



Father Engagement

**The Impact of Good+Foundation's Father
Engagement Training in Child Welfare**



REPORT
DECEMBER 2024

Good+Foundation

Prepared by



“I work in some systems, where it’s still okay to say, ‘Father is unknown,’ ... If I’m going to be equitable, I have to put forth some effort in locating and engaging a father in a way we haven’t in the past.”

Dr. Alan-Michael Graves,
Good+ Senior Director of Learning and Capacity Building,
shared on the Mathematica Podcast

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Introduction

The Impact of Good + Foundation's Father Engagement Training

The Good+Foundation is dedicated to creating long-term, positive outcomes for families, placing this mission at the heart of its work. Over the years, Good+ has expanded from providing strategic product donations and parenting support to offering technical assistance and professional networking opportunities for social service providers through its Good+ Training Academy, launched in 2019. Recognizing that supporting families also requires transforming social service systems, the Training Academy collaborates with providers to build professional connections to resources that ultimately benefit families. A critical focus of this initiative is addressing systemic and individual barriers that often exclude fathers from active participation in their children's lives. Both research and practice highlight that father-inclusive programs foster stronger, thriving family units.

One notable partnership that reflects Good+Foundation's commitment to transformative change is with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services ("DCFS"), one of the nation's largest child welfare agencies. Through this partnership, Good+Foundation delivers its specialized Father Engagement Training to thousands of DCFS social workers, as part of DCFS's Father Strong Initiative. This initiative, aimed at reshaping the child welfare system to be more inclusive of fathers, aligns closely with the objectives of the Good+ Training Academy.



The Father Engagement Training equips social workers to recognize and address biases against fathers, particularly Black fathers, by providing tools that promote inclusive family engagement practices. The program has been well-received, with 98% of new social workers reporting increased readiness to address bias in their fieldwork.¹

With five years of training conducted, Good+Foundation was interested in understanding the impacts and effectiveness of their training beyond the survey data collected after participants completed the training. Good+Foundation wanted to assess:

- if their training is leading to sustained mindset shifts
- when and how social workers are putting the training into practice, and
- whether or not more fathers and paternal relatives are being engaged by DCFS, among other evaluative questions.

In an effort to ensure a thorough evaluation of the Father Engagement Training, Good+Foundation partnered with Castillo Consulting Partners (“CCP”) to conduct the assessment. CCP’s experiences and skills with quantitative and qualitative research, data collection and analysis, and program evaluation, along with their backgrounds and expertise in diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and antiracism (“DEIJA”), and child welfare offered the right mix of skills and expertise needed to complete the evaluation.

This report synthesizes insights from the data collected for the assessment via surveys, focus groups and field observations with social workers that completed the Father Engagement Training, to evaluate the training's impact, highlight trends, key insights, and areas for improvement. The report closes with recommendations for further research and ongoing learning development with hopes of continuing to reduce bias and strengthen engagement of fathers in the family finding and connection process.

<https://goodplusfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Good%2B%20Training%20Academy%20Impact%20Assessment.pdf>



Executive Summary

In preparation for evaluating the impact of the Good+Foundation's Father Engagement Training, Castillo Consulting Partners (CCP) analyzed data gathered from multiple sources, including a comprehensive survey of social workers, focus group discussions with DCFS staff, and field observations of practice. These sources provided valuable insights into how the training influences social workers' engagement with fathers and identified areas for continued improvement. Key takeaways from our analysis include:

The training has increased awareness and sensitivity towards fathers among social workers.

The Father Engagement Training has effectively raised awareness of biases against fathers in child welfare, with 89% of survey respondents acknowledging increased awareness of cultural and gender biases and 86% reporting a better understanding of biased reporting impacts. Focus groups further confirmed that the training challenged participants to confront their biases and broaden their perspectives on father engagement.

Social workers gained enhanced skills in engaging fathers, resulting in more inclusive practices.

Survey data showed that 84% of social workers gained practical skills for engaging fathers effectively. Focus groups and observations confirmed increased confidence and intentionality in their interactions, with participants using new strategies to maintain father engagement, even in challenging situations.

The training positively impacted social workers' engagement strategies and outcomes for families.

Survey results indicated that 85% of social workers improved their engagement with fathers, with greater efforts to listen, validate, and document interactions fairly. Focus groups highlighted increased father involvement in family decisions, and administrators observed measurable improvements, including reductions in out-of-home placements for Black families due to policies like the Father Engagement Policy.

Veteran social workers benefit most from the training, while newer social workers face challenges in adapting.

Analysis revealed that veteran social workers with over 15 years of experience responded most positively to the training, showing a deeper understanding of family dynamics and greater confidence in advocating for fathers. Conversely, newer social workers (under two years of experience) often felt overwhelmed by the training and job expectations, highlighting the need for tailored support and ongoing training for these staff members.

Cultural brokers play a critical role in reshaping narratives and supporting father engagement.

Incorporating cultural brokers into the County-wide initiative to support Black and Native American fathers marks an important move toward a more inclusive approach to father engagement.² These brokers shift conversations from biased assumptions to strengths-based perspectives that emphasize the value of paternal involvement, playing a crucial role in addressing cultural biases and broadening family engagement practices. Good+Foundation staff serve as cultural brokers themselves and train community organizations to adopt this role as well, expanding the reach and impact of these efforts.

Continued challenges highlight the need for ongoing training and support.

Although the training has been well-received, challenges persist, including ongoing biases, difficulties in engaging fathers, and limited resources. Field observations and focus groups revealed that social workers occasionally revert to biased thinking, underscoring the need for regular refresher courses and continuous education to maintain the positive impact of the training.

² <https://file.lacountv.gov/SDSInter/box/surdocs/122214.pdf>

This report provides further insights into each of the key takeaways, along with detailed observations and feedback from social workers and administrators. The insights within offer a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the Father Engagement Training on practice and outcomes, highlighting areas of success and opportunities for growth. The information shared is intended to guide the Good+Foundation and DCFS as they consider next steps in enhancing their approach to engaging fathers and supporting families within the child welfare system.

Methodology

Data Collection Process

CCP utilized a mixed-methods data collection and analysis approach to measure the effectiveness of the Father Engagement Training. This mixed-method approach included:

- Observing the Father Engagement Training
- Collecting quantitative data via a survey
- Collecting qualitative data by hosting focus groups and conducting field observations

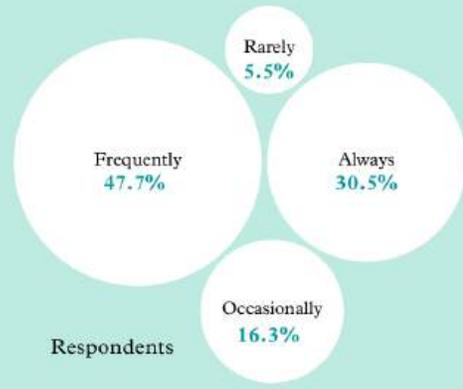
Training Observation. The CCP team attended three training sessions to grasp the content, understand the goals and objectives of the training, observe the Good+Foundation facilitators and assess participant engagement. Insights from these observations were used to make recommendations about the type of data to be collected to effectively evaluate the training.

Survey. CCP collaborated with the Good+Foundation team to codesign the survey instrument to ensure that survey questions would yield valuable insight about the effectiveness of the training. The survey was administered to social workers via an e-mail that was sent by their regional administrators and was organized into the following sections: (1) pre-training, (2) initial impact, (3) post-training and (4) demographics, and administered to social workers via an email that was sent by their regional administrators. In total, we received responses from 443 social workers with varying years of experience, who interact with fathers in their caseloads across all eight service planning areas (“SPAs”) throughout LA County, all of whom had completed the training. Analysis of demographic variables such as the point in time at which the employee completed the training, their tenure at DCFS at the time of training, their region, along with standard demographic data such as race, ethnicity, age, gender, etc. were used to disaggregate the data to assess the impacts and effectiveness of the training within DCFS across various variables.

