

Establishing a Community Presence using Fathering in 15™



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By Ave Mulhern

Mitch Freeman has been a Fatherhood Specialist with **CareNet Pregnancy Resource Center (PRC) of Dane County, Madison, WI** since January 2018. And while Mitch is fairly new to fatherhood programming at a pregnancy center, he's not new to being a father—he has 5 children!

Mitch also knows firsthand the pain of a missing father, and the struggles of growing up in a single mother household. Perhaps this is why Mitch is such a perfect fit to fulfill the role of Fatherhood Specialist at the PRC.

I recently connected with Mitch to find out how their center was using **Fathering in 15™**, NFI's interactive, subscription-based, online tool that helps organizations build the skills of dads anytime, anywhere.

Why Fathering in 15™?

Mitch realized early on that the barriers to engaging dads in pregnancy centers were as follows:

1. It's a clinic; men don't like doctors.
2. It can be a very female-focused environment; men don't feel like it is a place for them.
3. Lack of time; the dads work (sometimes multiple jobs), go to school, etc.

Mitch LOVES **Fathering in 15™** because of its content and its mobility. It lets him go to the dads. At the same time, Mitch and his center are very intentional about involving dad in the services from the PRC right from the start.

Typically, if a dad comes into the PRC with the mom, Mitch approaches the dad and introduces himself, gets to know him some, with the goal of finding a time and place to meet where the dad can meet up with him outside of the center (usually at a local McDonald's restaurant or the library). Mitch can do this because he can bring Fathering 15™ to them!

He only schedules half hour meetings with the dads, allotting 15 minutes to complete the Fathering in 15™ session content and 15 minutes to dialogue. Dads like it because it's only a half hour, it's on their "turf," and not a huge time commitment. Mitch says this format has most definitely increased his opportunities to meet with dads, allowing him to create more connections.

Conversely, if a dad is not with the mom at the appointment, the center will give her a brochure to give to the dad, and encourages her to invite dad next time (sometimes they also ask her if they can follow up with him directly).

Fathering in 15™ Also Enables Community Connections for this PRC

A Local High School:

A local high school counselor who was familiar with the PRC's interest in working with fathers had a young student who was facing the unexpected—becoming a teen father. Mitch was approached by the school to mentor the young man, at the school, one on one, using Fathering in 15™.

In order to work with the student, Mitch had to register as a volunteer with the school, then meet with the principal and guidance counselor for an interview where Mitch provided a sample session from Fathering in 15™. The school allowed Mitch to do the sessions right in the school.

And even though the student's family backgrounds were different, Mitch helped with navigating their relationship and helped the young man understand what their relationship could look like, and how to be an involved and committed father.

A Local Elementary School:

Mitch was also approached by the local elementary school to get involved with dads of the students. The guidance counselor at the school recognized they have dads with younger kids and they could be facing challenges, even unplanned pregnancies. Also, like many schools, they had trouble getting dads to meetings at the school.

Mitch met with the principal and guidance counselor and he shared a vision for how he would approach the dads: he would start by building relationships and not offering workshops or classes just yet. So at a recent school family night, Mitch was given a classroom where he set up a mini basketball hoop, had some other games and prizes, and invited some dads to come in. He hopes to possibly host a 2-on-2 basketball tournament, flag football, or a BBQ in the spring—mainly to be part of the environment first, then build relationships before offering mentoring or workshops using Fathering in 15™.

A Local Probation and Parole Office

Someone from the local probation and parole (P&P) office did a google search for fatherhood and found Mitch’s PRC. They called looking for parenting classes for a dad who had lost his health insurance and had no money for the required parenting class (many counties and states mandate the classes but they come at a cost to the participant). Mitch explained the Fathering in 15™ program to the officer, and the P&P office allowed Mitch to complete the 15 sessions with this dad, and it met the requirements for the court! Mitch is now working with his third dad referred from P&P.

In Closing

“It is about getting on the radar,” says Mitch.

Mitch feels Fathering in 15™ is an excellent tool that gives him the basis to start working with dads. Eventually he hopes to gather a group of dads and begin using NFI’s **24/7 Dad® program**. Until then, he plans to establish himself more in his local school and community, taking it one step at a time.

Oh, and Mitch just started as a volunteer in the local community center. Establishing a presence... again! Mitch ended our interview saying, “Keep up the good work NFI!” I say to Mitch, “Of course, but I hope we can keep up with you!”