

25 Years of NFI: Featuring Kim Dent of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, Part 2



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NFI could not meet its mission without dedicated practitioners like Kim Dent with the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood (OCF). In the **first part** of this two-part post, Kim shared her background and role with OCF, how Ohioans view fatherhood, and how OCF has benefited from partnering with **National Fatherhood Initiative**® (NFI).

In this second part, I share what Kim thinks are the most important things fathers should know, what organizations working with fathers need to know, how states can support local organizations to serve fathers, and a short success story about a father served by one of OCF's fatherhood grantees.

What Fathers Need to Know

“Being there for your children in a healthy way is the most important thing for fathers to understand. Give them the time and love they deserve. Understand your value as their father and how your support and presence is crucial to their success. Financial support ensures that your children will have their basic needs met; your time and presence invested in your children will contribute to their healthy development. Be there, be intentional, and be consistent. Respect their mother and, if you're no longer romantically involved with her and raising your children together, come to an amicable decision about how to raise them that

will result in what's best for your children, always. You'll never have a more important job; nor a more fulfilling job, ever.

Moreover, even if you're with your children's mother, you need to respect her position in the home. If you're a father who has come home from incarceration, for example, mom has had to run the household on her own. That transition upon reentry can be challenging for you both. You need to reenter with respect for what she has done even as you two discuss how to divide labor and work together to raise your children now that you're back home."

What Organizations Need to Know

"The most important thing for organizations to understand when it comes to serving fathers effectively is that most fathers want to be there for their children. Don't stereotype and judge fathers as non-factors and unimportant to their children. Remember that effective services for fathers contribute to the foundation of healthier more resilient families and better developed children. Many fathers didn't have a father or positive male role model in their lives while growing up; therefore, they, too, are trying to learn what a good father looks like and how to be that for their children. Meet them where they are in a non-judgmental way. Programming for fathers is not cookie-cutter. Fathers require different supports, education, and resources during various stages of their journey as a dad."

How States Can Support Organizations

"The most important advice I have for any state on how to help organizations to serve fathers effectively is this: Children are our most precious gifts. Youth are your state's future doctors, educators, service providers, pastors, business owners, judges, elected officials, farmers, factory workers, first responders, etc. Regardless of their future endeavors and dreams or goals, having good character, integrity, and respect for others is essential. State officials should research the social ills currently plaguing their states that negatively impact child well-being, child outcomes, and the health of their communities. Investing in supports for low-income fathers builds self-sufficient and resilient families, thus breaking the generational father absence trend and better develops children from infancy through their young adult years.

As far as steps states can take, the first thing is to remember that states serve families. A lot of the families served in one program are served in another program. They might access TANF, SNAP, child care. They might be involved in child protective services. Second, states have measures—outcomes they need to have to say their programs are successful in serving families. Third, states have to include all members of a family to succeed. States have done a good job providing services, resources, and information to moms and engaging them. They haven't done the same with fathers. States have to figure out how to get that done. If states form relationships with local programs with expertise in engaging dads, it will help them be more successful with their state programs and positively affect their outcome measures.

Government exists to serve families, especially those in crisis. States have to look at serving the whole family to ultimately benefit children.”

Kim’s Most Inspirational OCF “Father Story”

“After being in this field for nine years, and engaging fathers and families throughout the state, I have encountered many uplifting and inspirational ‘father stories.’ One of my favorites is the story of Mr. Carlos Christian, a father who was incarcerated at the age of 19 in the Marion Correctional Facility for 10 years. His parenting skills and ongoing support of his relationship with his son—who was three months old at the time of Carlos’ incarceration—resulted in Carlos obtaining custody of his son upon his release. Mom trusted Carlos to continue raising their son with the same values he instilled in him throughout the 10 years of his incarceration. Carlos’ own father and the mother of his son, Little Carlos, supported Carlos’ efforts to remain a vital and consistent part of his son’s life by bringing him to the prison for visits, allowing Carlos to send audio books of him reading to his son, etc.

Carlos has since written two books, one for incarcerated fathers and one for fathers re-entering into society post-incarceration. He is widely sought after as a speaker in state prisons in and outside Ohio and in federal prisons. Most recently, Carlos completed a documentary outlining his life and the work he put into becoming the businessman he is today. The documentary is called, “The Walking Logo.” Carlos is a facilitator, contracted by one of the current OCF grantees called Action for Children, and is also contracted by the Ohio Department of Youth Services to provide services to young fathers in the youth facilities. Carlos, as an Action for Children contracted facilitator, works closely with the local child support agency in Columbus to engage fathers when paternity is established.”

A huge thanks to Kim for her contributions to our blog to share about OCF’s excellent work to raise awareness across Ohio about the importance of fathers and support of local organizations to serve fathers.

To see an OCF program success story, watch this inspirational video from Lemar Turner, a Father2Father program participant.

To learn more about the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, visit <https://fatherhood.ohio.gov/>.