

BIANNUAL NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 12, Spring/Summer 2026



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CONNECTICUT
FATHERHOOD
INITIATIVE

Spring/ Summer Edition

This Issue's focus:

Highlights from the
26th New England
Fatherhood Conference
and Connecticut's
Contributions



Of the 427 people who attended the 26th Annual New England Fatherhood Conference 194 (or 45%) were from Connecticut.

Welcome to the Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative Biannual Newsletter!

Message from the New England Fatherhood Conference (NEFC) Planning Committee

The NEFC Planning Committee was formed in 1999 - with members from the states of Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut - to plan an annual regional event for professionals to share and learn about father engagement efforts across New England. The event rotates to a different host state bi-annually; Connecticut hosted in 2025 and again this year. Current Members for representing Connecticut are Tony Judkins (DSS), Diana DiTunno (DSS), Doug Edwards (Real Dads Forever) and Kelley Edwards (DMHAS). The Committee collaborates throughout the year to manage all logistics required to organize and convene our Conference, which is held in March. Over the years, the Conference has become a valuable regional platform for advancing fatherhood work, strengthening cross-state collaboration, and equipping practitioners with tools that positively impact families and communities. We are excited to share highlights of our 26th Annual NEFC, entitled *Heart of a Father, Strength of a Man*.

CT Fatherhood Initiative: Who Are We?

If you are a part of a system serving fathers and families in Connecticut, *we are you!* The CT Fatherhood Initiative (CFI), is a statewide multi-agency collaboration, led by the Department of Social Services, working toward a common goal: *to support children, mothers and fathers by focusing on the important influence of men who are or will be in fathering roles.* CFI partners do this through systems change efforts as well as supporting direct services and programming for fathers, with a commitment to racial equity, gender equity and safe engagement of fathers with their children.

NEFC Workshop Presenters

We are always committed to featuring a talented, diverse array of speakers and presenters.



Keynote Speaker

Dr. Ingrid M. Canady is the Executive Director of Connecticut's State Education Resource Center (SERC)



Dr. Canady presented us with a lively, inspiring keynote, *including salsa lessons* ending with, "Thank you for allowing me to be myself, thank you for what you do, and don't stop keeping the heart beating for what you do."

Her workshop session was a celebration of a father's legacy: the heart that nurtures and the strength that protects through storytelling and reflection.



NEFC Iron Dad Competition

The Planning Committee offered an exciting competition on the final day of our 2026 conference! The NEFC Iron Dad was led by Friday's Keynote Speaker, Joe Gidjunis, immediately following his address. Dad dyads competed for the title by preparing food, changing diapers, and battling stains as the rest of our attendees participated in activities to help them earn points toward their total score - and also for the chance to win prizes themselves throughout the competition!

Over the Two and a Half Days, 32 Workshops are Presented

We are always committed to featuring a talented, diverse array of speakers and presenters who will inspire and challenge attendees. The Committee has selected professionals committed to father engagement who share their expertise and experience to enhance our work and expand interstate networks.

*Below are some samples of the workshops
that were presented by 17 of our Connecticut colleagues:*

- *The **Fatherhood Manologues** is an exhilarating collection of short stories about fatherhood.*
- *The **Fight for Manhood: Building Strength and Leaving a Legacy** interactive workshop explores these struggles while guiding fathers and father-engagement workers.*
- ***What Should I Say? Talking to Kids About Substance Use** is an active, experiential workshop that will provide practical tools.*
- ***Steady Hands, Strong Hearts: Fathering Neurodiverse Children** celebrates fathers rising to the challenge and offers powerful insights.*
- ***Dear Daughter, I Love You Because...** allows participants to take an interactive journey through parenting, leaving with strategies to further develop healthy relationships with their daughters.*
- *This workshop, **Writing with a Father's Strength and Heart**, provides a welcoming space for fathers, mothers, and families to share letters and personal stories.*
- ***Not a Wuss, Not a Bully: Real Manhood Insights** We need to be strong; we don't want to be weak. We struggle with vulnerability. What do our families and kids need from us?*

Attendee Comments

"Great mix of learning styles. Great use of science, photos, videos, and group work. Provided language for the space."

"Funny, personal, heartfelt, and passionate. Loved this workshop."

