

Evaluation of the Young Fathers' Initiative (YFI)

Fathers, Families, and Healthy Communities

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The following is an evaluation of the Young Fathers' Initiative (YFI) implemented by Fathers, Families, and Healthy Communities (FFHC; <http://www.ffhc.org/>). The evaluation includes a brief program description; basic demographic data (i.e., attendance and age); and qualitative findings from focus group and individual interviews with YFI participants (also referred to as students or young fathers), YFI facilitators, and staff employed at two program sites.

Program Description

The Young Fathers' Initiative (YFI) is a 16-week (approximate) fatherhood program adapted primarily from the National Fatherhood Initiative's 24/7 Dads A.M. Curriculum Program (<http://store.fatherhood.org/24-7-dad-programs/>). YFI was developed for young fathers attending two option schools in low-income neighborhoods in Chicago: Excel Academy (EA) and Ombudsman Educational Services (OES). Both EA and OES provide nontraditional and largely individualized educational services toward high school completion to 14-21 year old, "out-of-school" and/or "off-track" students. EA is generally a full day program and OES is comprised of two half day programs. FFHC conducted one YFI group at EA, and two YFI groups at OES, an AM and a PM group, to accommodate the half day schedule.

YFI was originally intended to be a replica of the National Fatherhood Initiative's 24/7 Dads A.M. Curriculum Program (<http://store.fatherhood.org/24-7-dad-programs/>). The 24/7 DADS curriculum is a 12-week manualized program with workbook-guided content delivered via a group format. It includes the following program modules: 1) Family History; 2) What It

Means To Be a Man; 3) Showing and Handling Feelings; 4) Men's Health; 5) Communication; 6) The Father's Role; 7) Discipline; 8) Children's Growth; 9) Getting Involved; 10) Working with Mom and Co-parenting; 11) Dads and Work; and 12) Celebrate.

The YFI curriculum incorporated approximately half of the curriculum content provided by the 24/7 DADS program. In addition, the YFI curriculum was adapted to meet the needs of young, low-income, African American fathers being served by YFI. The young fathers served by YFI were either expectant fathers or fathers of young children. The rationale for program adaptations is presented as a part of the qualitative findings of this report. Generally, the YFI program focused on the following topics (topics with an * next to them were incorporated/adapted from the 24/7 DADS curriculum): 1) History of Black Fatherhood and Families; 2) What It Means To Be a Man*; 3) Men II Boys Film (exploring various portrayals of manhood); 4) Showing and Handling Feelings*; 5) Communication* (including conflict resolution and healthy relationships); 6) Co-parenting*; 7) The Father's Role*; 8) Web of Support (understanding social support networks); 9) Self-Marketing and Personal Values; 10) Defining and Understanding Co-parenting (with mothers' future partners); 11) Child Support; and 12) Close Out. Some sessions included the collection of demographic and baseline data. Further, some content may have been repeated, or required more than one session to complete.

Participant Age and Program Attendance

Basic demographic characteristics (i.e., participant age and program attendance) were provided by YFI facilitators. The statistics below reflect averages for the young fathers who attended at least one YFI session (See Table 1).

Age

The average age of young fathers at Excel Academy (EA) was 18.62 years ($n = 16$; $r = 16-21$). Similarly, the average age of young fathers at Ombudsman Educational Services (OES), for the AM and PM programs combined, was 18.00 years ($n = 16$; $r = 16-19$).

Program Attendance

At EA, 18 out of 20 young fathers who were registered for YFI attended at least one of the 20 sessions offered. Weekly sessions at EA had an average of 5.85 young fathers in attendance. Young fathers at EA on average attended 6.55 sessions ($n = 18$; range = 1-17). Nine of the 18 young fathers attended at least six or more (approximately one third) of the 20 offered sessions.

