

Increasing Low-Income Fathers' Involvement in Home Visiting Programs



Parents as Teachers™

By Tomoko Wakabayashi, Karen A. Guskin, Jan Watson, Kate McGilly, and Larry L. Klinger Jr.

Excerpted from the report *The Parents as Teachers Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Project: Evaluation of "Dads in the Mix," an Exemplary Site* prepared for the Parents as Teachers national office

It is now well-supported and documented that fathers interact with their children in ways different from mothers, contributing equally and importantly to children's healthy and optimal development (Turner, 2009). Father involvement, for example, has been found to positively correlate with children's secure attachment, social and emotional development, cognitive development, and quality of life, including health and poverty (NFI, 2009; Raikes, Summers, & Roggman, 2005). Fathers' positive influences in their children's early years also improve children's odds against later incarceration, crime, teen pregnancy, low educational attainment, and substance abuse (NFI, 2009).

What Fathers Are Saying From the beginning day I really enjoyed our meetings and found myself looking forward to each upcoming Tuesday. The cookout was great. My children really, really had a great time as well.

"I've been involved with several parenting groups. To me, [this] has been one of the best."

– M. H., *Dads in the Mix*, Allegheny Intermediate Unit



The percentage of father-absent homes continues to rise nationally, with one out of every three of America's children (34.5 percent) living apart from their biological fathers (Kreider, 2008). Nevertheless, research shows that as long as fathers stay involved in their children's lives, whether they live with their children or not, the potential for their children's success in life remains comparatively high (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 2006).

Resident fathers, or fathers who live with their children, have been found to be more involved and engaged than non-resident fathers. Nevertheless, the degree of father involvement remains not only qualitatively, but also quantitatively different from that of mothers (NRFC, 2009). There are cultural and societal barriers which associate taking care of children to female roles. Fathers consequently have been found to show less interest in participating in parent education programs and other efforts which support parents to become the first and the best teachers of their children (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 2006).



Home visiting programs like Parents as Teachers are no exception. While many of these programs have names which suggest that they focus on serving “parents” and/or “families,” the participants are overwhelmingly mothers.

Dads in the Mix, a PAT Promoting Responsible Fatherhood program

The PAT Promoting Responsible Fatherhood project was designed to demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of an adaptation of the PAT model with low-income fathers as the primary target population. The project goal was to increase father involvement in PAT services. Residential fathers who met the income criteria (under 200 percent of the federal poverty level) were recruited to participate in a 12-week group meeting cycle lasting three months. Fathers also participated in home visits by PAT-certified home visitors.

One example of a successful program was Dads in the Mix, provided through a PAT partnership with the Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU3) in Pittsburgh. Dads in the Mix uses the PAT curriculum *Young Moms, Young Dads* to deliver peer-facilitated fatherhood group meetings and the PAT home visiting curriculum for home visits.

The program’s implementation goals were:

1. To expand services to as many fathers in the AIU3 service areas as possible.
2. To recruit at least eight to 10 fathers per session and engage and retain 80 percent of the enrolled fathers so that they receive at least eight hours of skill-based parenting education during their 12-week group meeting cycle.
3. To complete a monthly home visit (three times during the group meeting cycle) with 80 percent of the enrolled fathers.

The program’s outcome goal was to have fathers become more involved in the lives of their children.

Implementation and outcome results

The program met its implementation goals. Its successful recruitment and retention strategies focused on:

- > Staffing – The program hired experienced and dedicated staff who were knowledgeable about the community, had experience serving fathers, and were certified in the PAT model.
- > Coordination of services – Home visits and fatherhood group meetings were coordinated to recruit, engage, and retain fathers.
- > Provision of incentives – Dads in the Mix used snacks and monetary incentives like tickets to family-friendly events to engage and retain fathers. However, one of the most effective incentives was the fathers’ desire to help their children succeed.
- > Flexibility of scheduling – fatherhood group meetings, like home visits, were scheduled at a time that best met the participants’ schedules.



- > Organizational partnership and collaboration – the AIU3 was able to partner and collaborate with community efforts, including the Father’s Collaborative Council. In addition, with the existing capacity and infrastructure of AIU3, fathers were provided with resources beyond what Dads in the Mix provided on its own.
- > Communication and outreach – Among the successful strategies were newsletters, personalized event invitations, one-on-one interaction with staff at community meetings and family-friendly events, “each one bring one” campaigns where current participants brought along a friend, and child-drawn invitations to meetings.

Dads in the Mix also showed preliminary evidence for reaching the outcome goal of promoting involved fathers. Fathers reported being more involved in their children’s lives and improving communications and relationships with children and/or spouses. In addition to being involved, more fathers reported being patient with their children and others. Fathers’ increase in patience was often connected to how they disciplined their children. Fathers’ increase in communication as well as patience was also often reported in connection with how they facilitated their children’s learning.

As Parents as Teachers continues to evaluate its Responsible Fatherhood project, we will learn more about the successful strategies used by exemplary implementing sites and disseminate the information for use by other PAT model sites to better involve low-income fathers in skill-based parenting education services, and in the lives of their children.

To read the full report, [click here](#).

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Tomoko Wakabayashi, Ed.D., is a director at the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Mich., and is the assistant principal investigator of the Numbers Plus Efficacy Study (funded by IES National Center for Education Research, U.S. Department of Education).

Karen A. Guskin is the director of research and evaluation at Parents as Teachers in St. Louis, Mo.

Jan Watson, M.A.T, is the training, program support and technical assistance manager at the National Center for Parents as Teachers in St. Louis. She also manages the National Responsible Fatherhood Project and provides technical assistance for five partner sites in four states.

Kate McGilly, Ph.D., is the senior manager of special projects at Parents as Teachers in St. Louis, Mo.

Larry L. Klinger, Jr., M.Ed., is the program manager for Family and Community Education Services at [Allegheny Intermediate Unit](#) in Homestead, Penn.

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