

STATE PROFILE:

INDIANA



Using Federal and State Funds to Support Fathers: An NRFC Spotlight on the Indiana Father Engagement Program¹

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Introduction

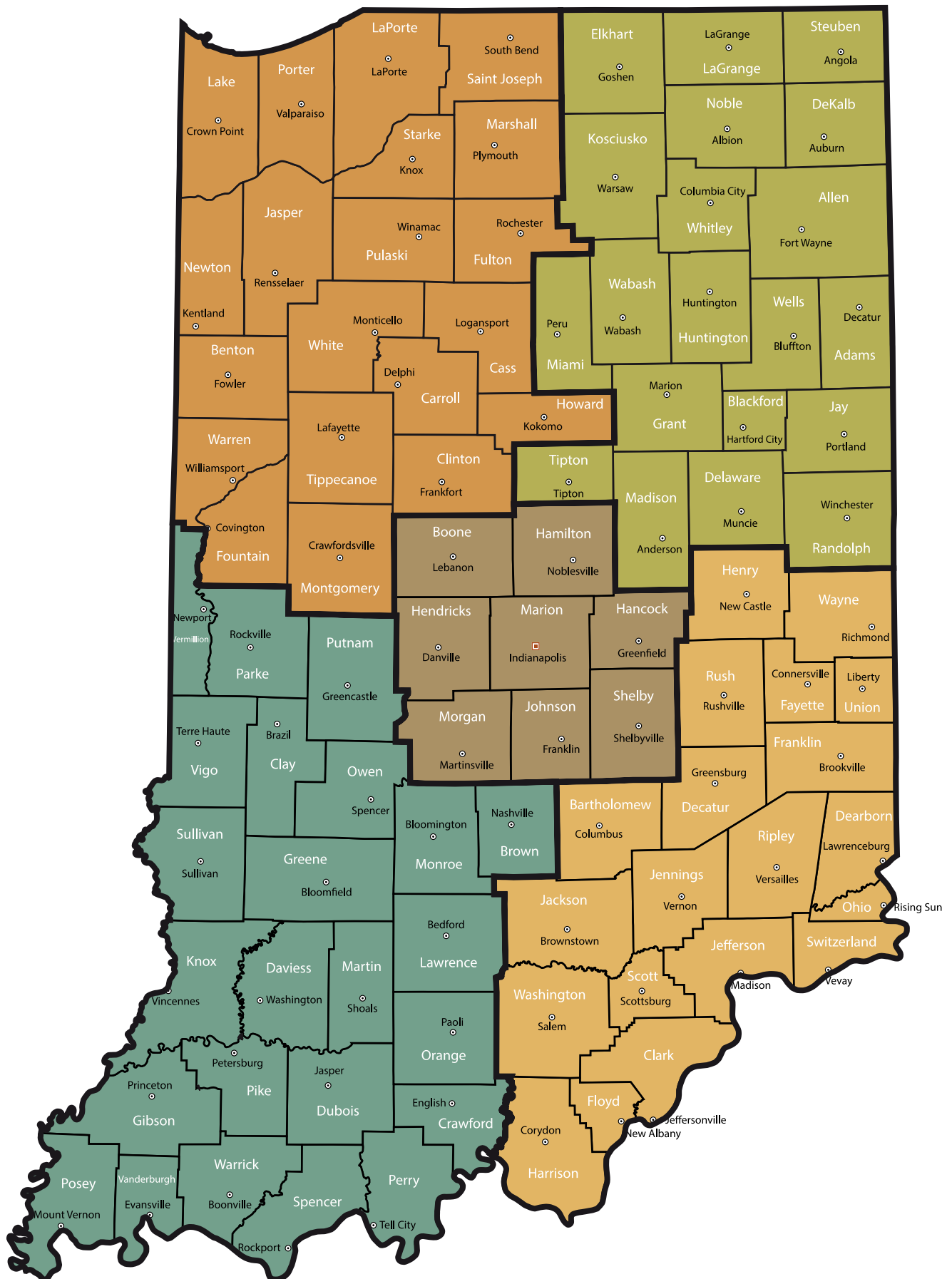
This paper is part of an ongoing series of spotlights for the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse highlighting fatherhood work across states, including [Ohio](#), [West Virginia](#), [South Carolina](#), and Oklahoma [LINK TO BE ADDED]. Those spotlights have shown how federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds have been used in various ways to support fatherhood programming, including direct grants or contracts with community programs or intermediary organizations and initiatives to better engage fathers in Family Support Center programs. The approach is slightly different in Indiana, where fee-for-service support services are provided by community programs in partnership with local child welfare offices.