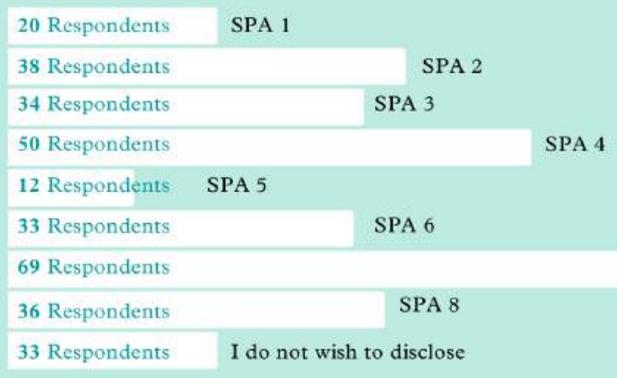


n=325

How frequently do you work with fathers in your fieldwork?



How many years have you worked as a social worker?



In which SPA do you primarily work?

Focus Groups & Field Observations. Qualitative data collection encompassed both focus groups and field observations, designed to capture nuanced perspectives and observe training application in real-world settings. CCP hosted three distinct focus groups to gather insights that would enrich the quantitative data and offer a more comprehensive understanding of the training’s impact. These groups were organized by participant role: (1) DCFS regional administrators, (2) new social workers, and (3) veteran social workers, allowing for open, peer-level dialogue in a safe environment. Field observations further supplemented this data by enabling CCP to attend various meetings and discussions where evaluators could witness how training concepts and principles were implemented in daily practice. Working collaboratively, CCP and Good+Foundation developed a detailed protocol for the focus groups and defined key objectives and observational goals for fieldwork, ensuring alignment with the core learning outcomes of the Father Engagement Training.

Focus group participants and field observation sessions were selected by Good+Foundation and DCFS to represent a range of perspectives and experiences within the agency. While initially some qualitative data collection was intended to be conducted in person, logistical constraints required that all focus groups and field observations be held virtually. Despite these adjustments, the virtual format allowed for meaningful and substantive engagement across participants and provided valuable insights into the training’s ongoing impact.

Research Limitations

Survey Participants. While Good+Foundation knows that thousands of social workers have completed their Father Engagement Training, due to frequent staff changes, the exact number of participants is unknown. As such, determining the right sample size was difficult. To address this limitation, the CCP team assumed the total number of social workers in Los Angeles County, approximately 5,000, as the full universe of potential participants and determined the appropriate sample size and confidence interval based on this number.

Time Constraints. One of the biggest limitations impacting this evaluation was time constraints with both the time allotted to complete the assessment, and the time lapse between the time of data collection and the time when social workers completed the training. The complete assessment was conducted over the course of six weeks which offered minimal time to conduct a comprehensive evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the training. Furthermore, given the wide range of training completion dates, it was difficult to account for the long-term vs. short-term impacts of the training. This challenge was especially notable with the “before the training” questions in the survey instrument. Recommendations regarding potential ways to gather more accurate data in this regard are included later in this report.



Recency Bias. Related to the time constraint limitations is the presence of recency bias. While some survey participants completed the training within the past 3-5 years, many of the respondents had participated in training within the past several weeks. In an effort to mitigate for this limitation, the evaluators disaggregated the data based on tenure, assuming that new social workers had completed the training more recently, thus would have different insights about the effectiveness of the training than more tenured social workers who had completed the training in the past.

Field Observations. The evaluators recommended the use of field observations as one method by which to assess when and how social workers are putting the training into practice. Due to time constraints and the sensitive nature of investigations, access to opportunities to observe social workers in the field was limited.

Internal Data Review. One of the most effective ways to determine if fathers and paternal family members are being engaged by DCFS is by reviewing data on the frequency of children being connected and placed with their fathers or paternal relatives, both before and after the father engagement training was made mandatory for all social workers. A comprehensive analysis of this data was beyond the scope of this assessment, which limits our ability to evaluate the direct impact of the training for fathers and families. However, Dr. Wendy Wiegmann, Project Director at the California Child Welfare Indicators Project, is collaborating with DCFS to track father engagement by caseworkers (she has also served as an advisor to Good+ on how to assess the impact of their training).

Data from DCFS reveals an overall increase in father engagement of approximately 16.01% from January 2023 to June 2024. This includes increases in visitation to White fathers (+17.37%), Black fathers (+14.71%), Latino fathers (+21.81%), and Asian/PI fathers (+38.48%, the highest increase). Unfortunately, Native American fathers saw a decrease of 8.96%. These trends reflect DCFS' growing focus on father engagement, likely influenced by the training, which equips social workers to better prioritize father involvement in case plans. Collecting and analyzing additional data on paternal placements would further clarify the training's impact. Evaluators recommend that future assessments include an in-depth analysis of this data to gain a better understanding of the training's effectiveness directly on families within DCFS.



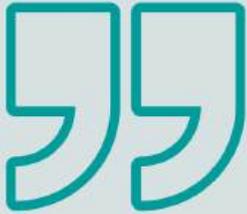


Key Insights and Highlights

Insights from the survey and focus groups yielded the following key findings:

1. Training participants experienced increased awareness regarding their biases and greater sensitivity toward fathers whose children come into contact with DCFS.
2. Learnings from the training helped enhance participants' skills with engaging fathers. They gained new knowledge and valuable insights that supported growth in their understanding of how to effectively engage fathers in their work.
3. Participants believe that participation in the training has positively impacted their practice and outcomes for families in their caseloads, with veteran social workers feeling more confident to advocate for fathers to be engaged.

Increased Awareness and Sensitivity



"The training expanded my knowledge on ways to engage fathers that I hadn't considered before. It helped me understand their perspectives better."

- *New Social Worker*

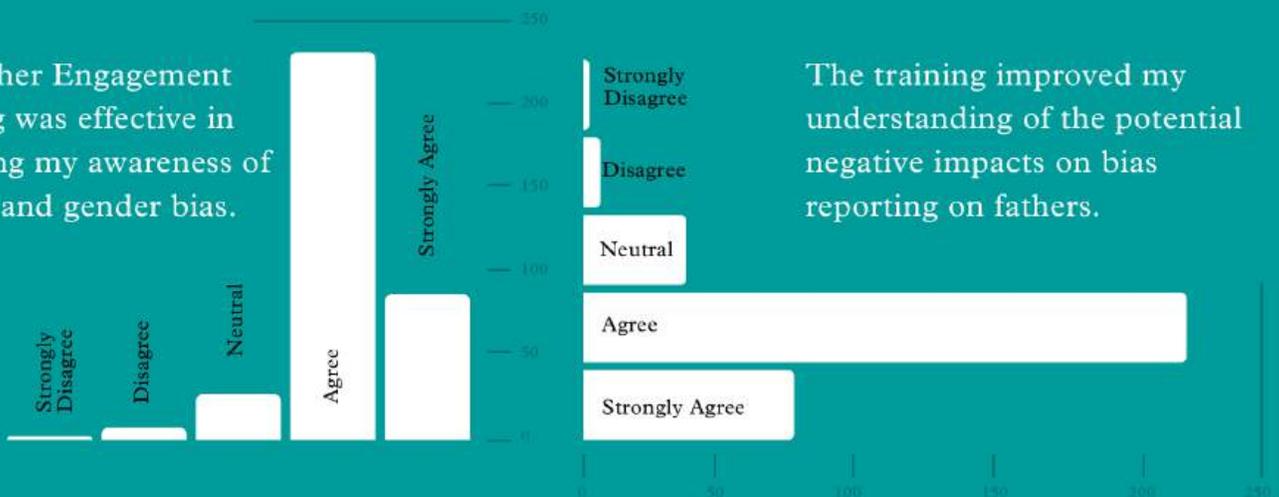
One of the primary goals of the Father Engagement Training is to increase awareness about the systematic and unconscious biases against fathers in society as a whole, and within child welfare specifically. The survey included a series of questions to measure whether or not the training is increasing awareness:

- The Father Engagement Training was effective in increasing my awareness of cultural and gender biases.
- The training improved my understanding of the potential negative impacts of biased reporting on fathers.
- The training helped me recognize my own biases when working with fathers.
- Since completing the training, I have noticed changes in how I perceive fathers in my fieldwork.

89% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Father Engagement Training was effective in increasing their awareness of cultural and gender bias;

86% agreed or strongly agreed that the training improved their understanding of the potential negative impacts of biased reporting on fathers. In addition to increasing awareness, social workers overwhelmingly agreed that the training helped them recognize their own biases toward fathers and shifted the way they perceive fathers in their fieldwork.

The Father Engagement Training was effective in increasing my awareness of cultural and gender bias.



The training improved my understanding of the potential negative impacts on bias reporting on fathers.

n=339



Quantitative data from the survey was supported by qualitative insights from focus groups, as participants across all focus groups reported a heightened awareness of the need to engage fathers actively in their work. Participants reflected on how the training deepened their understanding of fathers' roles and challenged participants to confront their biases and understand the unique challenges fathers face within the child welfare system. A veteran social worker noted, **"Dr. Graves challenged my bias and reminded us that it's important to check our bias in this work."** Another agreed and added, **"It's important to check our bias. Fathers are a culture within themselves. There is a unique need for them to have our support."**

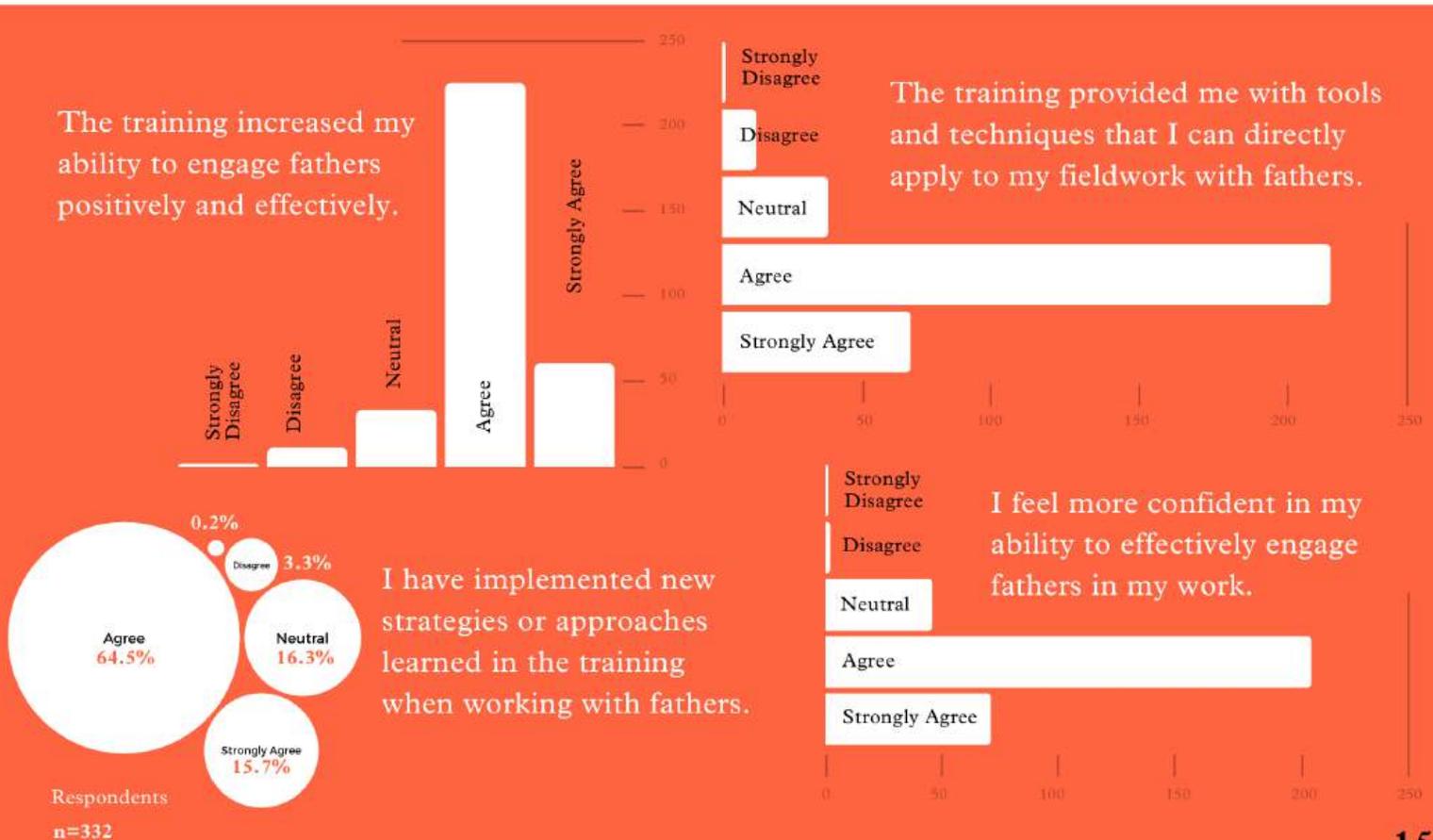
New social workers expressed a shift in perspective, recognizing the importance of treating fathers with the same respect and consideration traditionally reserved for mothers. One participant emphasized, **"Treat them [fathers] how they want to be treated. Their kids need them. The same support I give to mothers I give to fathers. They are equally important."** Another social worker commented, **"After taking this training, I ask CSWs more questions about their work with fathers, and it has increased awareness across the team."**

Administrators also observed a change in the mindset of social workers: **"We are very intentional about engaging fathers... The [data] tracking is showing that the practice is changing and evolving."**

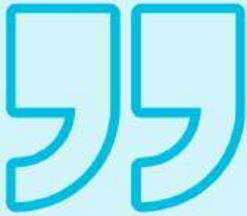
Enhanced Skills in Engaging Fathers

Beyond increasing awareness, the workshop also sought to provide social workers with the tools and skills needed to effectively engage fathers. Insights from the data indicate that the training indeed provided social workers with practical strategies to engage fathers more effectively. **84%** of survey respondents said that the training increased their ability to engage fathers positively and effectively. In the CCP team's observations of the training, social workers were encouraged to maintain engagement even when fathers were non-responsive or challenging to reach. In a focus group, one veteran social worker shared, **"After the training, I've been taking the role of supporting and locating fathers,"** and discussed how the training's emphasis on creating safe spaces for fathers to express themselves and be involved in their children's lives stood out as a learning that she is actively putting into practice.

A new social worker highlighted the importance of allowing fathers to share their stories: **"I've been working on listening to understand the father... Meeting the father where he's at and not assuming anything."** Administrators supported these efforts by implementing new engagement strategies, such as using monthly case conference engagement forms and developing escalation plans to engage fathers who are initially unwilling to participate. These changes, which participants attribute to the Father Engagement Training, have encouraged social workers to implement new strategies and feel more confident in their ability to engage fathers in their work.



