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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
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January 11, 2011

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NO. I-05-11

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAM MANAGERS
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS
ALL TRIBES WITH TRIBAL/STATE TITLE IV-E AGREEMENTS

SUBJECT: FATHER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

The purpose of this All County Information Notice (ACIN) is to inform counties, tribes and others of efforts being made at the state level to disseminate and promote the development and implementation of strategies, policies and protocols to improve the engagement of fathers who have children involved in the child welfare system.

Father engagement, specifically within the child welfare system, is the systemic inclusion of fathers, from prevention and early intervention, through assessment and planning, to the provision of services. Promoting father engagement/father involvement reflects the California Department of Social Services' (CDSS) commitment to taking a more inclusive approach to strengthening families. To this end, CDSS funded activities, including a research-based intervention designed to improve the quality and level of father involvement in the lives of at-risk children and families. This intervention and research study is called Supporting Father Involvement (SFI). In addition, CDSS is funding a statewide dissemination of SFI results, and support for the design and implementation of a plan to assist public child welfare agencies with enhancing their efforts to engage and involve fathers. The father engagement efforts are also an integral part of the State's Program Improvement Plan (PIP).

The Supporting Father Involvement (SFI) Intervention and Evaluation

The SFI Project is sponsored by the CDSS' Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP). The SFI Intervention and Evaluation was launched in 2003 with the goal of fostering the positive involvement of low-income fathers in the lives of their children and families, which would lead to the prevention of child abuse and neglect in those families. The intervention and evaluation components of the SFI Project were planned and implemented through a working partnership of state, county, academic institutions (UC Berkeley, Yale University, and Smith College), and local family resource centers. The Project is currently housed in five family resource centers located in San Luis Obispo, Tulare, Santa Cruz, Yuba, and Contra Costa counties.

The first phase of the intervention and study included 300 families that were mostly low-income, with at least one child that was birth to seven years of age. Families could not have an open child protective services case within the previous year preceding their participation in the SFI Project. Once accepted into the study, families were randomly assigned to one of three categories: 1) the control group, in which parents receive a one-time educational presentation on the improved outcomes for children in families where fathers take an active role in family life; 2) a 16-week fathers' group (2 hrs. per week); or 3) a 16-week couples' group (2 hrs. per week). All project participants were assigned a case manager and received other services as needed through the family resource centers.

Data was collected from family assessments administered three different times during the families' participation. An analysis of data from the first phase of the study has provided valuable data about the importance of engaging fathers:

- Fathers were more involved in the daily care of their children
- Families and children were healthier when fathers were more involved with parenting and working with mothers as co-parents and partners
- Parents experienced reduced stress and anxiety
- Parents were more satisfied with their relationships with one another
- Children were less hyperactive and aggressive

The findings demonstrated that positive father involvement is associated with children's well-being and with lower levels of behavior problems. Data documenting long term effects show that fathers who participated in both the fathers' and the couples' groups were significantly more involved with their children more than a year after the groups ended. Families who participated in the one-time information session (control group), however, did not show an improvement in father involvement, lessening parental stress, or any improvement in their children's problematic behaviors. Of particular value to child welfare agencies is that the SFI Project findings show that fathers participating in both the fathers' and the couples' groups presented reduced risk factors for child abuse and neglect.

The success of the SFI Intervention with the initial families who participated has led to extending funding for this study at the five sites for an additional three year period. This newest phase of the SFI Intervention differs from the earlier phase in that it supports work predominately with families involved with the public child welfare system. The referrals to the SFI Project in the current phase from county child welfare agencies are families who have had referrals to child welfare of suspected child abuse and/or neglect. The families may or may not have a child welfare case opened, but are found to be in need of services and are referred to the local SFI Project site. It is projected that work with these families will be just as successful as that conducted with the families in the earlier stages of the study.

In learning about the impressive results from this research study, it is hoped that family resource centers and social service agencies across the State will want to implement the SFI Intervention. A site in San Diego County is planning to start their first SFI group early in 2011, while a site in Humboldt County has recently completed their first SFI group. Agencies are using a mixture of funding from their county First Five and county child welfare agency to support the cost of conducting the SFI groups.

