Provide Service Referrals to Dads and Build Community Partnerships

**THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:**
1. Developing community partnerships.
2. Making the most of community partnerships to reach out to Dads.
3. Supporting Dads with referrals to community organizations.

**TO REMEMBER:**
Programs that successfully include men and Dads focus on them as people, not just in their role as fathers. They provide support, referrals and resources for issues outside of parenting.

1) *Developing Community Partnerships*

By partnering with other organizations in the community, your WIC clinic can better provide programming for men and Dads and make more effective referrals.

- You could consider partnering with:
  - Food banks or restaurants for meals
  - Local stores for incentives and support for activities
  - Community centers and other agencies for use of space
  - Volunteer organizations or high school students for childcare
- Work to understand the needs and motivations of other agencies and so you can explain how they might benefit from a partnership with WIC.
- Use social media or contact regular media to talk about WIC and to get community partners interested.
- Invite current or potential partners to visit your program during an event.
  - Use the opportunity to explain what your WIC office is doing to engage and support fathers and talk about the importance of fathers in the lives of children.
  - This can strengthen the relationship with current partners.
- You can also use community partners, like community centers and local businesses, to spread the word that your WIC program is reaching out more to Dads and to publicize special events.

“Effective referrals begin with effective, trusting relationships between programs and parents. Get to know the fathers’ strengths, the diversity of their needs, and the tough challenges that they face. These relationships and this knowledge drive the referral process.”

-Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide, Effective Referrals
2) **Making the Most of Community Partnerships in order to Include Dads**

If you develop community partnerships, you may have more capacity for activities that will appeal to Dads, such as:

- An evening event at your office for Dads where dinner is provided
- Special story time for Dads and their children at the local library
- Gym time at kid’s gym or Daddy and Me time at a community pool
- Invite physical trainers to have a fitness clinic to encourage parents to be active with their kids at home
- Bike store that would loan bikes and trailers for a Daddy and Me bike ride
- Sponsorship for a BBQ at a local park with playground time or soccer
- Invite community partners to participate in a Father’s Day Fair! The following quote is an example of how an agency used community partnerships to celebrate Dads:

  “Community Action Agency (Jackson, MI) held a community festival called "Father’s Fair" near Father’s Day to raise awareness of the importance of fathers and to give families an opportunity to celebrate fathers. Local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and churches, as well as the Jackson Police Department and the Friend of the Court, organized informational booths. The children played on an inflatable obstacle course, slide, and ball room.”
  - from Dedicated to Dads: Lessons from Early Head Start

3) **Support Dads with Referrals to Community Organizations**

- WIC staff should learn about social and educational resources for fathers in the community.
  - Your clinic may already have information on many of these places as part of your referral process for women and children.
  - Developing community partnerships may also help you make referrals.
- After making the referral, WIC staff can help to motivate Dads to follow through on referrals and make sure the connection has been made.
- Focus on health and health services:
  - Engage Dads in discussions about their physical, mental and emotional health.
  - Remind Dads that they need to take good care of themselves to be able to take care of their children and family.

**Steps for Making Effective Referrals:**
1. Before referring dads to an agency, **know** the agency’s process and how the father will be treated.
2. **Prepare** dads for what to expect.
3. **Check back** with fathers about whether or not referrals are helpful.
4. If the referral was less helpful: **Work** with dads to understand roadblocks they may have encountered.
5. If the referral was helpful: **Ask** dads to share their referral experience with other fathers and families.

- adapted from Community Partnerships: Effective Referrals
The following suggestions are potential community partners to refer Dads to:

### Health services:
- Local health and human services departments
- Community clinics
- City and county hospitals
- University hospitals

### Support for Positive Co-Parenting:
- Mediation service providers
- Marriage and family services
- Family rights organizations
- Legal aid societies
- Anger management counselors

### Mental Health:
- Community mental health providers
- School-based mental health clinics (for younger Dads)
- Substance abuse programs
- Family violence programs
- Hospital emergency departments (short term solution)

### Education and Employment Support:
- English as a Second Language classes (ESL) or GED classes (may be offered at community centers or libraries)
- Community colleges
- Technical schools
- Employment agencies
- Career centers

### Housing:
- Community development agencies
- Housing authorities
- Public housing
- Community development financial institutions
- Halfway houses and shelters

### Social Support:
- YMCA/YWCA
- Community centers
- Faith Institutions
- Neighborhood groups
- Parent-teacher associations
- Community improvement groups

“Effective referrals include fathers at every step of the referral process. Fathers may have had unhappy experiences with social services agencies in the past. For example, they may have been excluded as part of the family unit. As a result, many men may be reluctant to engage with family service and support programs. By setting expectations with fathers and with community partners during the referral process, your staff can serve as both partners with and advocates for fathers... Through successful referrals, you and your community partners can help fathers expand their support network.”

-Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide, Effective Referrals
Resources

- **Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide:** Community Partnerships: Effective Referrals & Community Resources (p.43-47)
- **Promoting Father Involvement in Early Childhood** from FRIENDS National Resource Center
- **Step by Step: Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families** from Best Start Resource Centre
- **Dedicated to Dads: Lessons from Early Head Start** from Head Start
- **Sector Analysis: Linking Fathers: Father Involvement in Early Childhood Programs** from Minnesota Fathers & Families Network

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**SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:**

- Develop or strengthen community partnerships.
- Use community partnerships to reach out to Dads more.
- Provide referrals to Dads for issues outside of parenting and use partnerships to inform the referral process.
- Make sure Dads’ needs are considered and check back with Dads to see if referrals are effective.