

25 Years of NFI: Featuring Angel Flores of Vista Community Clinics & the Dads Club



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As we continue celebrate 25 years of NFI and our focus on fatherhood practitioners doing excellent work with dads, we turn our attention to **Angel Flores** with **Vista Community Clinic** in Vista, CA.

Vista is located in the San Diego area, and one of the first things Angel told me is that San Diego alone has the same population as 22 states. That's a lot of dads to serve!

So, let's dive in to hear how Angel came to be in this position, a little about VCC and his background, and how he's made the Dads Club Program at VCC a success.

How did you come to be in your position at VCC?

“Previously I worked with a non-profit community resource organization and after that as a case manager. I always kept great contacts in my community so I could network to help the families I served. In 2016, VCC received the Federal Government's responsible fatherhood grant and that's when Sylvia Alcantar, the MCH Program Manager reached out to me to see if I wanted to come work with dads as a Program Supervisor for the Dads Club. I will tell you

more about myself in a bit, but I was very interested in the position because I wanted to show my voice in a service that wasn't really out there for dads in our area.

What was unique about this opportunity with VCC was that we would be implementing the fatherhood program basically from scratch to serve all types of fathers, both English and Spanish-speaking. With my background in case management, I knew it would be a very important component for a successful program. I also knew that I would really need to leverage my community contacts and get direct referrals.”

What did your life look like growing up, and did it play a role in the work you do today?

“I was a teen dad and there weren't a lot of services for us then, I was also still living with my mom at the beginning. But eventually I became a self-sufficient teen dad, I worked two jobs while the mother of my child finished school. I remember having two sets of friends, the ones facing a lot of challenges in life, and ones looking for a way out—entrepreneurs. Just when I was trying to identify my direction, I heard Oprah say, ‘I'll show you your future if you show me your friends’. So, I decided to spend more time with the entrepreneurial friends and that helped guide me in the right direction, to want a career, go to college, etc.

I ended up navigating information and resources to eventually earn a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Science focused in Social Work from San Diego State University. I focused on Social Work so I could be directly involved with individuals and families since I could relate to their struggles and make the biggest impact. Also, I knew I could share the challenges I faced growing up as well as my success being the first one in my family to finish college.”

What framework did you use to build the Dads Club at VCC and to recruit dads?

“Continuing with the idea of leveraging my contacts, I knew that I would need to campaign for direct referrals, and that required physically getting out into the community to make personal connections with agencies. And in order to keep the referrals coming, I needed more than a verbal agreement, I needed MOU's to formalize our agreements.

So, I assigned each of my staff the job of going out to visit a total of 22 agencies—some meetings were prescheduled while others were just a drop-in. The goal for each staffer was to introduce themselves, share info on VCC and our fatherhood program, ask for a tour (if the agency was willing – and surprisingly, many were), learn about their intake process, and ask how we could formalize an agreement. It worked! To date we have close to 30 MOUs with community partner agencies.

We also went to the courthouse and got listed in their directory for parenting programs under “D” for Dad's Club. That helped make it easy for dads to find us.

Also, we heavily promoted our list of services (not just the Dads Club) focused on things dads need help on:

- Child welfare services – open cases

- Child support & visitation – can’t pay, not working, money being taken out when they don't make that check; letters and certificates to get visitation or reunification
- Expungement of criminal record
- Homeless court – tickets
- Housing
- Certification program – job training
- Employment

Since coming on board with the Dads Club, we’ve served over 670 dads in the San Diego area!”

What is the most important thing for fathers to understand when it comes to being involved in their children’s lives?

“That no matter what’s happening financially or with himself, or around him, at the end of the day, dads should still focus on whatever it takes to be in their child’s life.

Some dads are grieving that loss of being in their child’s life, but they also have unrealistic custody expectations. I usually get the dad talking about the love he has for his child. I always ask him to tell me a story of what life would look like if they could wave a magic wand and have it be the way that he wants. Usually, the guys break down and share more, I encourage them that it’s attainable, and that we’ll work together to get there.

Dads typically don’t open up because they don't think they have hope and that they’re not listened to. In the end, we see that they feel like moms feel—they want to be there for their kids and they love them.”

What’s the most inspirational “father story” you have experienced?

“We’ve had lots of success stories. In fact, each quarter, our case workers are required to give a success story from a client they work with. We see dads that are able to reconnect with their child, get housing, employment, and feel like themselves; they become self-sufficient. In fact, these dads come back to share their stories with the Dads Club. In some cases, the dads are not successful, but they share their setbacks which lets the other guys know there will be hiccups...but there’s hope.”

What advice would you give to other practitioners who are working with fathers?

“I would suggest using a similar approach to ours for a successful fatherhood program:

- Work with partner agencies and create MOUs
- Split up staff to visit community agencies and meetings to find updated resources

- Provide case management services to meet dads where they are at”