Impact on Practice and Outcomes



"This training changed so much for me... It has absolutely changed outcomes. Fathers sitting in a room talking about their case openly makes a difference."

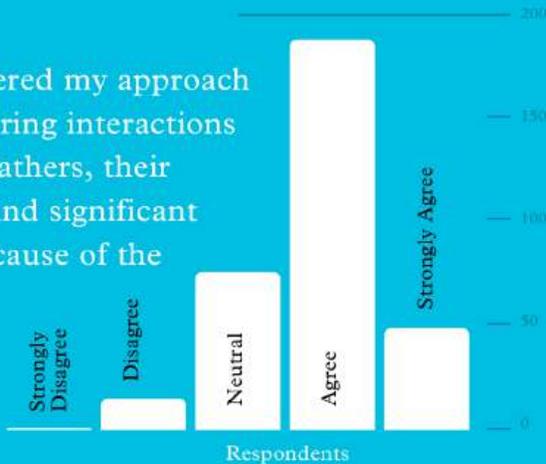
- *New Social Worker*

The ultimate goal of the Father Engagement Training is to shift practice with father engagement and improve outcomes for families that come into contact with DCFS. In this study, social workers reported significant changes in their practice following the training. Many described a shift towards a more inclusive and empathetic approach, focusing on understanding fathers' perspectives and the challenges they face.

Survey data indicates that **85%** of respondents reported a noticeable improvement in their engagement strategies with fathers post-training, particularly in how they listen to and validate fathers' roles within the family. Survey respondents expressed that they altered their approach to monitoring interactions with fathers (**72%**); changed the way they document and report interactions with fathers (**68%**); are more likely to seek out resources and support fathers; reflect on potential biases when assessing fathers' interactions (**82%**); and are more able to provide fair and unbiased assessment of fathers' interactions as a result of the training (**81%**).

n=332

I have altered my approach to monitoring interactions between fathers, their children and significant others because of the training.



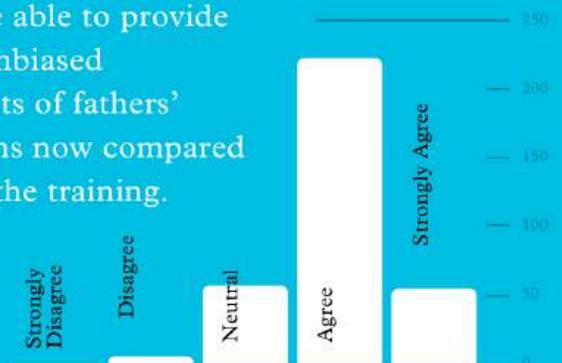
I have changed the way I document and report on fathers' interactions post-training.



I reflect on potential biases when assessing fathers' interactions more now compared to before the training.



I am more able to provide fair and unbiased assessments of fathers' interactions now compared to before the training.

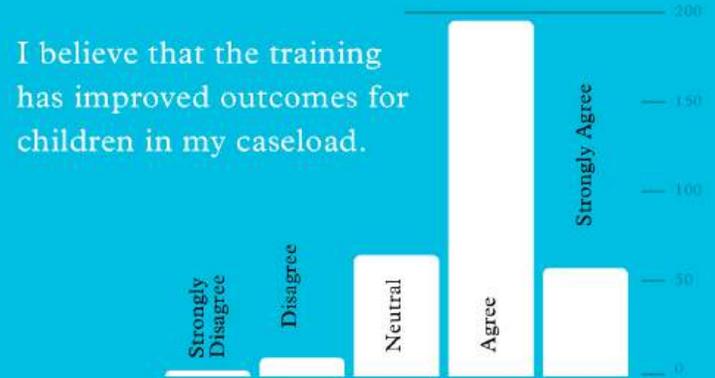
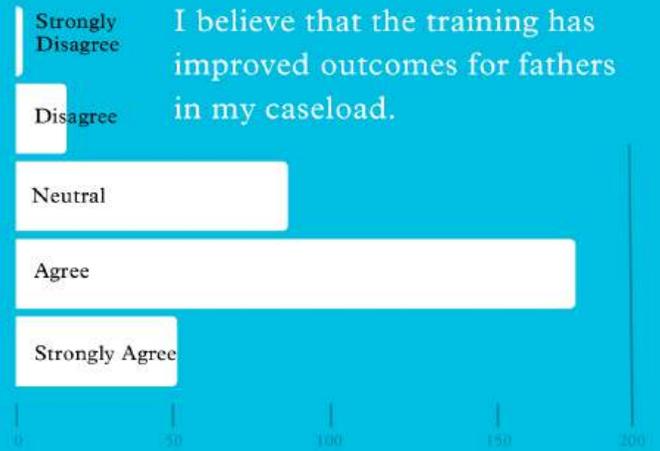


Improved outcomes were difficult to measure objectively through the surveys and focus groups as responses were based on anecdotal evidence of improvements rather than concrete data. Nevertheless, participants believe that the training has improved outcomes for fathers (**71%**) and children (**76%**) in their caseloads. Administrators also noted measurable improvements in engagement outcomes. They mentioned that **"More fathers are involved in the cases"** and that the **"Father Engagement Policy 0080-506.11 helped reduce out-of-home care for Black families by 67% in the first year,"** exceeding their goal.

Also important to note is the fact that social workers feel supported by their agency and agree that overall, the training has positively impacted their work with fathers.



Respondents



Differences Between New and Veteran Social Workers

In an effort to assess the impacts of the Father Engagement Training based on tenure, our analysts disaggregated the survey data using a tenure variable and noted the following trends:

- Social workers with **more than 15 years of experience** were more likely to respond positively as they reflected on the impact of the training, meaning they selected “agree” or “strongly agree” more than any other group. This suggests that more experienced social workers found the training particularly meaningful or were more likely to engage with the feedback process than other groups.
- Other groups, such as those with 6-10 years of experience, also showed significant engagement through positive response ratings, potentially indicating that the training was impactful across a range of experience levels.
- Newer social workers (**a tenure of 2 years or less**) had the lowest positivity rating.

During the Veteran Social Worker focus group, moderators asked participants why differences in the impact of the Father Engagement Training might exist between newer and more experienced social workers. The responses revealed valuable insights into trends that distinguish tenured social workers from their less experienced counterparts.

1. **Tenured social workers have more experience and understanding.**

Veteran social workers emphasized that their extensive experience equips them with a deeper understanding of their roles and the complexities of family dynamics. One participant shared, **“When I started, you are in survival mode. You’re learning the policies and your role. You’re trying to understand the services you’re supposed to provide... court reports, attorney orders. You are learning so much. You are taking in so much information. It makes it harder to take in what the court is looking for, and now you have to learn about engagement. You’re on overload.”** Another veteran reflected, **“We are used to being thrown into all these different training sessions. It’s overwhelming. Once you have more time with the department, you understand the difference that both parents make.”**



- 2. More years in the department results in confidence with case management.** With more years in the department, veteran social workers develop confidence in managing cases and navigating complex family situations. One participant noted, **“It becomes too much for new social workers. We’ve seen it all, and we can manage things better. We have to treat the father as a parent. We have to give the same respect and rights.”** Another added, **“We have developed this frustration tolerance,”** highlighting how their ability to adapt over time allows them to handle challenges more effectively.
- 3. Tenured social workers know that there are disparities and have time to evolve and adapt.** Veteran social workers also expressed a clear understanding of historical disparities in engaging fathers and how the department’s approach has evolved. As one stated, **“We understand the evolution of the work and understand the disparity. We understand how it is better for the families.”** Reflecting on the initial introduction of the Father Strong Initiative, a veteran remarked, **“What took so long? I am happy we are doing it now.”** Others echoed this sentiment, expressing both excitement and disappointment that such training had not been prioritized sooner: **“Before that, it was only a one-sided conversation. There wasn’t a discussion around fathers. For once, we are looking at the family as a whole.”**