"I came for the first time last year and was so excited to be back. This has been a life changing experience, so thank you!"

"Always a pleasure to learn from you and to bear witness to the healing and honesty of the NEFC community. Thank you."

"Energy, compassion, funny, thoughtful, and responsive."

"Life changing!"

"The activities were very engaging and enjoyable."

"Very powerful, moving, and reflective."

"I've been to a lot of fatherhood conferences over the last 20 years plus and this one is the best in my opinion! Keep on doing what you're doing."

"Fantastic presentation with applicable tools I can use."

"Excellent" Facilitators, PP slides, resources, knowledge, overall format of presentation."

"I always love attending this conference. I love that it has practical use for my job and connections to fathers. I love the father stories and appreciate the dads being vulnerable. Thank you all so much."

"Loved the conversation. Very insightful."

"Amazing, very informative."

"All three days were spectacular, but my favorite was to witness how wisdom, respect and love/ support was showed and received amongst attendees. Thank you."



CFI Partners

CT Departments of:

- Social Services
- Children and Families
- Correction
- Developmental Services
- Education
- Housing
- Labor
- Mental Health and Addiction Services
- Public Health
- Veterans Affairs

also

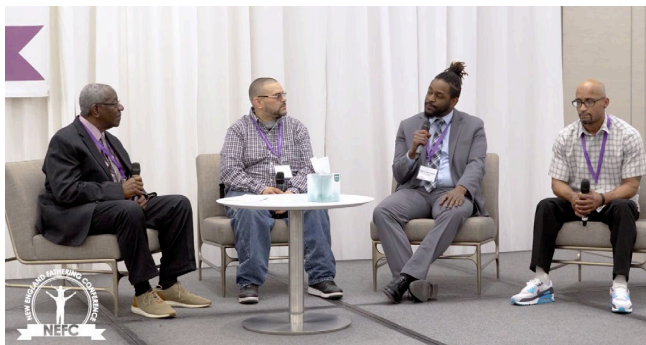
- Office of Early Childhood
- Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division, Support Enforcement Services, and Family Support Magistrate Division
- Board of Pardons and Parole
- Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity
- CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- CT State Colleges and Universities
- United Way of CT
- Legal services, researchers, and numerous community-based, family, and youth-serving providers

Dads' Stories

A Conference favorite, Dads from across New England participate in an unscripted, authentic, heartfelt facilitated conversation. It's a wonderful opportunity to hear directly from them on Day 1 and Day 2 about their struggles, challenges, and successes.

CONGRATULATIONS

to Neftali Matos and Juan Estefano from The Village, and Xavier Young from Madonna Place, for their participation in Dads' Stories.



Dads share their journeys in fatherhood, their relationships with their children, and their commitment to their families.



Did you know

The **27th Annual New England Fathering Conference** will be hosted by Massachusetts at the Sheraton Springfield Monarch Place Hotel on March 10, 11, & 12, 2027

Check the website below to join the mailing list and stay informed about the event:

www.nefatheringconference.org

The Department of Social Services (DSS) programs are available to all applicants and recipients without regard to race, color, religious creed, age, sex (including pregnancy and sexual harassment), marital status, national origin, ancestry, intellectual disability, physical disability, (including blindness), past or present history of mental disability, learning disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, genetic information, workplace hazards to reproductive systems, veteran status, prior conviction of a crime or other factors which cannot lawfully be the basis for employment actions or licensing, retaliation for previously opposed discrimination or coercion or unless the provisions of sec. 46a-80(b) or 46a-81 (b) of the Connecticut General Statutes are controlling or there are bona fide occupational qualifications excluding persons in one of the above protected groups, status as a victim of domestic violence, as well as status as a sexual assault victim and status as a human trafficking victim. DSS has a TDD/TTY line for persons who are deaf or hearing impaired and have a TDD/TTY: 1-800-842-4524, or dial 7-1-1. Auxiliary aids are also available for blind or visually impaired persons. The DSS is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer. DSS has a TDD/TTY line for persons who are deaf or hearing impaired and have a TDD/TTY: 1-800-842-4524, or dial 7-1-1. Auxiliary aids are also available for blind or visually impaired persons.

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