For Ombudsman Educational Services' (OES) morning program, 13 out of 27 young fathers who were enrolled in YFI attended at least one session. Group sessions averaged 4.06 young fathers in attendance each week. Young fathers in the OES AM group attended an average of eight sessions ($n = 13$; $r = 1-12$). Five of the 13 young fathers attended at least five or more (approximately one third) of the 16 sessions offered. For the OES afternoon program, attendance records are available for nine sessions. All nine enrolled participants attended at least one session. Young fathers in the OES PM group attended an average of 2.67 sessions ($n = 9$; $r = 1-9$). Four of the nine fathers attended three or more (approximately one third) of the nine documented sessions. Weekly sessions had an average of 2.56 young fathers in attendance.

Table 1. Age and Attendance of YFI Participants by Site

	EA	OES-AM	OES-PM
Average Age*	18.62 years		18 years
	n = 16		n = 16
	r = 16-21		r = 16-19
Average Size of	5.85 fathers	4.06 fathers	2.56 fathers
Weekly Sessions	r = 2-11	r = 2-9	r = 1-6
Average # Sessions Attended	6.55 sessions	8 sessions	2.67 sessions
by Fathers	n = 18	n = 13	n = 9; r = 1-9
	r = 1-17	r = 1-12	

*OES AM and PM program data are combined.

Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

Qualitative data were derived from five focus group sessions (i.e., group interviews) and three individual interviews conducted by an external evaluator (and author of this report). Focus groups sessions were the primary source of qualitative data collected and were conducted with three student groups (also referred to as YFI participants or young fathers), two staff groups, and the one dyad of YFI facilitators. Individual interviews were utilized to accommodate staff at one site who could not participate in the group format due to scheduling constraints. A total of 27 people participated in the qualitative interviews across both sites: 15 students, two YFI facilitators, and 10 staff persons. YFI fathers who participated in the focus group sessions were predominately African American, with the exception of one Caucasian and two Hispanic participants. YFI fathers who participated in the focus group sessions had various levels of exposure to the program. Some had attended the majority of the YFI sessions, whereas others

had only attended a few sessions. School personnel were both male and female; and black and white. School personnel included social workers at Ombudsman Educational Services (OES); as well as teachers, staff, and school administrators at Excel Academy (EA). In order to participate in the interviews, staff had to have relatively regular contact with YFI participants. Staff and YFI participant interviews ranged from approximately 10 minutes to 35 minutes (shorter interviews were generally individual interviews), and the interview with YFI facilitators lasted 82 minutes.

A semi-structured interview guide, developed a priori, was utilized to guide each interview (See Appendices A, B, and C). Each interview was recorded. Recordings were reviewed numerous times and detailed notes were taken in order to systematically identify emergent themes and key summary points across interviews. Interviewee quotes are included, in the vernacular in which they were spoken, in order to illustrate key summary points and themes reported in the qualitative results. Names and school affiliation have been intentionally omitted, and all school personnel are referred to as “staff” in order to maintain confidentiality. Both staff and the young fathers were informed that their responses to all evaluation questions are confidential; that is, YFI facilitators would not have access to audio tape recordings or be able to match comments to individual participants. Several key summary points emerged from the interviews and often represented themes across all participant types (i.e., staff, YFI facilitators, and YFI fathers). These key points and themes are discussed below.

A Good Program Overall

As a theme across all interviews, the students, staff, and facilitators overwhelmingly noted that YFI had a positive impact on the young fathers they served. When reflecting on the value of the program, one staff person noted, “These young men, they’ve been reached.” Another staff person stated, “there’s a sense of pride in the fatherhood that I’ve seen sort of emerge a little

bit.” A third staff person observed a sense of camaraderie and comfort among the fatherhood group and stated,

...they had a great time in here whenever they were here...they were engaged, laughing, sometimes they were even having arguments...and just being real, it seemed like, with each other.
...I was never in a session, but I got the sense that they developed a level of comfort among the students to just be able to share...