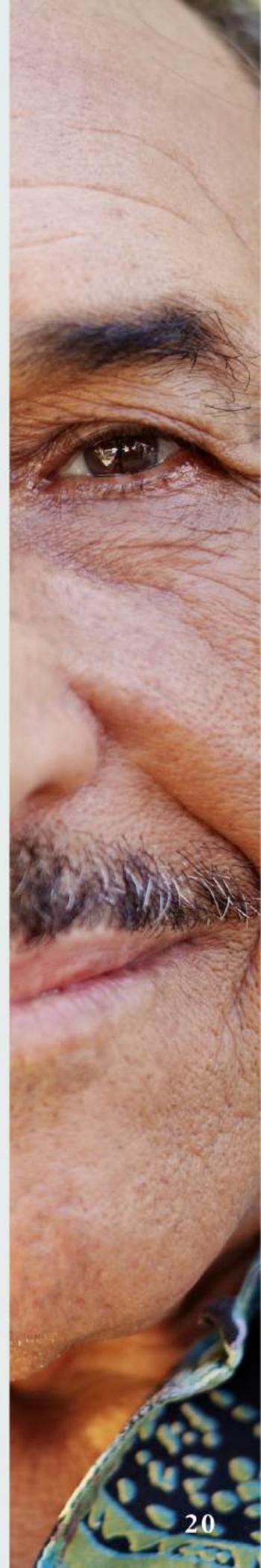
Veteran social workers recognized that fathers were often overlooked in family dynamics, with one noting, **“Fathers weren’t thought of. Do we have a workable parent? It was normally the mom.”** Another shared, **“I didn’t get why fathers were put on the back burner. Learned from the department that fathers are dangerous. They are not nurturing. It wasn’t fair.”** The training has helped shift these perspectives, as tenured social workers noted the positive changes. One stated, **“Historically there has been a lack of trust in the department. [With the Department supporting and] putting resources behind the Father Strong Initiative the engagement [with fathers] has improved.”**

Another shared, **“You are invested in including everyone. You are able to challenge your bias that mothers are more important.”** They emphasized how the training has made their work with fathers more meaningful and impactful: **“I didn’t think it would be different before the training, and it is different. It’s made my work with fathers more meaningful.”**

A regional administrator added to this by observing, **“I’ve noticed the change and attempts by social workers. They are taking this seriously, and it’s not going away. And fathers are an important part of what we are doing here.”**

In contrast, new social workers, some of whom had not yet participated in the training or were unfamiliar with the Father Strong Initiative, expressed excitement at the growing emphasis on father engagement. One new social worker noted, **“People feel that men aren’t sensitive. I’m glad that CSW’s are learning [to engage and involve the father]...it will make their job easier.”** Another, who had participated in the training as a community advocate before becoming a social worker, expressed satisfaction that the training was being extended to all social workers: **“I felt a sense of satisfaction that all the social workers were going to experience the training, learn, and push for father and paternal initiatives.”**

Insights from veteran social workers suggest that their extensive experience enables them to engage more deeply with the training and challenge their biases about fathers. Having witnessed the department’s evolving approach over time, they have developed strategies to navigate cases with a more nuanced understanding of family dynamics. In contrast, newer social workers often feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information and expectations, making it harder for them to fully grasp the complexities of father engagement right away. Veteran social workers, who have learned to challenge their biases through years of training and witnessing historical practices that overlooked fathers, are more likely to advocate for equal treatment of both fathers and mothers, making their work with families more effective and impactful.





Challenges and Barriers

While the training was positively received by participants across the board, several challenges with putting the training into practice were identified, namely in the focus groups and field observations. During the focus groups, social workers pointed out the difficulty of locating and engaging fathers, particularly in complex family dynamics involving multiple paternal figures. One veteran social worker explained, **"If it's one father, it's manageable versus two or three father households."** Another emphasized this point and added, **"Finding and locating more than one father is time-consuming... We are trying to meet state mandates while being flexible with their schedules."**

New social workers highlighted cultural and gender biases as ongoing challenges to effective father engagement. There was acknowledgment that female social workers might find it more challenging to engage male clients, suggesting the need for further gender-sensitivity training. A focus group participant shared that **"It can be more challenging for a female to work with males so the concepts can be more helpful to their engagement."** Biases rooted in "tradition" were also identified as a challenge. **"I am very intentional in having discussions around engaging fathers, but there's still resistance from some staff who are used to traditional practices."**

Considering the diversity of knowledge, skills, experience and tenure among social workers, administrators emphasized the need for consistency and support at all levels to sustain changes in practice. They identified gaps in resources and support, noting that not all staff have received adequate training, and called for regular refresher courses, **"You need to keep your finger on the pulse. Maybe we have a three-day initial training and a one day or one-hour refresher training."**

Field observations offered deeper insight into the challenges and barriers impacting father engagement by DCFS social workers.

During focus groups, participants from all experience levels consistently shared that the training challenged their biases about fathers and highlighted the importance of recognizing fathers as key figures in their children’s lives. They emphasized the need to actively engage fathers, even when locating them is difficult, to ensure they have a voice in decisions regarding their children. However, participants also acknowledged that biases still emerge in their practices, even after completing the training. One veteran social worker noted, **“In our reports, I see bias sometimes. I’ve seen fathers being labeled as the perpetrator and not by their name or identified as a father.”** Instances of bias were similarly noted during field observations.



Evaluators were invited to observe a DCFS-led “Eliminating Racial Disparity and Disproportionality” (“ERDD”) Roundtable. ERDD Roundtables use a case staffing model where investigating social workers present complex cases involving Black families to a group of stakeholders, including Cultural Brokers, for input on developing the best plan of action for the family. The primary goal of these Roundtables is to safely divert families from DCFS involvement to community-based services whenever possible.³ Notably, Dr. Alan-Michael Graves, Good+ Senior Director of Teaching & Capacity-Building, represents Good+Foundation as a community partner and leader in these discussions, contributing his expertise and reinforcing the commitment to equitable, community-centered approaches in family support.

During the virtual Roundtable attended by evaluators, a significant number of Cultural Brokers were present. Cultural Brokers are “African-American community members who volunteer to help families navigate the child welfare system, advocate for their strengths, and improve communication with the DCFS.”⁴ Cultural Brokers play a crucial role in addressing the overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous children in foster care by fostering better relationships and ensuring families feel supported and heard.

³ <https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/122213.pdf>

⁴ Ibid. <https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/122214.pdf>



“We tend to focus on mom, mom, mom, and no one really looked at fathers.”

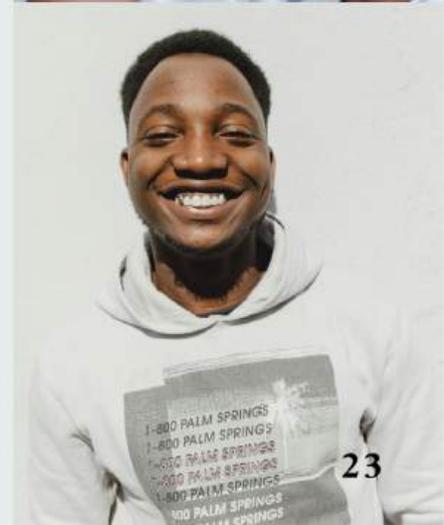
- Regional Director

At the Roundtable, a social worker described a family situation, referring to the father as the mother’s boyfriend. As the discussion progressed, it became clear that the father was actually the mother’s fiancé. Although this may seem like a minor detail, the change in terminology significantly altered the narrative and perceptions of the father, especially since the department's initial intervention involved the father.

