



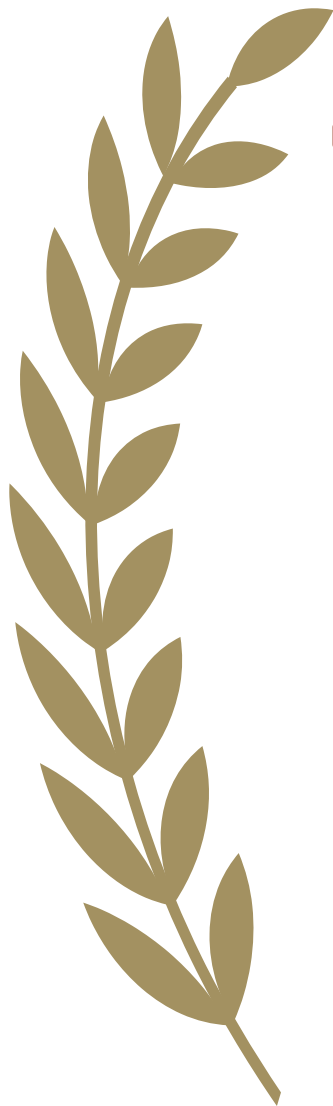
# Creating an Alumni Program for Graduates of a Fatherhood Program



*A GUIDE WITH TIPS AND ADVICE*

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**National  
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## Introduction

Thank you for downloading *Creating an Alumni Program for a Fatherhood Program*! The staff of National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) commends you on your commitment to help fathers to become the best dads they can be and to do so through an alumni program.



[www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)

This guide provides information on:

1. Why and how NFI created the guide.
2. The objectives of the guide.
3. How to use it.
4. Examples of organizations in diverse settings and who serve diverse fathers that have successfully implemented an alumni program.
5. A list of NFI resources to consider using with your alumni program.

## The Creation of the Guide

As the leading fatherhood-renewal organization in the country, NFI has trained more individuals and organizations to implement fatherhood programs and services than any other organization. Organizations in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, Washington D.C., and other countries use NFI resources in their communities. Since 2002 and through the first half of 2023, NFI trained more than 43,500 fatherhood practitioners from more than 9,700 organizations.

A major part of NFI's work involves training organizations on how to implement its fatherhood programs in a variety of settings that include urban and rural communities, corrections, schools, healthcare, and the military. These programs include research-based and evidence-based curricula such as 24:7 Dad® and InsideOut Dad®. As NFI staff has maintained relationships with users of NFI curricula, we have seen the emergence of alumni programs in many settings. NFI staff decided to investigate this emergence and to develop this guide because of the positive impact these programs have on fathers, families, and the organizations that run NFI programs, and in the hope that other organizations will start an alumni program.

NFI staff identified model alumni programs that operate in diverse settings and that serve diverse fathers. Staff interviewed practitioners who started and operate alumni programs to identify: 1) the rationale for starting a program; 2) the benefits and challenges of starting a program; 3) the activities alumni engage in; 4) and future plans for the program. Staff also asked for advice that these seasoned practitioners would give to another practitioner who might consider starting an alumni program. NFI identified universal themes that emerged in these interviews and chose five organizations as case studies to include in this guide.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on NFI's programs and evaluations of the programs, visit [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org).



## Objectives of the Guide

NFI developed this guide to provide organizations with:

- The rationale for starting an alumni program.
- The benefits of starting an alumni program for fathers and the organization.
- The challenges of starting an alumni program.
- Examples of creative alumni programs from which to draw ideas.
- Advice from seasoned practitioners on starting an alumni program.



## How to Use the Guide

Use this guide as encouragement to start an alumni program and to create a plan for starting one. Consider using some of the NFI resources described at the end of this guide as the foundation for or an integral part of your organization's service to fathers who "graduate" from a fatherhood program.

## Starting an Alumni Program

### THE RATIONALE

There are two primary reasons for starting an alumni program. The first reason is to keep fathers connected to a positive environment that facilitates continued growth as a father after they complete a fatherhood program. The second reason is to provide a credible, trusted group of fathers who can recruit fathers into a fatherhood program, encourage fathers currently enrolled in a program to maintain their participation, and, in some instances, to act as guides or mentors for fatherhood program participants.

