Washington County Department of Social Services

Washington County Family Center

DADS’ Connection

Over 24 million children are growing up in a home without their biological father. Statistics show that if a father is involved with his child for the first two years of their life, 80% will stay involved. Children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, feel better about themselves, and are more likely to have good physical and mental health, and avoid high risk behaviors such as truancy and criminal activity compared to children who have uninvolved fathers.

History:

The Young Fathers Program was created by the Washington County Department of Social services, and began providing services in 1996 to young non-custodial fathers, father figures, expectant fathers, and fathers of children up to age seven. The program, once known as the Fathering Program, became renamed as the DADS' Connection. The program served 186 Washington county fathers from 1996-2004, ranging from ages 16 to 30. In 2004 grant funding became scarce, forcing the program to close its doors.

In 2008 the DADS' Connection program was revived after receiving special project funding through Program 10. The DADS' Connection program once again became the sole program in Washington County providing intensive case management, counseling services, parenting education, and job readiness services to fathers and those in fathering roles.

The mission of the DADS' Connection is to provide opportunities for personal growth and development to men, by empowering them to become responsible fathers to their children and involved members of our community. The majority of our fathers served have been affected by the most common obstacles and barriers to employment, such as the lack of education, poor job skills, poor employment histories, criminal backgrounds, and limited transportation. Our program seeks to promote stability in the father-child relationship as well as increase the opportunities for fathers to enhance job skills, education, job retention, and to consistently meet their Child Support commitments to their children. Most of the fathers involved in our program have come from fatherless homes themselves, and are trying to break the cycle of fatherlessness, poverty, abuse, and neglect.

The Dads Connection is housed within Washington County’s Family Center. There are 24 counties in the state of Maryland that have a Family Center. There are, however, only 4 that have a program targeted specifically to work with and support young fathers. On average the program serves about 100 fathers each year. During FY 2020, 79 dads were served. 51 found jobs and 21 were employed at a wage of $12.50 or more per hour.

Program Goals:

•The first goal of the DADS' Connection is to assist fathers to overcome barriers of employment through case management services and collaboration and coordination with other community resources. We have reached out and worked with Hagerstown Community College, Valor Ministries, The Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, Horizon Goodwill, Western Maryland Consortium, Pro Bono Legal Program, legal expungement assistance programs, Job Club through Gatekeepers Reentry Program, and Department of Motor Vehicles. Each of these agencies have programs that can assist fathers to gain job readiness skills and/or remove barriers to gaining employment.

•The second and third program goals are to connect fathers with jobs and increase the financial support to their children by meeting their child support obligations. The current hourly wage for fathers obtaining employment while working with the DADS’ Connection is from between $11.50-$26.00. One way we have been able to give our fathers an advantage in the job market has been to help them gain a job skill such as Forklift Operator training or Welding Certification. Through Hagerstown Community College and DADS' Connection services, fathers are able to receive Forklift Operator certification or Welding certification providing them with a marketable job skill and making them more attractive to local warehouses and other employers in the area.

Services

Parent Education Program: Improve on a wide range of parenting skills that will allow fathers to build a better relationship with their child during this six-week program. Participants help decide what to talk about in each session. Topics include understanding your child's needs, how to talk so kids will listen, dealing with anger and conflict, relationships and understanding the child support system.

Job Readiness: Learn basic job skills like filling out a job application, writing a resume, and job interviewing techniques. For those who are eligible, we can help purchase work-related items such as tools and clothing so you're better prepared for a new job

Employment Placement Assistance: Receive help finding a local job so you can earn money to support yourself and make child support payments. If needed, a staff member can go to a job interview with you and provide transportation. Jobs found usually range from $11.50 to $26.00 an hour.

Educational Opportunities: A high school diploma is required for many jobs and we encourage all participates to become high school graduates. If you need a high school diploma, we will pay for the general equivalency degree (GED) enrollment fee and provide instructional classes. Several of our young fathers have obtained their GED, in addition to securing gainful employment, while involved in the program

The DADS’ Connection has only one designated full-time staff person. He serves as a mentor/role model to program participants in addition to administering program responsibilities. The local Family Center provides in-kind support such as office space and operating supplies.