

Delaware Fatherhood Program and Training Partnership for NCPs



Across the nation, the issue of engaging non-custodial parents (NCPs) in paying their child support obligations is gaining momentum. For years, many child support offices resorted to a punitive approach for getting NCPs (many of them, fathers) to comply. Things are changing now, and slowly but surely these fathers are emerging and taking care of their responsibilities while connecting with their children.

In our state, the Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) developed and piloted the Delaware Fatherhood Program (DFP) to serve NCPs in conjunction with an assortment of public and community nonprofit partners. The fatherhood initiative targets low-income NCPs who are potentially at risk of not paying child support or losing contact with their children, as well as re-entry fathers, throughout the state.

This initiative was and continues to be an employment-based service that focuses on providing services to help NCPs achieve self-sufficiency while encouraging parents to increase emotional, parental, and financial involvement in the lives of their children. The initiative has created an integrated service structure to formally link teams of qualified service providers and community partners to address the broad needs of NCPs.

During the pilot program, we noticed many fathers were not working and their efforts to find employment were hampered because they lacked the skills they needed to get hired for even basic-entry jobs in construction and restaurants. With a customer-focused approach, DCSS realized from the onset the need to bring in strategic partners such as the Department of Labor, Division of Social Services, and two statewide employment and training vendors to be part of the solution that DFP needs to successfully engage NCPs. Using this approach, NCPs who enroll in the program can receive training, job placement services, and other benefits. This holistic approach ensures that all the needs of the NCPs are met, thus positioning them to succeed.

At DFP, we believe unemployed and underemployed NCPs can benefit from training to enhance skills that can get them better paying jobs. To this end, NCPs who join the program and whose assessment shows they can benefit from further training, get referred to our employment and training partners. The initial assessment and feedback from the NCPs themselves are helpful in recommending education and/or additional experience needed for their success in selected careers. We currently have NCPs who are in full-time training, while others are working and participating in training part-time.

As we continue to engage with NCPs not meeting their child support obligations, ensuring we equip them with the skills to succeed rather than simply finding them jobs they may not last in is paramount to the success of our program. To this end, DCSS provides statewide training at the Child Support Orientation for new DCSS employees as well as at unit meetings and other functions. Additionally, DCSS employees assigned to the DFP are always working with the walk-in unit and other child support supervisors in Kent and Sussex Counties to handle questions from NCPs coming into the office. The supervisor who initially handles a walk-in customer does not simply hand off to the Fatherhood Coordinator but instead attends the interview and gathers knowledge via shadowing and is able to support future NCPs who show up for help.

As a state, we see long-term benefits in this approach, and we are committed to investing resources and creating opportunities for NCPs to succeed, meet their financial obligations, and reconnect with their children.

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