In some cases organizations have created an alumni program out of sheer serendipity. Fathers who graduate from a program asked for ways they could stay connected to each other and the organization because of the development of a support network they wanted to continue to access and be part of. As one practitioner recalled, "We couldn't get the guys to leave. We had alumni coming back to the next class cycle and would drop in." Fathers so valued the fatherhood program that this practitioner's organization decided to create a formal alumni program as a reaction to this dynamic.

Some organizations have been proactive and quite creative in responding to fathers' desire to stay connected as they see a way to leverage the passion that fathers gain from their growth and fathers' subsequent desire to give back. One practitioner stated, "Guys that really got transformed wanted to give back to the community, so we came together around that common purpose (not just individual experience, but the impact in the community of father absence). We wanted to capitalize on the passion these dads had for doing more and realized this could help the staff and our organization to have greater impact." The focus of this organization's program is on alumni



serving the community on the organization's behalf—an outward rather than inward focus.

Many organizations use alumni during the early stages of a fatherhood program and throughout its course. Alumni address fathers during their orientation to a fatherhood program and share their experience in the program (e.g. benefits). More “advanced” or established alumni programs might have members serve as guides or mentors to fathers as they move through a fatherhood program and, once they graduate, keep them involved by encouraging them to join the alumni program. Some organizations use alumni to recruit fathers into a fatherhood program. This kind of participation by alumni encourages fathers to join a program and maintain their participation, which is one of the greatest challenges to starting and maintaining a program. Alumni are a very effective recruitment and retention tool because they bring energy and credibility to an organization's efforts to reach and serve fathers.



## THE BENEFITS

There are many benefits to starting an alumni program for fathers and an organization. As noted above, alumni programs keep fathers connected to a support network comprised of the organization's staff, programs, and services, and of their fellow dads. One practitioner described the support network as a “brotherhood” or “fraternity.” Staying connected is critical to fathers' ability to continue their growth in an environment that supports it. Many fathers who enter a fatherhood program lack such a support network and might return to an unsupportive environment after they complete a fatherhood program. Fathers who lack access to an alumni program can fall back into old, poor patterns of behavior in the absence of the positive environment of the program and the other services and programs the organization provides.

An organization benefits simply by continuing to serve fathers as part of its mission. Alumni facilitate, for example, helping fathers over a long period of time on issues that require more time to resolve than is possible in a fatherhood program. One practitioner said that his organization's alumni program is an extension of the “psychological home” for fathers established by participating in the fatherhood program and the other array of services and programs available to participants in their fatherhood program.

Beyond this broad benefit, organizations have realized these benefits:

- Better outcomes for the fatherhood program (e.g. retention of fathers) by expanding the organization's father-friendly environment.
- Galvanized partnerships with other organizations when alumni serve the community on the organization's behalf (e.g. conduct presentations on father absence and its impact on the community).



- Alumni are a resource/asset for the organization (e.g. volunteers) and can bring other resources/assets to the organization through their skills (e.g. professional and hobbies) and community connections.
- Staff who run fatherhood programs and alumni programs gain deeper expertise in working with fathers and can share that expertise with other staff in the organization (i.e. act as a guide or mentor to other staff on how to effectively work with fathers).
- Greater ability to attract funding for family-service programs. Organizations can mention the program in grant applications to showcase the organization's ability to serve the entire family in a sustainable manner.

Another benefit that bears some discussion is that alumni can provide a constant source of feedback to staff in charge of a fatherhood program that these staff can use to improve the program. One practitioner noted that alumni help keep the fatherhood program on track by avoiding “program drift.” Alumni provide feedback on what the fatherhood program teaches that works over the long haul. Because staff is in contact with alumni over the long term, they are able to keep tabs on the chronic and situational issues faced by fathers. This long-term contact gives staff insight into the most important issues they must address in the fatherhood program.

## THE CHALLENGES

The challenges to starting and maintaining an alumni program are not so different than those of a fatherhood program. The two greatest challenges are staffing and funding. One difference, however, is that an alumni program can stretch already-thin resources beyond those required for the fatherhood program. Alumni programs require diligent planning. Even though an alumni program can rise organically and with limited resources, programs eventually require diligent planning to succeed over the long term. Consequently, these challenges argue for ensuring that these resources are available before starting an alumni program.