In response to persistently high rates of children entering foster care, Indiana's Department of Child Services (DCS) developed a statewide initiative to engage fathers as part of a broader strategy to support families. Known as Fatherhood Engagement Services, the program uses a combination of state and federal funding—including TANF funds—to offer services for fathers who are involved with DCS child welfare cases. Services are provided in all 92 counties of the state. The initiative's primary goals are to strengthen fathers' relationships with their children, improve their employment skills, and support family stability with a focus on keeping children safely in a home with one or both of their parents or other relatives.

This NRFC Spotlight:

- 1 Provides an overview of the state's fatherhood initiative.**
- 2 Explains how DCS provides support for community providers.**
- 3 Details the type of services available in local communities.**
- 4 Looks at how federal funding supports and sustains the initiative.**
- 5 Offers tips from Indiana's father engagement program operators for other states seeking to embed fatherhood programming with social service delivery.**

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1. A STATEWIDE FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE

Indiana DCS's father engagement services have expanded significantly since their inception in 2009. What began as a pilot with six local organizations has grown to include 118 providers operating across all 92 counties in the state. Every four years, the state solicits proposals from organizations interested in participating as service providers. Once selected, providers are authorized to accept referrals from local DCS offices, deliver services to fathers, and receive reimbursement from the state. Services are supported through a fee-for-service model, meaning providers are reimbursed by the state after delivering approved services. Program services are time-limited based on individual case plans.

Each year, approximately 4,500 fathers in Indiana receive father engagement services. Fathers are eligible for these services if they have a child involved with the DCS child welfare program. The journey typically begins when a local DCS case manager, referred to as a family case manager, assesses the family's situation. If the family case manager determines the father could benefit from engagement services, they initiate a referral with a contracted father engagement service provider.

These providers work closely with DCS to locate and engage fathers, including fathers who are incarcerated or living out of state. Once a father is identified, the provider contacts him within 24 to 48 hours, aiming to establish face-to-face contact and begin the intake process. This process includes gathering demographic information, assessing needs, building rapport, and developing a personalized service plan for the father aligned with the family's established DCS case.

Providers develop service plans that typically include a visual representation of the father's connection to their child, extended family, and other people or public systems connected to the welfare of the child. The provider is asked to send the service plan to DCS within 30 days so that the plan can be combined with other information DCS is gathering. The services are delivered primarily one-on-one but may also include group work or coparenting sessions with the child's mother and/or other family members. All services are grounded in DCS-approved educational curricula such as *Bringing Back the Dads*, *24/7 Dads*, *InsideOut Dad®*, and *Bridges Out of Poverty*. These curricula aim to promote father involvement, and they include components on parenting, understanding child support policies, and financial planning. Services are offered at home, in the community, or at the provider's offices, whatever is most accessible and appropriate for the father.

Providers help fathers strengthen their relationships with their children and promote positive connections between families, local family case managers, and others involved in the child's care. To build these relationships and support the meaningful involvement of fathers in their children's lives, providers facilitate father participation in paternity establishment, Child and Family Team Meetings, court hearings, and visitation arrangements.

The journey is often not linear. Providers recognize that a father's situation and past experiences often impact their ability to engage in services. Fathers may engage at different levels, at different times, and often enter the program with skepticism or trauma from their life experiences or past involvement with DCS.

FATHER ENGAGEMENT GOALS



Improve child safety, stability, well-being, and permanency.



Increase father involvement in DCS child welfare cases.