When someone questioned, **"Is the father a boyfriend or fiancé?"** the social worker clarified that the father was indeed the fiancé and had been documented as such in their notes. However, during the discussion, the social worker had referred to him as the boyfriend several times. Several people in the meeting acknowledged that this distinction altered their perception of the father.

Taking this one step further, the father’s relationship with the mother took precedence over his relationship with the child. He was introduced to the group through his connection to the mother, rather than his role as a father, reflecting sentiments expressed in the focus group: **“We tend to focus on mom, mom, mom, and no one really looked at fathers,”** and **“We have been really centered around mothers.”** This arrangement underscores the ongoing tendency to view fathers primarily in relation to the mother rather than recognizing their direct role and significance in their children's lives.

An administrator noted that part of the department's progress in engaging fathers involved working with **"community partners who are cultural brokers. If they (staff) are having trouble engaging with fathers, we reach out to them (community partners) to engage the fathers.”** This proved true in the incident described above, where engaging the father was a top priority. The cultural brokers present in the meeting discussed an action plan to connect with the father, as the social worker in contact with the family had not yet reached him.





However, much of the conversation, led by the social workers familiar with the case, turned toward hypotheticals about the father's potential affiliations that might pose a threat to the children's safety. This discussion was sparked when a social worker mentioned that one of the children "**didn't feel safe**" returning to the home where the incident occurred. Despite this, it was noted that the child was currently being cared for by a paternal relative, which then led to speculation about the relative's affiliations and potential risks to the child.

At one point, a cultural broker intervened and asked if the child felt safe with their paternal relative. When the social worker confirmed that the child did feel safe, the cultural broker redirected the conversation to focus on the strengths and assets the child was currently benefiting from, rather than the hypothetical threats presented by the social worker. This shift helped center the discussion on the positive support the child was receiving, rather than dwelling on unfounded concerns.

This field observation highlights both the progress made by the department in fostering more inclusive approaches to father engagement and the areas where further training and development are still needed for social workers. The presence and active participation of cultural brokers in the meeting exemplifies the department's growing commitment to addressing cultural biases and ensuring a more holistic, nuanced approach when working with families. Allowing cultural brokers to step in when staff are struggling to engage with fathers is a significant step forward, providing valuable perspectives that can help broaden the focus beyond immediate concerns and stereotypes.

This intervention reflects a shift in how the department is beginning to approach family dynamics—moving from a purely risk-based lens to one that considers the value of paternal relatives in a child's life.



“How we represent the family's story can make or break them.”

- New Social Worker

In addition, the situation underscored the need for continuous training among social workers, especially in how they engage with fathers and paternal relatives. Despite the department's progress in recognizing the role of fathers—evidenced by the inclusion of cultural brokers—some social workers still fall back on assumptions or hypotheticals that can impede meaningful engagement. The swift shift in conversation to unsubstantiated concerns about the father and assumptions about the paternal relative's possible affiliations highlight the need for continued education.

As one social worker in a focus group noted, **"People undervalue fathers from relatives, managers, social workers... We haven't historically seen fathers in the role of the nurturer...and are treated like risk factors."** These stereotypes can influence how fathers and paternal figures are framed in discussions, affecting perceptions of their ability to care for their children.

While the social workers were making an effort to include the father in the discussion, subtle biases were still influencing the conversation, potentially altering how participants viewed the details of the case and causing presumably unintentional harm. These biases, even when unnoticed, can impact decision-making and the treatment of families, highlighting the need for ongoing training to reinforce unbiased, strengths-based approaches. This aligns with a comment made in a focus group: **"How we represent the family's story can make or break them."**

Moreover, this field observation highlights the necessity of reinforcing in practice what is taught in the Father Engagement Training. While the training has clearly made an impact in challenging biases and encouraging social workers to think differently, it is evident that these lessons need to be revisited regularly to ensure they are applied in the field.



Recommendations

Additional Research

Further exploration of the impacts of the Father Engagement Training on outcomes for families would provide valuable insights regarding the effectiveness of the training in shifting practice and behavior among social workers. Future research and evaluation might include:

- A review of case notes, documents and other records that provide insight into the frequency at which social workers inquire about fathers and paternal relatives upon initial contact and during an investigation
- Field observations that include shadowing social workers as they interact with families that are under investigation to assess whether or not they are putting the teachings of the training into practice to minimize bias against and increase engagement with fathers
- Surveys, interviews or focus groups with families to gather their feedback regarding their experiences with social workers, including whether or not they felt that the father and paternal relatives were engaged without bias during an investigation
- A longitudinal study to track outcomes over time with the goal of determining if there is an increase in contact with fathers, if more children are placed with their fathers or paternal relatives rather than being placed with nonrelative resource families

In addition to the recommendations above, CCP also encourages Good+Foundation to consider adapting the “before the training” survey questions so they can be administered in a pre-training questionnaire that is distributed to training participants immediately before the training. Combining this “pre-training” data with a similar post-training questionnaire can yield valuable insights about the impact of the training in real time.

Ongoing Learning & Development

Survey data and focus groups revealed that social workers would benefit from more frequent and varied training sessions, with many calling for advanced training and refresher courses to reinforce and expand on the skills learned. New social workers recommended, **“Yearly training once a year minimum,”** and emphasized that **“in-person training was better than virtual training.”** Administrators suggested incorporating more practical exercises and real-life scenarios, including testimonies from fathers, to help social workers better understand fathers' experiences and challenges.

One social worker suggested, **“We need annual refresher courses and perhaps a more advanced module for experienced staff.”**

Participants valued the interactive and collaborative elements of the training, such as small group discussions and personal storytelling.

A veteran social worker remarked, **“Dr. Graves broke us up into small groups, and we got to learn from each other.”**

Another veteran added, **“In all of my years, I haven't attended training that was this refreshing, energetic, insightful... I felt hopeful.”**

A new social worker shared, **“It opened up an entirely new perspective on engaging families. I had the preconceived notion that I would predominantly work with mothers. Seeing the attention shift back to fathers changed my approach to involving fathers. It was an aha moment—there's a different way of approaching these families.”**



Participants offered recommendations to strengthen the training, including offering sessions in both in-person and virtual formats, extending the duration to allow more time for reflection, and structuring the training into multiple levels to cater to various experience levels.

A new social worker expressed the need for more real-life examples, saying, **“Bringing in fathers who have been through the system to share their experiences could provide valuable insights and motivation for both staff and participants.”**

Another participant recommended more in-person sessions, noting that **“the virtual format sometimes limits deep discussions,”** and suggested breaking the training into multiple sessions for better content absorption.

The overall feedback emphasizes that the training is valuable and should occur more frequently. Training sessions would be further enhanced by differentiated learning strategies that accommodate varying levels of experience and tenure, and by including voices of individuals with lived experiences to deepen understanding and engagement.

Closing

The Father Engagement Training has significantly improved social workers' attitudes, awareness, and practices around engaging fathers in child welfare. Despite ongoing challenges, such as cultural biases and resource constraints, feedback shows that the training has been effective in fostering a more inclusive and empathetic approach. It is clear that continued training and support are needed to sustain these positive changes and further strengthen social workers' ability to engage fathers effectively. Regular refresher courses, advanced training sessions, and practical tools will be essential in maintaining this progress and ensuring better outcomes for fathers and their families.