Staff might have to volunteer their own time to run an alumni program if the organization lacks funding to start and maintain one. A single staff person often starts an alumni program. Several practitioners recommend dedicating more than one staff member to the program because these programs can “take off” with the passion that alumni bring and the subsequent demand their passion places on the organization. Alumni might need to contribute funds and donate other resources to support the program's activities.

Another challenge common to fatherhood programs that alumni programs also face, as noted earlier, is recruitment and maintaining participation. So despite the passion that alumni bring to a program, staff can't take that passion for granted and assume that alumni will just show up. Alumni might be hard to identify in the first place if the organization lacks updated contact information. One organization, for example, had a database of hundreds of fathers who had





participated in their fatherhood program through the years from which to start an alumni program. Unfortunately, they learned that they had viable contact information on only 150. Moreover, these fathers were spread across the state which made it difficult for many of them to attend program activities. Over time fathers relocate, change phone numbers and e-mail addresses, and make other changes that can make it difficult to contact them about an alumni program.

Staff must keep activities and topics fresh to maintain participation, and they must be of interest to fathers. It can be a challenge to maintain participation of alumni who become connected or better connected to their children and families during their participation in the fatherhood and alumni programs. This is an outcome that, ironically, is good for the fathers and a goal of any fatherhood program but that presents a challenge to alumni participation. Practitioners recommend that alumni programs include family-focused activities that involve fathers, children, and families to address this challenge.

By the same token it can also be a challenge to maintain participation of fathers who for reasons beyond their and the organization's control struggle to create and maintain positive connections with their children. These fathers can become uncomfortable and further discouraged when they are around fathers whose connections deepen. Staff must pay particular attention to maintaining these fathers' interest and motivation.

### SAGE ADVICE ON STARTING A PROGRAM

Practitioners provided a wealth of advice on starting an alumni program. Perhaps one of the most helpful pieces of advice is to start small and focus on engaging fathers staff knows well—the “low-hanging fruit”—as a nucleus and build from there. Look for fathers who did very well in the fatherhood program (e.g. learned and attended regularly) and who have a clear passion for being a dad and for giving back to the organization and community. These fathers might have just completed or be close to completing the fatherhood program. Needless to say an organization should start with fathers for whom they have updated contact information.

Additional advice includes:

- Get buy in from staff and the organization's leaders.
- Staff and fund it adequately.
- Start simple and realistic. Avoid an elaborate plan that is difficult to execute and that seeks to engage a large number of alumni right away.
- Create a purpose beyond simply offering an opportunity for fathers to stay connected after they complete a fatherhood program (e.g. serving the community on behalf of the agency).
- Create a strategic plan for launching and maintaining it. The plan should reflect input from staff, the organization's leaders, and from fathers/alumni on the program's activities and what it seeks to accomplish.





## Case Studies

These case studies are not intended to represent all of the permutations of alumni programs. They simply provide insight into the variety of settings in which alumni programs operate, the forms they can take (simple to more complex), and the activities in which alumni can engage. NFI encourages you to visit each organization's website or to contact their staff for more information on their alumni program and fatherhood program.

### CASE STUDY #1: GOODWILL/EASTER SEALS MINNESOTA

Organization/Agency: Goodwill/Easter Seals Minnesota (Minneapolis, MN)  
Fatherhood (not Alumni) Program: FATHER Project  
Alumni Program Name (if applicable): Citizen Father  
Setting: Community-Based (Focus on Low-Income, Non-Custodial Fathers)  
Website: <https://www.goodwilleasterseals.org/>

#### Description of the Alumni Program

Citizen Father launched in 2008. It provides continued growth opportunities for fathers who complete FATHER Project and helps the agency create change and impact in the community. It is a community-action program that creates social change. As fathers achieve success in the fatherhood program, the agency offers fathers a next step: sign up for a “future leaders” group in which they go through a 12-week process to build life skills and personal empowerment. They can participate in one of three leadership tracks, one of which is Citizen Father.

Citizen Father flattens the hierarchy between clients and staff by putting them “on the same plane.” The alumni develop activities that are not dependent on outside funding, and can create social change around bringing messages to the community on the importance of involved fathers. They share their personal experiences (e.g. growth process) and deliver messages about the importance of fathers via presentations in different settings in the community (e.g. schools). Consequently, the program goes beyond a personal testimony of the fatherhood program by focusing on the impact of father absence on the community. Alumni make presentations to other direct-service agencies (e.g. early childhood providers and child support agencies), business professionals, mothers, youth, other fathers including incarcerated fathers, and faith-based organizations. They also present to agency staff on the issues fathers face and how to work effectively with fathers. Presentations occur in a variety of formats and lengths, including at conferences and on radio and television.