Promote positive relationships between families and DCS staff.



Coordinate with courts and correctional facilities to engage incarcerated fathers.



Deliver services in a culturally competent and respectful manner.



2. DCS SUPPORTS COMMUNITY PROVIDERS

Throughout the process, providers maintain close communication with DCS, submitting outcome reports and updates on each father's progress. These reports help DCS monitor engagement, track improvements in parenting and stability, and make informed decisions about the child's permanency plan. The collaboration between DCS and service providers ensures that fathers are not only supported but also empowered to play a meaningful role in their children's lives, even in complex or challenging circumstances.

Given the variety of organizations involved in providing support to fathers, DCS ensures that all providers are aware of the state's service provider training requirements and uses a fee-for-service model to enforce performance expectations.

The DCS Director of Father Engagement Services, Dion Smith Sr., oversees all father engagement providers in the state and plays a critical role in coordinating local partnerships, problem-solving, and bringing providers together for group-learning. The director serves together with six other Regional Service Coordinators who support local DCS offices and build partnerships with contracted community-based organizations. He also regularly shares information on statewide trends, addresses providers' questions or issues, and provides technical assistance to help providers with program implementation and reporting. The goal is to foster collaboration and enhance the effectiveness of father engagement services across the state.

THE DIRECTOR OF FATHER ENGAGEMENT SERVICES MAINTAINS CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE STATE BY:



**Convening quarterly
video conference calls
with providers**



**Conducting annual
site visits**



**Reviewing program
participation reports
and services billed**

"We help men learn how their presence boosts their children's self-esteem, ambition, and overall productivity. We encourage dads to be curious about their children's lives and build relationships that will last a lifetime."

– Dion Smith Sr., Director of Father Engagement Services, Indiana Department of Child Services

3. INDIVIDUALIZED SERVICES FOR FATHERS

Services are embedded within a diverse range of community-based organizations that vary in size, history, and service settings. Most programs emphasize individualized guidance to help fathers build stronger relationships with their children but may also provide coparenting sessions and group programming such as father support groups, parenting education classes, and workforce development classes. Based on their individual service plans, fathers may also receive services such as housing support, help navigating child support and custody issues, or additional counseling. Although some programs are serving fathers who were living in the home with their children before the DCS case plan was initiated, all programs are primarily working with fathers who were nonresident and/or noncustodial. In addition, some are also working with fathers who are incarcerated or recently released from a correctional facility.

All the community-based organizations have a long history of providing services for families and/or youth, but many of them are relatively new to fatherhood work. Therefore, it is essential that the DCS Director of Father Engagement provide ongoing support to help these organization learn about what fathers need and how to communicate and build relationships with them. As noted previously, services are offered at the father's home, the provider's offices, or other convenient community locations. One program provides residential living services for youth and has now developed father engagement programming to mentor and support the fathers of some of these youth.



OVERVIEW OF SERVICE DELIVERY STEPS

1. Upon identifying a father associated with a child welfare case, a local DCS family case manager:

- ☐ Assesses the current level of father involvement.
- ☐ Sends a referral to a local state-approved father engagement service provider if service needs are indicated.

2. The father engagement service provider:

- ☐ Reaches out to the father and attempts to make contact within 24 to 48 hours of receiving a referral.
- ☐ Completes a program intake with the father.
- ☐ Creates a visual representation of the father's connections to their child(ren), extended family, and their local environment or social network, also known as a paternal genogram.
- ☐ Schedules face-to-face meeting(s) with the father and, as needed, his family, to discuss topics such as employment assistance, parenting education, and legal guidance.
- ☐ Responds to emergency requests from fathers and their families if questions or concerns arise between meetings.

3. Together, DCS and father engagement services providers:

- ☐ Review electronic outcome reports.
- ☐ Attend Child and Family Team Meetings or individual case conferences.

A CLOSER LOOK AT FOUR LOCAL FATHER ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS



FAMILYTIME, INC. has supported more than 7,000 families in Southern Indiana since 1998. The organization's mission is to "facilitate family-centered services in an environment where children are protected physically and emotionally while parents and caregivers are treated with the utmost respect."