Acknowledgments

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We would also like to acknowledge these individuals who played a crucial role in designing, facilitating, and supporting the research for this assessment. Their expertise and dedication were integral to the success of this project.

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- **Dr. Laurel Parker West**, Good+ Chief Program & Operations Officer
- **Mairin Riley**, Good+ National Program Director
- **Joe DeFerrari**, Good+ Senior Program Impact Coordinator
- **Caleb Beyah**, Good+Trainer

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Appendix

Survey Instrument

About the Survey

The Good+Foundation Father Strong Engagement Training is designed to promote fatherhood programming throughout Los Angeles County as a method of improving the lives of children and strengthening families. After five years of implementing this training with social workers in the Los Angeles County Department of Children & Family Services, we are interested in gathering information to determine the effects of the training on day to day actions and decision making as it pertains to father engagement in child welfare investigations and open cases. Along these lines, we are administering a survey to past training participants to understand:

- Individual experiences with and perspectives of father engagement before completing the training
- The impact of the training on individual perspectives upon initial completion of the training
- The impact of the training on individual practice in the field after completion of the training

This survey should take approximately 7 - 10 minutes to complete. Survey responses will be reported in the aggregate and all individual responses will be anonymous and confidential. A report with the findings will be shared with DCFS for distribution to all staff who are interested in the results.

Invitation to Participate in a Survey Panel

In an effort to continuously improve the effectiveness of the training and to assess the impacts of the training over time, we are inviting all survey participants to opt into a survey panel, which will require the completion of an annual survey about the impacts of the training. Participation is optional and voluntary. If you are interested in participating in the survey panel, please complete the brief questionnaire at the end of this survey and we will be in touch about next steps.

Survey

1. In which Father Engagement Training(s) did you participate?
 - Father Engagement 1.0 (Initial Training)
 - Father Engagement 2.0 (Advanced)
 - Both Fatherhood Engagement 1.0 and Fatherhood Engagement 2.0

Experiences Before Training

Note to Good+ Team: All questions in this part of the survey will be evaluated using a 5-point Likert Scale - (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree

2. Before the training, I was aware of cultural and gender biases in monitoring and reporting on fathers.
3. Before the training, I felt confident in my ability to fairly assess interactions between fathers and their children and significant others.
4. Before the training, I had adequate knowledge of the potential negative impacts of biased reporting on fathers.
5. I regularly considered the impact of my perceptions and biases when documenting and reporting on fathers before completing the training.

6. I felt equipped to engage fathers effectively and positively in my casework before completing the training.
7. My previous training and education (prior to completing the father training) provided sufficient guidance on addressing cultural and gender biases related to fathers.
8. I had access to resources and support for addressing biases in my interactions with fathers before completing the training.
9. I believed that my reports and assessments were free from cultural and gender biases before completing the training.

Initial Impact of Training

10. The Father Engagement training was effective in increasing my awareness of cultural and gender biases.
11. Since completing the training, I have noticed changes in how I perceive fathers in my fieldwork.
12. The training positively influenced how I interact with fathers in my casework.
13. The training improved my understanding of the potential negative impacts of biased reporting on fathers.
14. The training increased my ability to engage fathers positively and effectively.
15. The training addressed gaps in my knowledge regarding the role of fathers in family dynamics.
16. The training helped me recognize my own biases when working with fathers.
17. As a result of the training, I feel better equipped to identify and mitigate cultural and gender biases in my assessments and reports involving fathers.
18. The training provided me with tools and techniques that I can directly apply to my fieldwork with fathers.

Post-Training

Behavioral Changes

19. I have altered my approach to monitoring interactions between fathers, their children and significant others because of the training.
20. I have changed the way I document and report on fathers' interactions post-training.
21. I reflect on potential biases when assessing fathers' interactions more now compared to before the training.

Long-term Impact

22. I am more able to provide fair and unbiased assessments of fathers' interactions now compared to before the training.

23. The training increased my understanding of the importance of father engagement in child welfare.
24. I feel more confident in my ability to effectively engage fathers in my work.
25. The training helped me recognize and address my own biases towards fathers.
26. I have implemented new strategies or approaches learned in the training when working with fathers.
27. The training has positively influenced my interactions with fathers and improved my relationships with them.
28. I believe that the training has improved outcomes for fathers in my caseload.
29. I believe that the training has improved outcomes for children in my caseload.
30. I am more likely to seek out resources and support for fathers in my community after completing the training.
31. The training has increased my awareness of the challenges faced by fathers in the child welfare system.
32. I feel supported by my agency in my efforts to engage fathers thanks to the training.
33. Overall, I believe that the training has positively impacted my work with fathers.

Demographics and Background

34. Gender

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary or Nonconforming
- I do not wish to disclose

35. Race

- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Native American, Alaskan Native or Indigenous
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Middle Eastern, North African, or Arab
- Two or More Races or Mixed
 - i.* If you've selected two or more races, please share which races
- I do not wish to disclose

36. Ethnicity

- Latinx/Latino/Latina/Hispanic
- Not Latinx/Latino/Latina/Hispanic
- I do not wish to disclose

37. Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

- Yes
- No

- I do not wish to disclose

38. What is your age group?

- 18-24 years
- 25-34 years
- 35-44 years
- 45-54 years
- 55-64 years
- 65 years and above
- I do not wish to disclose

39. What is your highest level of education?

- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree in Social Work (BSW)
- Master's degree in Social Work (MSW)
- Doctorate in Social Work (DSW/PhD)
- Other (please specify)
- I do not wish to disclose

40. How many years have you worked as a social worker?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- More than 15 years
- I do not wish to disclose

41. In which SPA do you primarily work?

- 1 - Antelope Valley
- 2 - San Fernando Valley
- 3 - San Gabriel Valley
- 4 - Metro
- 5 - West
- 6 - South
- 7 - East
- 8 - South Bay/Harbor
- I do not wish to disclose

42. How frequently do you work with fathers in your fieldwork?

- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently
- Always

43. Which of the following best describes your caseload?

- Primarily children and families
- Primarily adults
- Mixed population
- Other (please specify)
- I do not wish to disclose

44. What was your title/position during training?

45. What is your title/position now?

Focus Group Questions

Questions for Social Workers

1. Initial Impressions and Reflections
 - a. Could you provide any specific examples or key takeaways from the training that have influenced how you interact with and support fathers?
2. Application of Training Concepts
 - a. How have you applied the concepts and strategies from the training in your daily work with fathers?
 - b. Can you provide examples of situations where you used what you learned in the training?
3. Challenges and Barriers
 - a. What challenges or barriers have you encountered when trying to implement the training's principles in your work?
 - b. How have you addressed or overcome these challenges?
4. Impact on Practice
 - a. How has the training influenced your approach to engaging fathers?
 - b. Have you noticed any changes in the outcomes for fathers and their families since implementing the training concepts?
5. Support and Resources
 - a. What additional support or resources would help you better apply the training in your work?
 - b. Are there any specific tools or materials that you think would be beneficial?
6. Feedback on Training Content
 - a. Which parts of the training did you find most valuable and why?
 - b. Were there any aspects of the training that you felt were less relevant or could be improved?
7. Cultural and Gender Sensitivity
 - a. How has the training affected your awareness and handling of cultural and gender biases in your work with fathers?
 - b. Can you share any examples of how you've addressed these biases since the training?
8. Training Effectiveness
 - a. Overall, how effective do you feel the training has been in enhancing your ability to engage fathers?
 - b. In what ways could the training be improved to better meet your needs and the needs of the fathers you work with?
9. Future Training Needs
 - a. What topics or areas do you think should be covered in future training sessions on father engagement?

