



Integrating Diverse Fatherhood Services into the Work of a Large Community-Based Organization

Organization profile

Family Services of Western Pennsylvania serves a population of great diversity, ranging from birth through senior citizens and representing all races and income levels. The agency seeks to enhance the quality of life of the individuals and families they serve and improve the communities they live in. Working in partnership with many groups, such as government agencies, hospitals, schools and school districts, behavioral health and health care providers, universities, and other non-profit organizations helps Family Services to address the needs of the individuals and families they serve.

The ParentWISE Program of Family Services of Western Pennsylvania has been providing parent and caregiver support and educational services for thirty years. The ParentWISE Program began as a Parent’s Anonymous Support Group and is now a program that offers education, support and referral services to parents and other caregivers. The ParentWISE Program provides educational series and workshops for parents, caregivers, grandparents, foster parents, educators, counselors, therapists and any other person interested in the issues and concerns that affect the well being of children, families and communities. Additionally, they offer parenting skills training and emotion management classes in the Westmoreland County Prison and the Allegheny County Jail for both male and female inmates.

The Challenge

ParentWISE first encountered the idea of doing fatherhood work back in 1991 when they received a grant from the Children’s Trust Fund, which asked them to conduct a “fatherhood program.” At the time, the language across the social services world was that “parenting equals mothering,” and there were few if any products or services available to serve dads. So, ParentWISE had to figure out how to engage dads, who are different from moms and require different kinds of assistance.

ParentWISE was also asked to provide an evidence-based program to fathers at the Westmoreland County Jail, which *required* that an evidence-based curriculum be used to supplement its own homegrown program.

The Solution

In 2008, ParentWISE merged with Family Services of Western Pennsylvania, an organization that required rigorous program evaluation and justification for running programs.

NFI stepped in to help ParentWISE create logic models to show how and why they should run a fatherhood program. NFI demonstrated to ParentWISE that NFI’s curricula come equipped with the sorts of evaluation tools they would need to demonstrate their effectiveness. NFI also led ParentWISE through the Father Friendly Check-up™ process, which helped ParentWISE create an internal culture that would be more supportive of running effective fatherhood programs.

The governing board of the Allegheny County Jail also had requirements, such as wanting gender-specific programs to be run. That led to ParentWISE to have NFI’s [InsideOut Dad®](#), [Why Knot™](#), and [24/7 Dad®](#) curricula approved by the Allegheny County Jail, so that ParentWISE could begin delivering those programs to incarcerated fathers. Features of the curricula that led to their approval by the jail are that they come with workbooks for the dads, pre- and post-tests to evaluate their effectiveness, and logic models to show how they lead to success for dads.

ParentWISE also received training from NFI on Doctor Dad® so they could deliver it to young men who were being referred to them by the family court system. NFI also provided ParentWISE with a free fatherhood resource kiosk (as part of a program NFI was running in 2006) so that the organization could provide resources to the diverse set of fathers in their community.

Today, ParentWISE is delivering NFI programs in a variety of settings:

- InsideOut Dad® in Westmoreland County Prison and Allegheny County Jail
- 24/7 Dad® in the same communities where the jails are located, and in alternative housing facilities run by Goodwill.
- ParentWISE is working with Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania, which is using a federal Department of Health and Human Services grant to provide employment training and fatherhood enrichment; ParentWISE, using NFI programs, is providing many of the services.
- ParentWISE is also delivering 24/7 Dad® at day reporting centers (run by the Department of Probation) in Allegheny County
- Doctor Dad® with young men via court referrals.
- ParentWISE has taken advantage of several NFI-led webinars to help them more effectively deliver NFI programs and learn promising practices for working with fathers.

Benefits

First and foremost, ParentWISE is serving more men than ever before, and is helping them see the critical role they play in their children's and families' lives.

ParentWISE attributes this success to the fact that NFI's programs are more than "parenting programs," but that they also help men think more broadly about their roles and address men's greater needs beyond just parenting and parenting skills. ParentWISE also benefits from the flexibility of NFI's programs, allowing them to serve the diverse needs of the fathers in their community.

Furthermore, ParentWISE's staff is better equipped to serve dads due to NFI's capacity-building webinars and workshops (such as Mom as Gateway).

ParentWISE is also seeing benefits across the community. Family courts in ParentWISE's community are starting to "buy into" the value of fatherhood initiatives, resulting in more court referrals. They are now working with organizations like Head Start about how to work with dads.

They have been able to expand their work outside of their county and go statewide. They are using NFI's evidence-based InsideOut Dad® curriculum to serve incarcerated fathers across the state, and they are using the knowledge gleaned from NFI's capacity-building workshops to serve other organizations around the state.

Products and Services They Used

- [24/7 Dad®](#)
- [InsideOut Dad®](#)
- [FatherTOPICS™ Capacity-building workshops](#)
- Capacity-building webinars
- [Fatherhood resource kiosks](#)
- [Brochures](#)
- [Pocket Guides](#)
- [Mom as Gateway](#)
- [Father Friendly Check-up™](#)

Services Provided by Other Groups or Companies

- ParentWISE is working with Hill House in downtown Pittsburgh to deliver 24/7 Dad®
- Manchester Craftsmen's Guild (local community guild)