It is understood that economic conditions dictate that many organizations may not have access to the resources to implement the SFI Intervention at this time. Therefore, we are moving forward with a phased dissemination in which the goal is twofold. 1) The first goal is to impact the culture of service provision within child welfare agencies and community-based organizations to more effectively engage and include fathers. 2) The second goal is to provide the necessary training and technical assistance to implement the SFI Intervention.

Dissemination of the Supporting Father Involvement Intervention and Evaluation and Father Engagement Strategies

With the intent of encouraging both public and non-profit agencies throughout the State to replicate the success of the SFI Project's approach to engaging fathers, the OCAP has engaged Strategies for statewide dissemination of the SFI Intervention, as well as for father engagement strategies. Strategies is a nationally recognized, three agency collaboration based in California. They provide training, coaching, facilitation, curriculum development, and technical assistance on the application of research and best practices to family and community strengthening programs, organizations, and networks throughout the State.

Strategies' SFI Dissemination activities include:

- Offering workshops to present the research results that support the SFI Project as an evidence-based intervention;
- Training staff to implement the SFI Intervention (conducting the fathers' and couples' groups);
- Engaging organizations in taking the organizational self assessment (OSA) tool to assess their level of father involvement;
- Providing technical assistance in the revision of policies, procedures and practices to reflect father involvement;
- Assisting agencies to successfully initiate/enhance their outreach to fathers.

Although the agency assessment tool developed by Strategies is aimed more towards community-based organizations, they have also worked successfully with public child welfare agencies who wanted to better engage fathers. Depending on agency readiness, capacity and goals, Strategies will customize an agency's implementation of some or all of the father engagement strategies. More information is available through Strategies web site at: www.supportingfatherinvolvement.org/strategies/index.html

Coming in the Future: Translating the Lessons of the Supporting Father Involvement Intervention to the County Child Welfare Agency

In addition to the efforts being undertaken by Strategies, the CDSS' Resources Development and Training Support Bureau has engaged the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) to work with the Regional Training Academies (RTAs) and the public child welfare agencies to increase their efforts to engage fathers. The CalSWEC and RTA activities in this area include:

- Designing and administering an instrument for evaluating father friendliness, the *Father Friendliness Organizational Self Assessment (OSA) for Child Welfare Agencies*;
- Providing technical assistance for the selection, implementation and evaluation of strategies to increase agency-specific father friendliness and engagement;
- Developing new social worker training curriculum for father involvement in child welfare decision processes, and;
- Developing an Implementation Toolkit (including communication tools, policy tools, evaluation tools and training tools) to facilitate the successful implementation of effective father engagement strategies statewide.

The Implementation Toolkit will be used to systematically disseminate and spread effective practices for engaging fathers. Practice knowledge gleaned from the SFI Intervention will be included in statewide and regional trainings and presentations.

The intention of such a comprehensive dissemination is to foster the broad and long-lasting institutionalization of the goals and some of the methods of the SFI Project statewide. For additional information on the CalSWEC activities, please refer to their website at: <http://calswec.berkeley.edu/>. As the products under development will not be available until sometime in 2012, public child welfare agencies who desire to begin work in father engagement in the intervening period may contact Strategies for assistance.

Examples of How the Supporting Father Involvement Intervention Is Being Used by Counties

Referrals to the SFI Project are frequently for those families who have had a referral(s) to the public child welfare agency for suspected child abuse and neglect, but no case is opened. Some referrals come through county Differential Response systems. Other SFI referrals are for families with an open child welfare case in Family Maintenance or Family Reunification. However, participation in the SFI Intervention at the five original sites must be voluntary and cannot be included as part of the child welfare case plan, as they are still part of the SFI research project. For any new sites where the SFI Intervention has been implemented, participation by families may be included in a child welfare agency case plan. At least one SFI Intervention site has worked successfully with their county child welfare partners to identify appropriate referrals of recently closed child welfare services cases in which social workers felt that the families needed continued support. As mentioned previously, all families participating in the SFI Intervention also receive case management and other services as needed through the family resource centers.