Alumni meet every other week. Presentations are opportunistic and conducted on a year-round basis (e.g. Citizen Fathers conducted 15-20 presentations in 2010). Staff plans to integrate a component into the program that will involve Citizen Fathers helping orient newly-enrolled fathers to FATHER Project and mentoring fathers currently enrolled in the fatherhood program.



## CASE STUDY #2: CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

Organization/Agency: Christian Heritage (Walton, NE)  
Fatherhood (not Alumni) Program: Destination Dad  
Alumni Program Name (if applicable): Not applicable  
Setting: Corrections  
Website: [www.chne.org](http://www.chne.org)

### Description of the Alumni Program

Christian Heritage's alumni program launched in 2009 approximately six months after the organization started Destination Dad, its program for incarcerated fathers. The alumni group is a "follow up" group for graduates of NFI's InsideOut Dad® program. It covers a variety of topics (e.g. letter writing to children, child support, and help with legal issues) in the form of "mini-workshops." Incarcerated fathers meet once a month for 90 minutes to participate in a mini-workshop. Christian Heritage recently expanded the alumni program to parole offices that serve graduates of InsideOut Dad® and who have been released on parole. Staff would eventually like to hold a regular event that brings graduates who have been released from prison together for networking and mutual support.

## CASE STUDY #3: NEWARK NOW

Organization/Agency: Newark Now (Newark, NJ)  
Fatherhood (not Alumni) Program: Newark Comprehensive Center for Fathers (Fathers Now)  
Alumni Program Name (if applicable): D.A.D.S. (Delta Alpha Delta Sigma)  
Setting: Community-Based (Reentry Focus)  
Linkedin Profile: <https://www.facebook.com/FathersNow/>

### Description of the Alumni Program

D.A.D.S. (Delta Alpha Delta Sigma) launched in 2008 at the same time as Fathers Now. It took the alumni program a few months to start because it required the first graduates of the fatherhood program. Alumni meet once a month for two hours on a Saturday. The meetings keep fathers engaged in activities and promote brotherhood (hence the fraternity-like name using letters in the Greek alphabet) and self-empowerment. Guest speakers address alumni on a variety of topics and encourage the fathers through motivational messages.

Fathers move immediately into the alumni program upon graduating from the fatherhood program. The alumni program allows the organization to maintain the support network that fathers establish during their time in the fatherhood program. To keep them engaged, staff has alumni perform community-service work, such as helping establish partnerships with other agencies (e.g. alumni speak at other agencies' events) and speaking to children in schools about their personal experiences. This community-service work has also included: 1) painting a childcare center (via a partnership with Home Depot that provided resources to paint the center); 2) choosing a school every year and holding a barbeque for the children with perfect attendance and on the honor roll that also involves playing games with the children; 3) launching an initiative called "Clean Neighborhood" in which the alumni chose one of the blocks on which an alumnus lives to pick up garbage, weed, and clean abandoned lots; 4) walking neighborhood children to school on the first day of the school year and handing out t-shirts to fathers of school children to raise awareness about the importance of fathers; and 5) helping another organization's implementation of a program to prevent



domestic violence. Activities also involve those for alumni and their families. These activities have included a barbeque for the families and outings to basketball games and Disney on Ice. Alumni also speak about their experiences during the orientation meeting of fathers beginning the Fathers Now program, and drop in on sessions from time to time to share their experiences related to the session topic.

D.A.D.S. has its own bank account that is funded solely by donations from alumni. Staff has big plans for the growth of the program that include: 1) a component in which alumni will mentor fathers currently enrolled in Fathers Now; 2) alumni apparel (e.g. polo shirts) for each alumnus; 3) an alumni award ceremony; 4) an alumni basketball game; and 5) an alumni retreat for personal development and to further build teamwork among alumni. Staff is in the process of creating a board for the program that will include a treasurer and alumni in charge of mentoring and strategic planning. The agency is also in the process of creating a cleaning and maintenance company that will employ some alumni. The purpose of the company is to address the challenge that many of the fathers face with employment after release from prison.

