



## FATHERS MOVING FORWARD

Catholic Family Service (CFS) of Calgary is currently offering Fathers Moving Forward as a pilot program at the Louise Dean Centre with investment from the Government of Alberta and community donors.

Launched in September 2015, this innovative program targets the biological fathers-to-be, aged 16-26 years, of infants who will be born to teenagers participating in programming offered by CFS at the Louise Dean Centre or Calgary Achievement Centre for Youth.

Fathers Moving Forward aims to improve developmental outcomes and reduce the risk of domestic violence and child maltreatment in young families. Specifically, our goal is to improve the following factors for the young fathers we serve:

- Emotional and physical well-being.
- Involvement with their infants.
- Individual parenting skills.
- Ability to co-parent and get along with the mother.
- Economic self-sufficiency.

### Who Are These Dads?

The fathers' demographic data at intake – and their status in terms of education, employment and earnings, relationships with the mothers, and child abuse potential – confirm that Fathers Moving Forward is attracting the right participants and that participants are very likely to benefit from the program.

For example, at intake 24% of the fathers had completed high school and 33% were attending a high school program. The most common sources of income for fathers were parents (37%), followed by wages (32%). Fifty-six percent of fathers lived with the mothers, either alone or with parents.

Most adolescent relationships, with or without a child, do not endure for long; this is why the co-parenting component of the program is designed to help young couples learn how to co-parent a child whether they are together or apart.

At program intake, however, most couples' romantic relationships were intact and hopeful.

- 75% percent of fathers described their relationship with the mother as very important.
- 95% described their relationship with the child as very important.
- 100% described being a good father as very important.

Fathers' perceptions about and satisfaction with their relationships with the mothers were generally positive.



### The Vulnerability of Young Fathers

Included among the many factors that place parents at risk of perpetrating child abuse are:

- Being a young parent.
- Having experienced abuse or neglect in childhood.
- Having emotional challenges, including but not limited to post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Having particular attitudes and beliefs about parenting.

Preliminary data reveal that virtually all of the fathers in the Fathers Moving Forward program are at very high risk of perpetrating child abuse. Here's why:

- 38% of fathers reported that they had experienced abuse by a family member or witnessed parental intimate partner violence, which is considered to be a form of child maltreatment on its own. Interestingly, fathers were more likely to report that the mothers/mothers-to-be of their child had been abused in childhood, and the mothers were more likely to report that the fathers had been abused than the fathers were in their self-reports.
- At least 52% of the fathers who completed the pre-test had a PTSD diagnosis at intake as measured by the Screen for Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms (SPTSS). Most fathers did not have realistic expectations about how

children do and ought to develop and act, and most would be likely to reverse the roles of the parent and the child; for example, believing that parents should confide in their children and that children should comfort their parents.

- Responses on empathic awareness indicators showed inconsistent responses from fathers. For example, while 100% disagreed that children should keep their feelings to themselves, only 52% of the fathers disagreed that babies need to be considerate of the needs of their mothers.

### How Will We Know We've Succeeded?

Our ongoing comprehensive evaluation of the program will contribute significantly to the sparse body of knowledge about effective parenting interventions for young at-risk fathers. Here are some of the questions we will be exploring as part of the program evaluation:

- Has economic self-sufficiency among young fathers improved, as demonstrated by increased financial literacy and savings, improved education and employment opportunities, and reduced substance abuse?
- Has positive father engagement increased or been sustained, including positive co-parenting relationships and skills, improved paternal well-being, and optimal infant development?
- Have evidence-based services for young fathers increased? Have we contributed to the body of research about serving young fathers?

As the program proceeds, we look forward to collecting sufficient post-participation, longitudinal data to be able to assess changes on the desired program outcomes.

### Learning to Date

Three co-parenting groups were held between September 2015 and January 2017. During this time, 27 fathers aged 16 to 26 years participated in a co-parenting group and/or a fathers-only parenting skills group. In the short time since the program launched, we have gained valuable insights about the experience of young fathers and the recruitment challenges for programs of this kind.

Circumstances that have affected participation by fathers include:

- Maternal and grandparent gate-keeping that prevent access to the child.
- Absence of any relationship or very early post-pregnancy breakdown of relationship between the mother- and father-to-be.
- Lower than expected referrals from other agencies.

We are making extensive efforts to address each of these recruitment barriers, primarily through outreach to potential referral sources.

### What Dads are Saying about FMF

- "We are learning a lot about each other."
- "We are fighting less; not as intense."
- "I think my partner and I need an intervention."



Fathers Moving Forward was designed to address three Government of Alberta initiatives:

**Framework to End Family Violence:** The program prevents family violence with at-risk populations through evidence-based parenting support programs to young mothers and fathers and promotes gender equality through the engagement of men and boys.

**Addiction and Mental Health Strategy:** By increasing the relationship and parenting capacity of young mothers and fathers, the program creates early childhood environments that build protective factors for mental health and well-being and reduces the risk of addiction.

**Prevention and Early Intervention Framework for Children, Youth and Families:** The program addresses the risk factors, such as early parenthood, and protective factors, such as knowledge of parenting and child development, that are associated with the prevention of child maltreatment.

### About Catholic Family Service

Founded in 1957, Catholic Family Service (CFS) is a charitable organization serving individuals and families within the Calgary community. We are all about building strong families. Our programs and services are designed to help people work through things like marital problems, family breakdown, trauma and abuse. At CFS, we don't turn anyone away, no matter what they've been through or where they come from. We are driven by compassion, not religion.

### About the Louise Dean Centre

The Louise Dean Centre is a partnership between Catholic Family Service, Calgary Board of Education and Alberta Health Services. Louise Dean Centre provides pregnant and parenting teens, their children and families with educational and health care support, as well as helping them deal with the emotional and social needs that come with pregnancy and parenting.

**For more information about Fathers Moving Forward, please contact:**

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