

Why “Going to Where the Dads Are” is Key to Recruitment



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Blown away.

That’s how I reacted upon learning of the success of **24/7 Dad**[®] program facilitator Tim Morgan running the program in five diverse locations in Abilene, Texas.

Tim is new to this work. He joined the Fatherhood EFFECT program of **BCFS Health and Human Services** as a parent educator in July of 2018.* Although he didn’t have experience running a fatherhood program, he instinctively knew that he had to take BCFS’ program to dads. If you’ve attended a training on any of our programs, you know that “Going to Where the Dads Are” is an NFI recruitment and retention mantra.

In January Tim sent me an unsolicited email that summarized his experience getting the program launched in each of the locations. (Tim’s not shy about sharing his success or challenges with anyone. He’s one of the top contributors in the **Father Engagement Learning Community**[™].) He noted where he had facilitated 24/7 Dad[®] and, for each location, the number of dads who started the program and graduated, the pitfalls he encountered, and how he planned to work with his primary contact to avoid those pitfalls with future groups.

What stood out to me was that, despite the pitfalls he encountered, 48 men started the program and 28 graduated from it. While that might not seem like a lot of dads, if you've ever tried to get a fatherhood group off the ground, I'm sure you'll agree that's a great start.

So, I asked Tim how BCFS had gotten the program into each of the locations in the first place. (After all, it doesn't matter how good a program you have if you can't convince potential community partners it will be valuable to them and the dads they serve.) In addition to going to where dads are, what Tim shared is a prime example of two other recruitment and retention tactics we encourage programs to use.

- Leverage existing relationships in the community.
- Deliver the program in settings that require enrollment and participation or that have an environment that naturally drives enrollment and participation.

Rise Discipleship and Abilene Dream Center

Both of these locations are faith-based residential recovery centers for men. BCFS enjoys a long relationship with both centers. The men admit themselves to the centers and are typically referred by the court or probation and parole. **Both centers require dads to enroll and graduate from 24/7 Dad®.**

Taylor County Substance Abuse Treatment Facility and Grand Works Halfway House

BCFS also enjoys a long relationship with both of these organizations. Dads' attendance in both locations, however, is voluntary. The Taylor County Substance Abuse Treatment Facility (SATF) is a correctional facility that serves high-risk offenders with substance abuse issues. Grand Works Halfway House (GWHH) serves men with substance abuse issues, many of whom are on parole. **Both environments encourage enrollment and participation.** Indeed, the Taylor County SATF has had a full group (e.g. 12 dads) every time they've run one.

Although a single point of contact in both locations recruit dads—the program director at the Taylor County SATF and the house manager at GWHH—Tim said that the main reason for the success in both locations is word-of-mouth. 24/7 Dad® graduates talk about the class with dads who haven't participated in it and encourage them to enroll. Tim also stops by GWHH when he's not facilitating to recruit dads.

Dyess Air Force Base

While BCFS had a relationship with Dyess Air Force Base, it hadn't resulted in success for Fatherhood EFFECT. BCFS had a hard time recruiting dads into the 24/7 Dad® program offered off-base. So, Tim presented on the program to personnel at the clinic on base—a group that included doctors, nurses, social workers, and case managers—and encouraged them to offer the program on-base. That approach worked. BCFS started a group open to dads in the Air Force. Also eligible were dads who were spouses of moms in the Air Force.

To recruit dads, Tim:

- Shortened the program to six weeks to get it off the ground.
- The communications department at BCFS designed flyers distributed across the base.
- Sent an email to master sergeants to refer men that were in their care.
- Spoke to master sergeants about the program during a recurring Monday morning breakfast on base.

BCFS graduated five dads from the first group. **Those graduates advocated for extending the program to 10 weeks, which decision makers approved.** Moreover, they spread the word to other dads. This word-of-mouth, along with more flyers and emails to master sergeants, resulted in a full house of 12 dads enrolling in the second group.

Tim's experience points to the type of community partner that can provide an ideal setting for recruitment and retention.

- As in the case of the first four locations, a recovery- or corrections-focused partner provides a great environment in which to offer a fatherhood program. Some of these partners might be willing to require participation. When participation is voluntary, dads are often self-motivated to participate. Because they're in crisis, they want to change their behavior. Many of them have harmed their families and seek the redemption a fatherhood program offers.
- As for the final location, the real estate mantra of "location, location, location" applies. Offering your program where it's easier for dads to participate can do the trick. Moreover, using credible messengers and recruiting channels creates a norm that says it's okay for dads to participate in such a program.

What existing relationships can you leverage into a winning recruitment and retention effort?

Which recovery- or corrections-focused organizations might be willing to offer a fatherhood program at their location?

Where else can you deliver the program where dads are so that they don't have to come to you?

* EFFECT stands for Educating Fathers for Empowering Children Tomorrow. It's funded by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Prevention and Early Intervention Division. For more information on the program, click [here](#) to read an evaluation of it that includes the impact of 24/7 Dad® on reducing the risk of child abuse and neglect.