#### CASE STUDY #4: KINDERING CENTER

Organization/Agency: Kindering Center (Bellvue, WA)

Fatherhood (not Alumni) Program: Washington State Fathers Network

Alumni Program Name (if applicable): Fathers Network Alumni Group

Setting: Community-Based (Focus on Fathers of Children with Special Needs)

Website: <https://kindering.org/>

#### Description of the Alumni Program

The Fathers Network Alumni Group launched in August 2010. The alumni program focuses on a single annual event attended by fathers of children with special needs from across the state. The first gathering involved wine tasting and social networking, and the second event is planned for February 2012.

Kindering Center invited 150-200 fathers who had been involved with the Washington State Fathers Network (which includes 17 chapters across the state) to attend the initial event. Staff invited fathers who were involved with the fatherhood program or the Kindering Center's services 15 to 32 years ago. The reason for inviting fathers who had been involved so long ago, staff explained, is that they are older dads with older children who are now adults with special needs. Staff thought that these fathers would be particularly interested in getting together and reconnecting with fathers they had known years ago to see how their and their children's lives had developed. Approximately 30 fathers attended the event. They enjoyed finding out what was going on with each other. They appreciated getting together because of the connection with other dads who have a very unique experience in raising a child with special needs—a very understanding, compassionate audience that understands their world.

Networking and reconnecting was the sole focus of the first event. Staff plans to add a guest speaker for the second event who will address a topic that alumni will eventually identify through a survey as their number one issue in taking care of their child (e.g. getting in-home nursing services and how to handle the daily stress of taking care of a child with special needs). Staff will ask fathers currently involved in the Fathers Network to financially support the alumni event.



### CASE STUDY #5: FORESTDALE, INC.

Organization/Agency: Forestdale, Inc. (Forest Hills, NY)  
Fatherhood (not Alumni) Program: Fathering Initiative  
Alumni Program Name (if applicable): Not applicable  
Setting: Community-Based (Focus on Non-Custodial Fathers)  
Website: <https://www.forestdaleinc.org/>

#### Description of the Alumni Program

Forestdale, Inc. launched their alumni program many years ago. (NFI staff couldn't identify the exact year at the time of the interview.) Alumni meet every other week to listen to a guest speaker address a topic of interest (e.g. child support and legal issues). Despite the fact that the Fathering Initiative serves very young fathers, the fathers who participate in the alumni program tend to be fathers older than 25 and are involved (e.g. living) with their "second family." Staff reports that younger fathers rarely stick around after they participate in the fatherhood program because their lives tend to be less stable than older fathers and their involvement with their "first family" can be quite tenuous. Older fathers, by contrast, tend to have more stable lives that carry over into their second family.

The agency holds events for alumni throughout the year that include an annual barbecue to which alumni bring their family and an annual holiday party in December. Staff sends "telephone blasts" to alumni to keep them abreast of events and other activities of the alumni program, such as a barbeque that is paid for mostly by the fathers (e.g. through donations of food). The agency covers the cost of activities for the children. Fathers also donate food and arrange the music for an annual holiday event with the 112th precinct donating toys for the fathers' children. Alumni donated items to the "Fathers' Den," a father-friendly space created by the agency to facilitate father-child interaction among participants in the fatherhood program, and built a playground for use by children of families served by the agency. Alumni help orient fathers to the fatherhood program and encourage them to maintain their participation.

Staff plans to hold fundraising events, with alumni help, to provide funds for the alumni program. They want to start workshops that draw on talents of the fathers (e.g. carpentry, how to paint, and how to sheetrock) as a way to build fathers' skills. They want to get local businesses to donate resources for alumni activities (e.g. Home Depot or Lowe's to donate supplies for a carpentry workshop). They also want to create a directory of alumni with contact information to facilitate networking and support among alumni. Staff hopes, for example, that such a directory will facilitate sharing of resources among alumni. Staff would also like to expand their ability to communicate with alumni beyond telephone blasts to include sending emails and texts.



## NFI Resources

NFI fatherhood curricula and skill-building resources are ideal for building and maintaining a fatherhood alumni program. More specifically, NFI programs and booster sessions are ideal for addressing topics important to fathers (e.g. how fathers can communicate more effectively with the mother[s] of their children), thus enhancing the ability of an alumni program to recruit fathers and maintain their participation.