- b. How often would you like to have refresher courses or follow-up training on this subject?

10. General Feedback

- a. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the training and its impact on your work?

Questions for Admins

1. Initial Impressions and Reflections

- a. Could you provide any specific examples or key takeaways from the training that have influenced how the staff interacts with and supports fathers?

2. Implementation Strategies

- a. How have you encouraged or supported your staff in applying the training concepts in their daily work with fathers?
- b. Can you provide examples of how you've seen the training principles being implemented by your staff?

3. Training Effectiveness: Impact on Staff

- a. In your opinion, how has the training affected your staff's ability to engage with fathers effectively?
- b. Have you observed any changes in staff confidence or skills in working with fathers since the training?

4. Outcomes for Families

- a. How has the training influenced the outcomes for fathers and their families from your perspective?
- b. Can you share any success stories or positive changes that have resulted from the training?

5. Additional Needs

- a. What additional support or resources do you believe your staff needs to better apply the training in their work?

6. Role of Administration

- a. How do you see your role as an administrator in supporting the ongoing application of the training?
- b. What more could be done at the administrative level to ensure the training is effective?

7. Challenges and Barriers

- a. What challenges have you encountered in getting your staff to apply the training in their work?
- b. How have you addressed these challenges, or what support have you provided to overcome them?

8. Training Content

- a. Which parts of the training did you find most valuable for your staff, and why?
- b. Were there any aspects of the training that you felt were less relevant or could be improved?

9. Future Training Needs

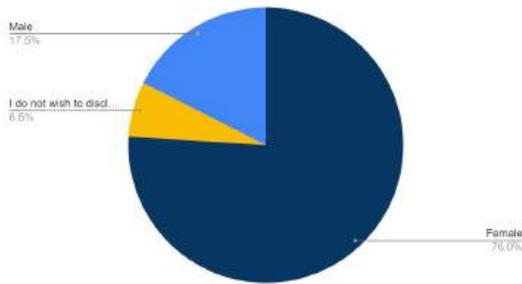
- a. What topics or areas do you think should be covered in future training sessions on father engagement?
- b. How often would you like to have refresher courses or follow-up training on this subject?

10. General Feedback

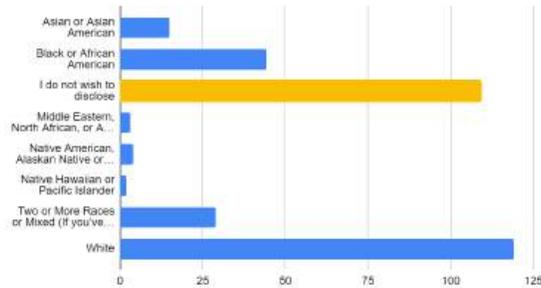
- a. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the training and its impact on your staff and their work with fathers?

Survey Demographics

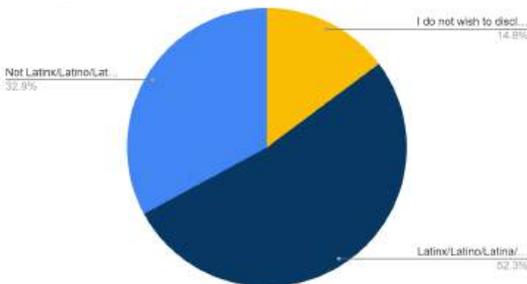
Gender



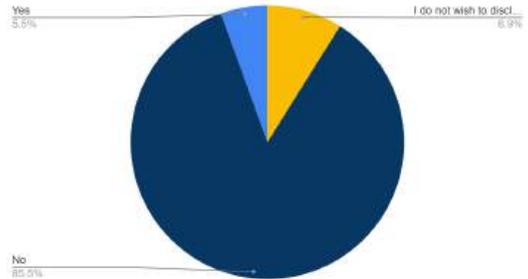
Race



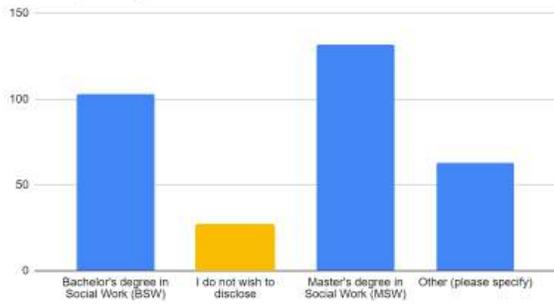
Ethnicity



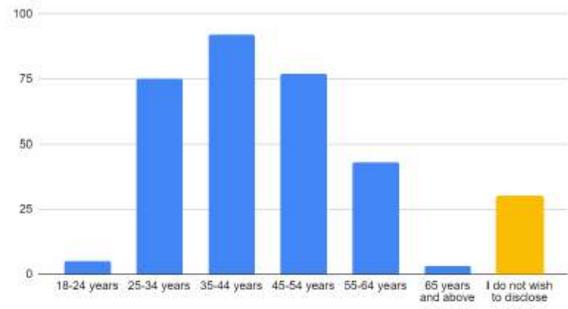
Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community?



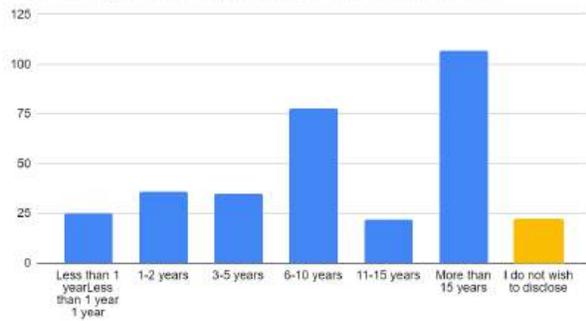
What is your highest level of education?



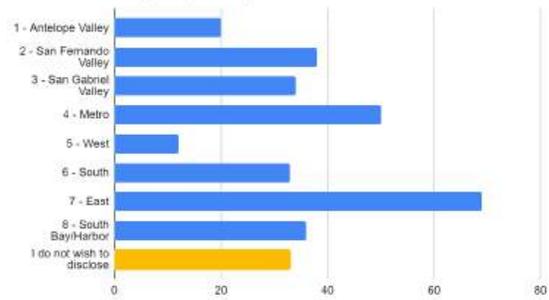
Age



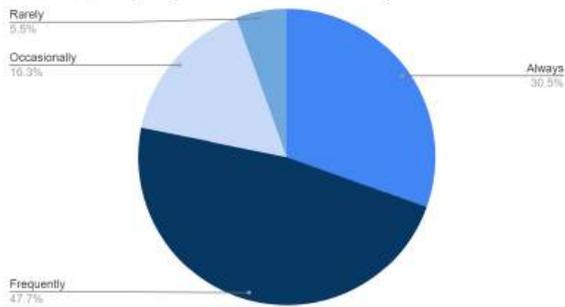
How many years have you worked as a social worker?



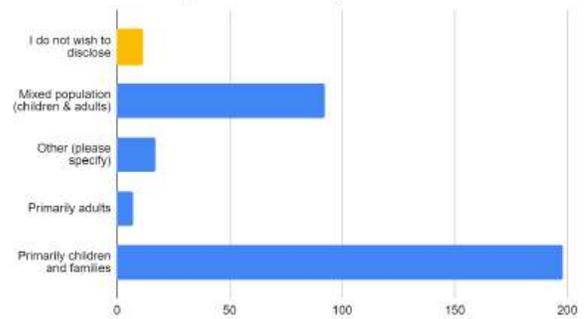
In which SPA do you primarily work?



How frequently do you work with fathers in your fieldwork?



Which of the following best describes your caseload?



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