As a father engagement provider, FamilyTime offers personalized services to help fathers build stronger relationships with their children and meet their DCS case plan goals. The approach emphasizes individualized guidance tailored to each family's needs. Parenting education is also available in group or individual sessions guided by the Nurturing Father curriculum. Group sessions are structured into 10 or 13 weekly sessions, totaling 15 to 30 or more hours of instruction depending on individual plans.



GEMINUS CORPORATION, established in 1992, delivers a wide range of services including Head Start, child abuse prevention, domestic violence support, and workforce development.

Through its Real Fathers Initiative, Geminus provides prevention and intervention programs for noncustodial fathers in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems to increase the fathers' parenting skills and help them become more involved in their children's lives. Program services include parenting education, vocational assistance, family planning counseling, and support with paternity, child support, custody, visitation, housing, and transportation needs. Fathers can also participate in father support groups and coparenting sessions with their child's mother. The ultimate goal is to improve the safety, stability, well-being, and permanency of their children.

"Our father support groups offer an open forum to discuss issues specific to fathers, exploring barriers that prevent positive parenting and providing support to first time and adjudicated fathers."

- Geminus Corporation website



IRELAND HOME BASED SERVICES has served children and families in Indiana since 1997 and is currently providing services in 50 counties. The organization offers therapeutic, home-based support for families referred by DCS and Juvenile Probation.” Services include parent education, supervised visitation, father engagement, and family preservation: all designed to strengthen family bonds and prevent child welfare involvement.

Ireland’s Fatherhood Engagement Program is designed to engage absent and/or nonresident fathers in the DCS family case plan and promote a positive relationship with the child. The program’s fatherhood liaison meets with fathers individually either in their home or at a community location to help fathers understand DCS processes, navigate their way through the family case plan, and establish ongoing, consistent involvement in their child’s life. The fatherhood liaison provides on-call availability, other support services, and referrals for fathers to additional resources within the community.

“Fathers may have many questions or concerns regarding their role in the DCS case plan. We provide education and assistance to help them effectively participate and successfully navigate their way through the case plan to ensure ongoing, consistent involvement in their child’s life.”

- Ireland Home Based Services website

NEIGHBORHOOD MENTORING ACADEMY INC.

NEIGHBORHOOD MENTORING ACADEMY, based in Fort Wayne, was established in October 2003. In 2011, the academy began providing residential group home services for young people between the ages of 14 and 21 who are no longer able to remain in their homes or have their needs met in a family-based foster care setting. Many of these young people have been evaluated and diagnosed with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The group homes provide support, guidance, and stability to help them develop their independent living skills.

The Neighborhood Mentoring Academy’s Fatherhood Engagement Program supports the fathers of these young people by helping them be more engaged and supportive in their children’s lives. Program services include supervised visitation, parenting education, employability training, and case management to promote long-term family stability. Fathers can participate in parenting education and other skill-building activities individually or in group sessions.

“When I meet with a father, I tell them, ‘I’m a father too, and I’m here to help you.’”

- Fletcher Upshaw, Executive Director, Neighborhood Mentoring Academy Inc.

4. HOW STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING SUPPORTS THE INITIATIVE

Indiana's father engagement services are supported through a blend of state and federal funding. The program was initially funded exclusively by state dollars. Since 2018, Indiana has integrated federal funding to expand its reach and impact.

- **TANF** funds are used to support job training, employment services, and efforts to maintain family stability.
- **Title IV-E foster care funding** was added after the *Family First Prevention Services Act* was passed in 2018. This law allows states to use federal funds for services aimed at preventing foster care entry.

Alignment between Father Engagement Services and TANF Goals

TANF has four statutory goals:

- 1** Providing assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives.
- 2** Promoting job preparation, work, and marriage.
- 3** Preventing and reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies.
- 4** Encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

The work of the contracted father engagement service providers in Indiana meets two of these TANF goals:

#2: Promote job preparation, work, and marriage

- Providers can offer support to fathers through job placement and training services.

