhonda Hall - Pitt OCD
  15. Kenneth Strother - Hill District FC
  16. Angela Gressem - Healthy Start
  17. Sharon Dixon - ACHD
  18. Mary Carrol - ACHD
  19. Doreen Glover - Family Resources, Hill District FC
  20. Charlotte Byrd - CHP, FCC
  21. Gladys Montanez - Latino Community Center
  22. Rosamaria Cristello - Latino Community Center
  23. Michael Smith - AIU, Sto-Rox FC
  24. Art Johnson - AIU, Sto-Rox FC
  25. M. Gabrielle Glass - Northside FC, Providence
  26. Thomas Washington – UPMC
  27. Wendy Etheridge Smith - AIU

1. Overview of OCDEL’s Investment in Engaging Fathers – Amy Malen shared that OCDEL greatly increased the funding to support father involvement in home visiting this year. This has led to providing staff who can engage fathers across the full county; thus, we are convening this group to ensure that is done in a coordinated way. The AIU, who has been receiving this support, will facilitate the coordination of the countywide effort.
2. Historic Moment with OCDEL’s increased investment and the potential passage of HB 1731 – See the bill at: [Regular Session 2021-2022 House Bill 1731 P.N. 1961 (state.pa.us)](https://www.legis.state.pa.us/CFDOCS/Legis/PN/Public/btCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&sessYr=2021&sessInd=0&billBody=H&billTyp=B&billNbr=1731&pn=1961) – Wendy Etheridge Smith recognized the group of individuals in the room who traveled to Harrisburg to participate in a rally to support HB 1731 on September 27, 2022. The bill was passed by the House unanimously in the spring and is now being considered by the Senate Appropriations Committee to then be considered by the full Senate once passed out of Committee. Allegheny County sent a group of 24 individuals. The purpose of the legislation is:

“Establishing the Pennsylvania Advisory Committee on Greater Father Involvement within the Joint State Government Commission and providing for its powers and duties. The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania herby enacts as follows: This act shall be known and may be cited as the Greater Father Involvement Act. … “The public policy of the Commonwealth is to end institutional barriers that may impede fathers in fostering supportive connections with their children, establish support mechanisms to enhance the ability of fathers to assume a beneficial parenting role and assist men in preparing for the legal, financial and emotional responsibilities of fatherhood.”

1. Exploring Our Current Father Engagement – The purpose the meeting was to establish a baseline of understanding about what programs are doing primarily to *establish support mechanisms to enhance the ability of fathers to assume a beneficial parenting role*, per language in HB 1731. The information will be used to guide the activities of new staff to support greater father involvement in home visiting and family centers across Allegheny County and to assure greater coordination across programs.
   1. Northside Family Center – still adjusting to COVID impact on programming; fathers are always invited to activities but do not always attend; a challenge for fathers can be simply asking for help; starting a support group specifically for fathers next month
   2. Sto-Rox Family Center – cultivating relationships with fathers to invite them to meetings for socialization activities; seeing the benefits of mixing older and young fathers together
      1. Have seen changes in how must serve fathers - went from 45% fathers having jobs to 80%, which impacts scheduling and availability; talking to younger fathers about their tempers (e.g., get a lot of court-appointed fathers because they lose tempers with the mothers during court appearances)
   3. Latino Community Center – offers Triple P for parenting and has a group for single dads; haven't started in-person services yet but all groups are done virtually; seeing more single fathers participating in Parent Child +, their home-visiting program
   4. Hill District Family Center – at enrollment, always ask the mother if the father is around/involved with the child's life and if father is around, then ask for permission for male home visitor to engage them; tell mothers about the importance of father's presence and to avoid creating barriers; trying to find different ways to engage with the dads, such as exploring doing a father's group on Saturdays (due to work schedules) and holding events at local churches
      1. Things they feel they need to address to support fathers: changing demographics in the community, such that seeing higher numbers of immigrants and struggling with language barriers; interactions need to be more than meeting with fathers once/month; consider doing more prevention work - like going to the schools and offering nurturing parenting in the schools; many agencies led by women so need more men in positions of leadership
   5. Family Care Connection - adjusting the father involvement work to their six communities; learned that it's helpful to have male staff to do this work since so much of this is woman-dominated so advise to be purposeful about hiring men into organizations to do this work; just had a kickoff for fathers for all six sites
      1. Fathers want to do things with their whole families so learned that bringing in the whole family and setting up separate time for some specific father work while engaging other family members can be effective; men will come out if their children and/or family are involved so don’t always just provide “dads-only” events
      2. Female staff do not always recognize the importance of fathers in their children's lives; need to strengthen their understanding to ask about fathers in the lives; OPPORTUNITY FOR HOME VISITING/FAMILY CENTERS IS TO TRAIN STAFF TO ASK ABOUT FATHER INVOLVEMENT, SUCH AS GETTING FATHERS’ CONSENT WHEN ENROLLING MOTHERS
      3. Have learned that fathers need to know where they can turn for help or an issue beyond just accessing diapers and resources so need to make sure family centers communicate that have other supportive services available to fathers as well as mothers
   6. ACHD, Office of Family Child Health and Development (new name such that not just maternal health in recognition of importance of welcoming all family members)
      1. Currently seeking to hire a Father Engagement Specialist (FES); will ask during enrollment if father is present and wants to connect with the FES
      2. Family Health Advocates (all women) running parenting groups; some fathers are attending
      3. POLICY OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS: When pregnant women apply for Medicaid benefits, they are encouraged to sue the father to be eligible to get the benefits, which negatively impacts father involvement
   7. Pitt OCD - Work has shifted to family involvement; one best practice noted is the inclusion of in family center parent advisory councils; OCD had developed resources to enhance the work; consider how to leverage all of Pitt’s resources to support the community, such as School of Education, Social Work, etc.
   8. Healthy Start - intentionally hiring men for fatherhood roles, providing same services to fathers as traditionally do for mothers; have learned that must engage fathers differently (show up at their homes rather than texting to get them involved)
      1. BARRIER FOR FATHERS: Many fathers lack health insurance, particularly relevant for mental health supports and accessing those services
      2. Fatherhood Coordinator addresses child advocacy with single fathers in Family Division court (paternity-related issues, child support) and basic parenting procedures
   9. South Hills FC - Lots of Nepali immigrant families; Nepali male staff person does visits with fathers who have children under 18 and offers field trips with dads and their children every 3 months; provide group gatherings; purchased 24/7 Dads curriculum
   10. Homewood Early Learning Hub and Family Center – offering groups for fathers alone and for fathers and children; offered a “Fathers Love Literacy” event; male staff person does home visiting on child development with both mothers and fathers and would like another male on staff
       1. NEED SUPPORT TO: Get training on fathers’ needs around legal issues, communication and co-parenting, issues with birth certificates and fathers not being listed on them
   11. UPMC - opening a neighborhood center next to Staples in East Liberty; focusing on 4 areas of engagement of health and wellness, enrichment, education, and workforce development using a 3-generation model in eight East End communities (though open to all); November 16 is the grand opening from 11 am - 2 pm
       1. NEED: Would like to get a mobile therapy unit that is billable, which is a request from the community
   12. East Liberty Family Center - collaborated with Steel Smiling (a mental health program) to do fatherhood groups and thus doing 24/7 Dad/MH
       1. Men's Day of Self Care on 10/22 at the Kingsley Center from 11 am - 3 pm

1. Next Steps – provide notes to participants to reflect on what has been shared and reconvene in early December to brainstorm what is needed to strengthen the home visiting and family center services available to fathers in Allegheny County; plan to convene the group quarterly to reflect on success of implementation and to deepen our collaborations