



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Researchers reported involved fathers have children who engage in less antisocial behaviors and their close parent-child relationships are proactive to demonstrate a myriad of prosocial behaviors that benefit the children, their schools, and communities. This includes a reduction in delinquency, drug use, and violent behaviors. Importantly, it was noted that the bond between fathers and children through repeated involvement contributed to the child demonstrating developmentally advanced symptoms that helped children gain control over intense emotions that could potentially lead to problem behaviors such as a lack of self-regulation and aggressiveness. Similarly, the research noted the absence of fathers contributed to an increase in negative behaviors.

Program Purpose

The 100 BMA's Fatherhood Initiative program for responsible fatherhood aims to promote healthy marriages, economic stability, and emotional well-being through a range of workshops, case management, and networking opportunities. The program is geared towards fathers who are facing socioeconomic challenges or who have previously been incarcerated in the Atlanta area. It is designed to help adult fathers establish or strengthen relationships with their children, as well as with their spouse or partner.

Program Objectives

The Fatherhood Initiative program objectives were to:

- Foster healthy engagement between father-child, father-significant other, and the whole family unit.
- Re-engage fathers facing socioeconomic challenges in the care and upbringing of their children.

The objectives of the program were supported by three core tracks: biweekly access to Life Coaches, monthly workshops, classes, or seminars that focused on topics or activities to assist in gaining knowledge that can be used to remove barriers to success and engage participants (fathers) with the larger cohort of program participants in social activities to network, share experiences, and socialize.

Evaluation Methodology

The performance evaluation assessed the program's performance towards stated goals and descriptive outcomes. The evaluation methods allowed the external evaluation team to assess the participating fathers' perceptions of the program, knowledge gains and sense of community. Evaluation analysts collected data through various sources that included reviewing program activities and analyzing meeting notes, progress reports, and interview transcripts. These data collection strategies provided the evaluation team with enough data to assess the program implementation process. In addition to collecting documents, evaluation analysts participated in eight focus group meetings and conducted semi-structured interviews with four participants. Data were collected and analyzed to determine whether the project met specific program outcomes.

Results

There were two overarching outcome measures analyzed. These outcome measures were perceptions of improved sense of community and increased knowledge. Most of the outcomes based on fathers' perspectives revealed that being in the program gave them an improved sense of community. Participants improved sense of community was driven by the improved positive interactions with the 100 BMA community, specifically life coaches and the program director. Further, participants expressed having increased accessibility to the 100 BMA community through access to the 100 BMA professionals. Fathers perceived that engaging in the life coaching sessions offered the sense of 'playing on a leveled field with each other.' They expressed that their sense of community bolstered their leadership experience and perceived that "being connected with some great individuals" further increased their sense of community. Participants noted that engaging in the life coaching meetings and focused group sessions created a sense of community because it allowed the fathers to communicate and talk about their experiences. These meetings also fostered a sense of community by allowing fathers to "tap in with all the brothers." Specifically, one father said, "We are talking. We are hearing how one person might feel." Another participant noted that "Everybody coming together talking about their different situations" was a strength of the program.

Another outcome measure that aligned with participants' sentiments was increased knowledge. Based on participants' quotes, fathers in the program perceived that life coaches were able to break down information related to coparenting, "line by line [in terms of] what I need to do on my end, to kind of get those [coparenting] rights back. One participant noted that the strategy of having a group text provided the opportunity for him to remain "abreast of what's going on." One participant reported that the program made sure he understood what being a young man and a new father was about. The father perceived that increases in his knowledge improved his leadership experience. Another participant said, "Being there gave me a lot of information [on] things I didn't know about being a father."

Most significant was the creation of a sense of belonging in a community for men. The participants needed a different type of community to support their transformation into men who have relationships with their children and their co-parent. This community provided encouragement from men who were a part of their cultural/racial identity group, "*there was no judgment*" and the program "*helped them grow into fathers and as men.*" This community including a familial variable of weekly dinners and this communal feeling helped to transform their lives to become better parents and help diminish potential antisocial behaviors in their children. It is apparent from the data set that the program provided strong support to the fathers through a community of men who served as Life Coaches, workshop facilitators, attorneys, and men who understood from personal experiences the challenges of fatherhood. A consistent theme was an appreciation for the meetings and the variety of content. These fathers appreciated the support they received from other men. There were no criticisms of the program, the content, or the leaders affiliated with the program. The Program Director and the Life Coaches facilitated a program that achieved the three core tracks and most importantly, had an impact on the lives of the fathers who shared their experiences through the interviews. The program model created the desired community to encourage fathers to engage in healthy and productive relationships through an awareness of the laws governing parenting, improved communication with their child's co-parent, and creating new communities with men who support their growth. Increasing the quality and quantity of parental involvement leads to fathers providing nurturance, interest, and companionship which leads to children's self-esteem, life satisfaction, and social competence. A recommendation for the program was an increase in advertising dollars to make the program accessible to more fathers.