#4: Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families

- The overall Father Engagement program goal is to keep children in the home with their parents.
- Services are tailored to each family's needs. Fathers can access services such as parenting education and coaching on family dynamics to establish healthy and stable families.
- Providers and DCS caseworkers help ensure that incarcerated or nonresidential fathers can contact their children, either through email, supervised visitation, phone, or video.
- DCS helps providers coordinate visitation with the Department of Corrections or local detention facilities in their communities so that incarcerated fathers can contact their children and/or children can visit their fathers in person or via video.

5. TIPS FROM INDIANA'S FATHER ENGAGEMENT PROVIDERS

TIP 1. Create opportunities for father engagement providers to network and discuss statewide objectives.

The DCS Director of Father Engagement's quarterly calls with father engagement providers across the state help ensure that the programs are aligned with statewide goals. The agenda includes space for providers to share data, discuss best practices, problem-solve potential issues, and share their challenges. For example, some providers in the more populous regions of the state encountered issues helping incarcerated fathers establish visitation with their children and shared how they developed a process for gaining approval for visitation rights within detention facilities and prisons. Doing so helped providers in the southern region anticipate future issues with visitation for incarcerated fathers and use proven methods from the northern region.



TIP 2. Build trust and rapport with fathers early in engagement.

Fathers face many distinct challenges rooted in past trauma, which can influence the ways in which they seek and engage in services. The father engagement providers we spoke with in Indiana stressed the importance of “meeting fathers where they are” and building trust during their initial interactions. Director of Neighborhood Mentoring Academy, Inc., Fletcher Upshaw, mentioned that he often shares his own fatherhood experiences with the fathers he works with. He finds that relating to them in this way creates rapport and increases their openness to engaging in services. Providers also emphasized the need to train staff on how to provide trauma-informed services. By drawing upon fatherhood best practices such as these when designing their outreach and early engagement strategies, practitioners can improve fathers' capacity to care for and support their children. (Please refer to the “Helpful Resources” section for more information on best practices.)

TIP 3. Create channels for communication between child welfare offices and father-centered providers.

The DCS Father Engagement Initiative illustrates how fatherhood providers and child welfare offices in other states might find more ways to engage and support fathers. Fostering a strong spirit of collaboration between DCS and father engagement service providers has proven vital for supporting fathers' long-term success in Indiana. For instance, after DCS sends providers a referral, the providers regularly share information related to child safety and protective factors. Creating a central channel between DCS and providers helps streamline this exchange. When providers work closely with DCS, they are better equipped to understand each father's situation and supply them with the resources and information needed to engage in their cases.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- See this detailed description of [Indiana's Father Engagement Services](#) program and how the state defines [service provider training requirements](#).
- Aside from the state initiative, Indiana is home to one of the oldest independent fatherhood programs in the country. Check out this [NRFC 2018 Program Spotlight](#) about the [Fathers and Families Center](#) in Indianapolis.
- For more information on ways fatherhood programs can work with child welfare offices to support fathers, see the [NRFC Program Spotlight on Project Fatherhood](#). This program spotlight shows how the Children's Institute, an agency with a long history of providing services to prevent child abuse and neglect in California, developed a fatherhood program in partnership with the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services.
- This older article [Engaging Dads in Child Welfare](#) explains why child welfare offices should work with fatherhood program providers (American Bar Association, 2007).
- For more on fatherhood best practices, see:
 - [Key Programmatic Elements of Father Engagement to Promote Self-Sufficiency \(KEEP Fathers Engaged\)](#), an issue brief and infographics by Rebekah Selekman and Pamela Holcomb (Mathematica).

This brief was developed by Ben Wallace and Dina Israel (MDRC) with assistance from Nigel Vann (Fathers Incorporated) on behalf of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance. Dion Smith Sr. (Indiana Department of Child Services), Azaliah Israel (Fathers Incorporated), Paige Thompson (Urban Institute), and Andrew Freeberg (Goodwill- Easter Seals Minnesota) reviewed the document and provided helpful feedback and suggestions.

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