The location of the SFI Intervention and Evaluation within family resource centers has resulted in significant benefits. One is an increased collaboration between the family resources centers and public child welfare. It has also resulted in a shift in agency culture in the family resource centers. This shift resulted in the revision of policies and procedures to address fathers; the intentionality of engaging fathers in agency services and changes in agency environment to include information about fathers on outreach materials and other agency forms (newsletters, intake, referral, etc.). Increased receptivity to fathers within agencies increases the likelihood of fathers becoming involved and actively participating in the resolution of individual and family difficulties, thereby decreasing the incidence of child abuse and neglect.

The CDSS plan for continuing to increase father engagement includes integrating aspects of father engagement, father involvement, and/or father friendliness throughout CDSS projects, educational and outreach materials, and training. In addition to this notice, other information on father engagement may be found in the resources section in this notice.

Additional Resources

The results of the SFI Intervention and Evaluation have been reported at a number of scientific meetings in this country and abroad, and in three published papers describing the qualitative results. A fourth paper, describing the quantitative results, has been published. This article is: Cowan, P.A., Cowan, C.P., Pruett, J.K., & Pruett, K.D., & Wong, J. (2009). Promoting fathers' engagement with children: Prevention interventions for low-income families. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 71, 663-679. A link to this article appears on the Supporting Father Involvement web site at: <http://supportingfatherinvolvement.org>.

The California Evidence Based Clearinghouse (CEBC) for Child Welfare (www.cebc4cw.org), which is also an Office of Child Abuse Prevention funded project, has reviewed the SFI Intervention. The CEBC for Child Welfare is an online resource that is a tool for identifying, selecting, and implementing evidence-based child welfare practices that will improve child safety, increase permanency, increase family and community stability, and promote child and family well-being. The SFI Intervention has been highly rated by the CEBC as "supported by research evidence". On a scale of "1" to "5", with "1" being the highest score, the CEBC reviewed the SFI Intervention and assessed it as having a Scientific Rating of "2".

Supporting Father Involvement Intervention state project web site
<http://supportingfatherinvolvement.org>

Supporting Father Involvement Intervention site in Yuba County
<http://www.gracesourceinc.org/supporting-father-involvement>

Supporting Father Involvement Intervention site in Santa Cruz County
<http://www.papassfi.org/>

Supporting Father Involvement Intervention site in San Luis Obispo County
http://www.capslo.org/ds/ds_pops.html

The National Fatherhood Initiative
[National Fatherhood Initiative](http://www.nationalfatherhoodinitiative.org/)

The National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System
<http://www.abanet.org/child/fathers/>

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood
<http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/>

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National Center for Fathering
<http://www.fathers.com/>

Center on Fathers, Families, and Public Policy
<http://cffpp.org/>

Fathers & Families Coalition of America, Inc.
www.azffc.org

The Fatherhood Institute
<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?nID=1>

Center for Successful Fathering
<http://www.fathering.org/>

The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse
<http://www.fatherhood.gov/>

The Fathers Network
<http://fathersnetwork.org/669.html>

Fathers and Father-Figures: Their Important Role in Children's Social and Emotional Development; Quesenberry, A.; Ostrosky, M.M.; and Corso R.M. The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning;
<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb16.pdf>

Best Practice/Next Practice by the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice; issue on Father Involvement in the Child Welfare System
<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/newsletter/BNPNSummer02.pdf>

The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children; Rosenberg, Jeffrey. Wilcox, W. Bradford. Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Children's Bureau. Year Published: 2006

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/chapterone.cfm>

What About the Dads? Child Welfare Agencies' Efforts to Identify, Locate and Involve Nonresident Fathers. Malm K., Murray J. and Geen R. (Washington, D.C.: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2006).

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/06/CW-involve-dads/report.pdf>

If you have questions about the SFI Intervention and/or other father engagement strategies, please contact Danny Molina, SFI Project Manager, Strategies - Central Region, at (805) 485-6114 extension 679. Or if you prefer, you may reach him via email at dmolina@icfs.org . If you have questions or desire additional information on the CalSWEC activities, please refer to their website at: <http://calswec.berkeley.edu/>. If you have any questions about this notice, please contact Lee Ann Kelly, Assistant Chief, at the Office of Child Abuse Prevention. She may be contacted either by phone at (916) 651-6960, or by email at LeeAnn.Kelly@dss.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By:

LINNÉ STOUT, Chief
Child Protection and Family Support Branch