

# 25 Years of NFI: Featuring William Johnson of The Coshocton County Fatherhood Initiative



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In our final posting to celebrate **25 years of NFI**, we look to an amazing program that combines community events for dads with almost every program that NFI offers—The Coshocton County Fatherhood Initiative (CCFI) and Mr. William Johnson.

While William's role at CCFI could be a full time job, it's not actually his full time job. Nonetheless, he gives everything he has to help fathers with their needs and make them better dads. I was able to catch up with this fatherhood champion (just barely!) to learn about his time at CCFI and the myriad of programs they offer dads.

## ***Tell me about The Coshocton Fatherhood Initiative (CCFI) and your role there.***

"CCFI is a special sub-committee of the Coshocton County Family & Child 1<sup>st</sup> Council. Our mission is to strengthen the family unit through engaging and empowering fathers and father figures to be meaningfully involved in and committed to their child's well-being.

We live and work in 'Rural America'. Coshocton County has 37K residents, and their work consists mostly of the farming industry. Although we're a small community, we have the same struggles as urban communities. Drugs, father absence, job issues, and the opioid crisis are among some of the struggles we have.

The good news is that our community has taken an active role in trying to erase father absence. In fact, at Coshocton open houses and other events, we pass out white “gummy erasers” that have a green logo that says “Helping to Erase Father Absence”. We’re also fortunate that the local Court System is very proactive in positive father involvement. They give referrals for dads for fatherhood programs.

I began at Coshocton County Fatherhood Initiative in 2006 as a Program Facilitator and Coordinator of workshops. After a period of time I became the Co-Chairman, but still remain in the aforementioned role."

### ***How does your organization serve fathers?***

"In general, we serve dads by providing workshops, programs and events. We focus on education for dads and the prevention of fathers being absent.

To accomplish this, we run several NFI programs, as well as two CCFI-specific workshops:

- **NFI’s 24/7 Dad AM®** – This is our primary flagship program that helps send dad down the right path for parenting and communication, so we market it in our community as a “communication program”. A good portion of the fathers come to the program through child support court, and juvenile court. We also use the free 24/7 Dad to Go app from NFI to complement the program, which helps dads keep a daily focus on being a great dad.
- **NFI’s Understanding Dad™ (for moms)** – Understanding Dad™ is a powerful program that opens moms’ eyes to the importance of father involvement. We have a male and female co-facilitate this program, which helps to give moms the men’s perspective and show where the dads are coming from. Also, the dad participants in 24/7 Dad® are encouraged to get mom involved in Understanding Dad™.
- **NFI’s Fathering in 15™** – We Love it!! It’s self-paced and has a certificate of completion! It’s great for dads who are not able to attend the classes and get them information for the “dads on the go”. In fact, we have the dads complete it themselves and after completing each topic, we have a conversation to assess the information they got out of it.

We’ve also had the opportunity to use Fathering in 15™ with students at the Local Opportunity School where young people who have dropped out of school attend to earn their high school diploma. We’ve served 7 male students and also used Mom as Gateway™ (NFI’s booster session workshops) for 8 female students.

- **A CCFI workshop named "Foundations"** – Geared toward new and first-time fathers. Some of the topics covered are swaddling, feeding, bathing, soothing, SIDS, shaken baby syndrome and assisting mom with breastfeeding.
- **Another CCFI workshop named "Framework"** – Covers co-parenting, communication with mom, and communication with the child (depending on the age of the child).

**Most importantly, we also host a lot of events that help connect us with dads. Fathers will buy into activities, but not necessarily programs. By getting dads to events, we can connect with them and follow up to get them in for our programs.**

We host an annual All Pro Dads Breakfast Program with the local schools, Father's Day Pool Party, Party in the Park for Dads & Families, and a Dads Alumni Event for past 24/7 Dad® Participants to come together to discuss their progress and success since completing the program."

***What do you think is the most important thing for fathers to understand when it comes to being involved in their children's lives?***

"What's most important is consistency and involvement in their children's lives. Learning to become nurturers as well as "gatherers", and to take on more responsibilities. Typically, mom is the nurturer and the dad is the provider, or gatherer. However, in these times the moms work too. If the dad is a non-custodial dad, he needs to be everything he can be as a parent.

Telling his children that he loves them is also very important. Taking on more responsibilities and telling your children that you love them—those things do not cost money. Fathers need to understand that no matter what the circumstance, they need to make sure that their children know they can come to them for support and love, always."

***What is the most inspirational "father story" you have experienced or heard?***

"There were 2 dads that stand out in my mind – one came to 24/7 Dad® with no court order and one came with a court order in order to have visitation of his daughter. Both were non-custodial dads.

The first dad, who did not have a court order, came in through Coshocton's Foundations Workshop. He came with his very 1<sup>st</sup> child. He then took 24/7 Dad® AM 4 times and brought another dad with him each time! He now has shared parenting with his daughter.

The second dad, who was court ordered, had supervised visitations with his daughter. He completed the 24/7 Dad® Program as part of his case plan and now has full custody of his daughter.

Also, both men have gotten better jobs since completing the program."

***In closing, how has NFI helped you be successful in serving fathers?***

"It takes a while to develop a fatherhood initiative and fatherhood programming. We've been successful because of NFI's programs and resources. NFI has, in my opinion, the nation's best technical support to help programs change fathers' lives. Their staff always has time to talk with us and guide us in the right direction."