NFI staff is available to help you develop a customized alumni program. Contact us at 301-948-1290 or email [info@fatherhood.org](mailto:info@fatherhood.org) to arrange a consultation. You may also go online to view the resources in our FatherSOURCE™ catalog at <https://store.fatherhood.org/browse-catalog/>. In the meantime, here are a few simple ideas followed by a description of the resources you might find most useful.

- Use the 24:7 Dad® P.M. program as the foundation of an alumni program for graduates of the 24:7 Dad® A.M. program, or the A.M. or P.M. program for graduates of another fatherhood program.
- Use the 24:7 Dad® Key Behaviors Workshop or any of the FatherTopics™ Booster Sessions to quickly deepen the knowledge and skills of fathers who have completed a fatherhood program.
- Distribute NFI's Pocket Guides and brochures during alumni program meetings and events, especially when meetings and events include discussion of topics addressed by these great resources.

To order any of NFI's programs and other resources, visit FatherSource™, NFI's resource center, at [www.fathersource.org](http://www.fathersource.org).

### 24:7 DAD® PROGRAM

24:7 Dad® is NFI's signature evidence-based fatherhood program. The most comprehensive fatherhood program available, it includes innovative tools, strategies, and exercises for fathers of all races, religions, cultures, and backgrounds. It focuses on the characteristics men need to be good fathers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The program includes everything you need to successfully market, run, and evaluate a fatherhood program. It is available in a more basic version—24:7 Dad® A.M.—and a more in-depth version—24:7 Dad® P.M.



### 24:7 DAD® KEY BEHAVIORS WORKSHOP

This eight-hour workshop is a great complement to the 24:7 Dad® programs. Its less intensive focus and short duration make it the perfect “teaser” or “lead in” to recruit fathers into 24:7 Dad®. Run the workshop on a Saturday or consecutive Saturdays (e.g. two four-hour workshops) to give dads a feel for how a fatherhood program can improve their lives and their children's lives. You can also use it in situations where it isn't possible to use a longer program like 24:7 Dad® (e.g. to reach dads in the workplace).





## INSIDEOUT DAD®

This innovative, evidence-based program for incarcerated fathers is just what you need if you want to start reaching out to this group of fathers. The program teaches inmates how to connect with their children while they are still on the “inside” and includes a strong emphasis on helping incarcerated dads to successfully connect with their children when they re-enter society and the lives of their families upon release.



## PROFATHERING15™

ProFathering15™ is a self-guided, online program for new, expectant, and seasoned dads and father figures that helps them learn how to be a great dad through 15 important fatherhood topics relevant to any dad. Dads can complete each topic in only 15 minutes!

ProFathering15™ is a great alternative for organizations who can’t offer a group-based fatherhood program, those who want to use a program with dads one-on-one, or with dads who can’t come into a facility due to distance, transportation or other issues.



Online Learning for Dads

## FATHERTOPICS™ BOOSTER SESSIONS

NFI has developed a series of workshop manuals that allow you to run affordable, topical booster sessions for fathers on a variety of important issues that may be barriers to a father’s involvement.

Delivered as stand-alone workshops or as supplemental sessions to your fatherhood programming, FatherTopics™ Booster Sessions allow you to deliver relevant, engaging fatherhood content in as little as 3–4 hours.





## POCKET GUIDES FOR DADS

Our pocket guides are a great resource for dads by providing them with a pocket size skill-building resource they can reference time and again. The New Dad's Pocket Guide™ provides essential hints, tips, and strategies that every new dad needs to know. The Dad's Pocket Guides for dads of children at specific ages provide tips and tools for preparing their child for a lifetime of health and success in school, and how to stay involved in their lives.



## BROCHURES, TIP CARDS, AND POSTERS

Our brochures and tip cards are easy to read and accessible for fathers from a variety of backgrounds. Brochures cover a range of important topics, including child health and safety, education, co-parenting, incarceration, and more.

Posters are also an effective way for organizations to show their “father-friendliness” and ensure fathers and families feel welcome.



## Conclusion

We hope you find this guide helpful in your efforts to improve the lives of fathers, children, families, and your community. We would like to hear from you about your experience running an alumni program and using this guide. Please send your comments to us at [info@fatherhood.org](mailto:info@fatherhood.org) or give us a call at 301-948-0599. Good luck!

