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Connecticut Fatherhood Program Certification

Quick Facts

- Legislation passed in 2003 charging the CT DSS Commissioner with creating a state certification process for fatherhood programs
- 2004: initial round of certification was held; six programs were approved
- 2006: six certified programs successfully underwent recertification
- 2010: ten programs successfully completed this round of certification
- next round of certification scheduled to begin in Spring 2015; informational session to be held in Fall of 2014

Purpose

The purpose of certification is to recognize fatherhood programs that have demonstrated exemplary practice in service to fathers and families. Certification is also an opportunity for fatherhood programs to learn more about their services, customers, and environment. By conducting a periodic and comprehensive review, programs can evaluate the effectiveness of their services. A willingness to evaluate progress and make adjustments in program operations ensures not only appropriate services to fathers and families, but also enhances credibility with key stakeholders in the community.

Benefits

Through the certification process, fatherhood programs have

- the opportunity to strengthen their services in support of low-income, noncustodial fathers and their families
- the ability to offer the *State of Connecticut Child Support Arrearage Adjustment Program* to eligible program participants
- The ability to present a comprehensive, father- and family-centered approach to service delivery to potential funders

General Information

- Program certification does not automatically lead to funding, whether state, federal, or private, and should not be the reason to enter into this process. However, being DSS-certified does allow programs the opportunity to demonstrate the delivery of comprehensive services based on the seven standards identified by national groups as best practices, which will enhance grant and/or RFP applications and may increase an agency's chances to be successful in obtaining funding.

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- **All submission deadlines must be met for programs to move successfully through the process.**
- If an agency successfully completes the application and compliance report phases, programs will be contacted to schedule an on-site review – *this requires a two-day commitment*; on-site review team leaders from the CRC will provide program management with a preparation guide in order to be fully aware of expectations for this portion of the process.
- The entire certification process, from orientation through the final decision by DSS, usually takes 6-9 months.

Expectations for Participation in Process

- the agency has a distinct fatherhood program, including designated space and staff
- the program has been up and running at least three years (36 months) prior to submitting an application for certification
- program management attends Orientation
- all identified deadlines are met throughout the process
- the program standards are demonstrated for *both* the written and on-site portions of process
- programming includes both curriculum-based interventions and individualized case management services
- demonstrate evidence of the agency having entered into local and state partnerships/collaboration (letters of agreement outlining the partnership, Memorandums of Understanding, etc.) and ability to demonstrate the interconnection of the agency at large and the fatherhood program (management buy-in and commitment to fatherhood programming, internal referrals among the agency's other programs, etc.)

Steps in the Process

To achieve official recognition through the *Connecticut Fatherhood Program Certification*, programs must fulfill the requirements at each step of the certification process and demonstrate compliance in all the *Fatherhood Program Standards* categories. The steps of the certification process are:

(1) Fatherhood Program Orientation

Fatherhood programs will be invited to an orientation designed to explain the certification process and requirements for participation in the *Connecticut Fatherhood Program Certification*.

(2) Application Submission and Review

Applications will be reviewed and scored by a Certification Review Committee (CRC), consisting of professionals in the field. Based on the application scores, the CRC will recommend and the DSS will select programs for participation.



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(3) Program Compliance Report Submission and Review

Participating programs complete a written description of how they comply with each of the *Fatherhood Program Standards* categories. This report is reviewed and scored by the CRC.

(4) On-Site Program Review

Based on the report scores, an on-site program review will be scheduled. During the on-site review, the peer review team, a subset of the CRC, will look for evidence of program compliance in each of the *Fatherhood Program Standards* categories by discussing the program's policies and practices with management, advisory group or governing body, staff, clients, and community partners. Relevant records and written documentation will be reviewed as well.

(5) Program Approval and Notification

Findings of the on-site review, and the peer review team recommendations, will be sent to DSS who will make all final award decisions. DSS will notify, in writing, programs awarded the *Connecticut Fatherhood Program Certification*.

(6) Fatherhood Program Certification Renewal

Fatherhood programs that receive the *Connecticut Fatherhood Program Certification* will be required to apply for recertification every four years.

Fatherhood Program Standards

Standard One: Purpose and Activities

The mission statement is the overall purpose of the organization. It is the reason the organization exists. Mission statements say three things: whom we seek to serve, what concerns we address and what will be achieved as a result of our work. The fatherhood program's mission should be to promote the positive involvement and interaction of fathers with their children and increase the ability of fathers to meet the social, emotional, financial, medical, and educational needs of their children. This mission is demonstrated both internally and externally through the development and implementation of well-defined goals and a coherent set of activities and services to attain them. Programs should have a protocol for identification and response to domestic violence to ensure any father engagement services are provided in a safe and appropriate manner.

Standard Two: Organization and Management

Fatherhood programs should have efficient and effective management systems, which ensure the implementation of quality services to fathers and families. Programs should have an advisory group or governing body that has responsibility for overseeing the delivery of quality services; an ongoing system of program planning; an organizational capacity that supports the accomplishment of the program's goals and provides adequate provisions for staff supervision, professional development and evaluation; ongoing, two-way communication with staff, clients, advisory group or governing body, and community partners; record keeping and reporting systems used to manage data and generate status reports; and, a fiscal management system, which incorporates appropriate internal controls to safeguard program funds.



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Standard Three: Parenting Skills Development

Fatherhood programs should enhance the capacity of fathers to be positively involved in the lives of their children and in their community. Programs should provide opportunities for fathers to learn the principles of effective parenting including child development, positive guidance, and educational involvement. Fatherhood programs should ensure that fathers have the opportunity to develop skills and strategies for co-parenting, access mediation support, and connect with resources within the community that will enhance their capacity to nurture children. Programs should have a protocol for identification and response to domestic violence to ensure any father engagement services are provided in a safe and appropriate manner.

Standard Four: Personal and Social Skills Development

Fatherhood programs should provide opportunities for fathers to develop personal and interpersonal skills and strategies that enable them to relate to their children and others more effectively. Fatherhood programs should provide, or provide access to, therapeutic group interventions that promote the development of positive behavioral patterns. Programs should offer information and education on men's health, pregnancy prevention, mental health, life skills, violence prevention, batterer intervention, anger management, money management, and substance abuse. Programs should provide opportunities for fathers to join program support groups and develop supportive networks within the community.

Standard Five: Workforce Skills Development

Fatherhood programs should offer extensive support and a variety of opportunities for fathers to develop the skills knowledge, and competencies required in the workforce. Programs should help fathers make the connection between learning and working by integrating academic learning, structured experiences in the workplace, employability skill building, and occupational exploration into their workforce skills development opportunities. Programs should provide opportunities for fathers to connect successfully with employers and employment resources within their community.

Standard Six: Father Support Services

Fatherhood programs should provide orientation, information and support services to enable fathers to become, and remain, involved in the fatherhood program, and responsibly involved with their children. Programs should offer, or provide access to, legal assistance and court advocacy services; information and assistance with paternity establishment and child support responsibilities; violence prevention and/or batterer intervention services; and facilitate client participation in housing, transportation, and translation services and supports; and, practice case management to monitor client progress, coordinate services and provide additional support as necessary.

Standard Seven: Evidence of Success

Fatherhood programs should be concerned with continuous program improvement. Programs need to know how to gather and use information to improve program functioning and undertake meaningful efforts to measure and document their success. Fatherhood programs should have in place an ongoing process of self-assessment and outcome measurement that includes descriptive data, outcome data, and evaluative measures. Fatherhood programs should have a plan to solicit and evaluate participant feedback.