

**FY 11 ABRT Agency Questions and Responses
Children, Youth and Family Services
Jacqueline Bryant**

Reviewer: Mike Murphy – (murphym@charlottesville.org)

Program: REAL Dads

1. Is there any actual impact data beyond survey responses?

CYFS is committed to developing methods for measuring impact data in addition to the survey tool currently being used. As the REAL Dads program is still a relatively new program, we are in a phase of learning more about how to best measure its impact and integrating this information into our program practice. Toward this end, we will begin to collect data on two new measures this year: the % of participating fathers who have at least 4 contacts per month with their children (based on a contact log maintained and verified by the Fatherhood Specialist and the client); and the % of fathers maintaining or increasing financial support for their children. It is significant to note that the first real measure of change with the fathers with whom we work is a shift in the way they think about fathering and their role as fathers. This shift in thinking is then integrated into how they see themselves which then results in a change in their fathering behavior. The survey we currently use helps us to assess this shift in thinking, which is an impact of the program.

While we continue to explore the best ways to measure this program, we are aligning our survey outcomes with nationally accepted standards. The best practices as well as the specific curriculum of CYFS's REAL Dads program are well supported by national impact data that clearly demonstrates positive outcomes for children and families from fatherhood programs. The Family Strengthening Policy Center (FSPC) notes that "Compared to others, children with involved fathers: perform better in school...have fewer behavioral problems, have better cognitive and psychosocial development, are less likely to drink, use drugs and initiate sex, have the skills to take initiative and control themselves, and experience less poverty." (FSPC December 2005).

The University of Missouri conducted an independent evaluation of the fathering curriculum on which the REAL Dads program is based, which showed statistically significant improvement in fathers' knowledge and skills in nurturing and caring for their children. The University of Missouri study, which used a control group for comparison, reported robust changes in...attitudes and perceptions regarding their fathering role. Some of the changes ... were reported as follows: After participation men increasingly stated that they and their children had a closer relationship, i.e., that they often do things together, that they share funny stories and activities with their child, that they tell their children they are special to them, that they prepare activities to do with their child during visits, and that they discuss their children's school projects with them. In addition, they considered themselves more knowledgeable about their child, including what has disappointed their child the most, what encourages their child the most, and what approaches work in handling their child's changing needs.

Survey responses assist CYFS in assessing the impact of the program on the local participating fathers and their families. The Harvard Family Research Project, citing Dr. Miller's 3-year

evaluation of Seattle's Family Centers as an example, supports use of participant surveys to measure outcomes and impact in evaluation of family support services.

2. Do you have any measure of positive changes for children?

Because our work is with the fathers themselves, most of whom do not have custody of their children, CYFS is not able to collect outcome data on the children who benefit from the REAL Dads services. The curriculum we use to work with dads to improve their fathering is supported by research that shows that the program improves fathering and the father-child relationship and that, in turn, children experience significantly improved outcomes when their fathers are actively engaged in fulfilling their fatherhood roles in their lives (please see citations in the answer to question #1). Again, we continue to explore the best methods for measuring the impact of our services and will pursue available options for measuring the direct impact on the children.

3. What is the nature of the 300 contacts in the community? How are outreach and shorter term services measured?

The REAL Dads program seeks to extend its impact through outreach in targeted neighborhoods. Outreach services are intended to empower fathers to increase their responsibility as fathers and citizens by connecting fathers to community resources, providing guidance regarding fathering issues/concerns, and linking fathers to ongoing REAL Dads services. The program measures the number of contacts made and, at the conclusion of the contact, outreach clients are asked if their needs were met and what additional services they may need. They are connected with additional resources as indicated by their responses. This data will be reflected in next year's outcomes.

4. In your work with the jail, do you collaborate with OAR?

REAL Dads collaborates widely in the community to ensure the diverse needs of participating fathers are met. The program works with the CYFS ParentingMobile for outreach in multiple low-income communities. The Fatherhood Specialist stays connected with several area churches, halfway houses, and employment programs to provide additional services to our clients. He works very closely with probation/parole to ensure participating fathers are meeting goals. The Fatherhood Specialist also participates in a community collaborative called the Re-entry Initiative, which includes OAR (primarily focused on meeting probation requirements), representatives from the jail system, a local therapist, city/county representatives, and concerned citizens to provide holistic support for successful re-entry. REAL Dads brings to the collaborative a case management approach that assists with all aspects of release. REAL Dads focuses on fathering issues, continuous focus on the relationship with his children and how the father's lifestyle and choices impact them.

A recent example of the Fatherhood Specialist's work in terms of collaboration involved an inmate participant from the REAL Dads group sessions. This father found out with two days notice that he would be released early. Because of his relationship with the Fatherhood Specialist, he contacted the Specialist to express his concern that the only arrangements that had been made for him were setting up his parole terms. The Fatherhood Specialist picked him up from the jail when he was released, took him to meet with his parole advisor, and arranged for him to stay in a half-way home. These types of secondary support services can be vital to helping a parolee help himself to succeed in all aspects of his life.

Participating fathers are also active collaborators in the development of program services. For example, when CYFS began to explore the idea of basing the program's curriculum on the national Inside Out Dads program, the Specialist took the materials to the participants for their review as to whether the materials seemed helpful as a basis for organizing our program. REAL Dads uses informal mechanisms such as these to engage fathers in planning program services. In addition, all program participation is voluntary and the men work with the Specialist to create their own service plans, which guide the services they receive.