The students (i.e., young fathers) described several reasons why they enjoyed participating in the program. They noted “we had good conversations,” and that they enjoyed the “creative discussions” and the nonjudgmental atmosphere which allowed them to speak freely about their experiences and feelings. One young father noted that he liked having a place to express his feelings and doing so felt “like a brick [was taken] off my shoulders.” Many of the young fathers indicated that they appreciated the advice they received during the program. As one young father put it, “[the] advice was helpful toward me improving and being a better father... a better person.” Similarly, when reflecting on the impact of the program, another young father stated, “it had helped me to ... [think about] what was the bad things and what was the good things I was doing as a...father? I know that the good things I was doing, I continue to do that and the bad things, just switch it around....”

Young fathers reported that they looked forward to participating in the program each week. Part of their appreciation for the program resulted from having a program specifically targeted toward fathers. As one staff person noted,

...The young men, they’ve really expressed how much they appreciate the fact that it’s a group targeted, directed towards them because they said so many other things are targeted towards the females and towards the mothers That they appreciate something that’s targeted toward them, specifically molded and targeted toward their interests and their needs and what they care about.

Finally, when asked, the young fathers largely indicated without hesitation that they would recommend the program to family and friends. Some indicated that, if given the opportunity, they would participate again.

Positive Relationships with Facilitators

The positive quality of facilitator-participant relationships was discussed as an important program component. The young fathers as well as staff observed that the facilitators were reliable, consistent, positive, trustworthy, and served as a role model for the young fathers. Young fathers reported feeling like the facilitator cared about them, was sincere, and wanted to be there (as opposed to being there for a paycheck). Young fathers indicated that they felt inspired and grateful for the facilitators' involvement in the program. This is exemplified by one participant who stated, "This program is good...because he inspire us to be good fathers." Another young father stated, "...he gave us his time to come tell us how to be a better father, and he come, we do a little program and he bring us food..." A third young father indicated his gratefulness by stating, "He taught me some things that I didn't know, that I've become better at doing, that I thank him for being in this program."

The importance of having someone that the young fathers could relate to was also reinforced by staff's reports. As one staff person stated,

So that they can really have conversation with men, not just any type of men, just men that's married, they probably haven't seen that. They probably never seen a man that still pay child support, that still be in the household taking care of the bills.... They need to understand, it does exist.

Another staff person noted the rarity of men serving in this role in the school system.

This staff person noted,

...It's our only group run by a man...it's nice to have that...male role model who's also a father...his kids are older so he's raised them and can...walk them through that experience...

This was echoed by a young father who said the facilitator was “giving us man to man advice.” Similarly, another young father described it as follows, “I like that someone was willing to come and talk to us as [a] man... basically giving us more knowledge about how to be a father.” Giving credit to the facilitator for the youths’ success, a staff person noted, “He changed lives, he turned some rough kids into some young mens.”

Lack of Father Figures. Students, facilitators, and staff largely agreed that the facilitators’ presence and commitment served to counter the largely lacking presence of fathers and/or positive, male role models in the young fathers’ lives. Though a few of the young fathers noted that they have positive relationships with their fathers or father figures, others experienced anger or resentment towards their own fathers who had been (and may continue to be) largely absent during their formative years. Further, some had conflictual relationships with residential step fathers or other negative influences. For example, one father noted that “there’s people who aren’t in any position to tell you how to raise your child. They’re not doing what they’re supposed to do.” For some of the fathers, these experiences influenced their own aspirations as fathers; that is they wanted to “do things differently,” or wanted to be there for their child because their own father wasn’t there for them. A staff person indicated that the program was “teaching you how to be a man...” which was necessary because,

A lot of our guys, you know, they’ve been in jail, incarcerated several times and nobody never taught them, they haven’t guided them, and I think, this program is guiding, you know...they need hands-on, they need discipline, they need structure, and that’s what the fathers’ program is doing.

Participants' Perceptions of Program Content

This section largely reflects the young fathers,' rather than staff members' or facilitators' perspectives about program content for two reasons. First, the majority of the staff were not able to speak about program content, as they were not involved in the program sessions and, with the exception of one, did not review the curriculum. Second, YFI facilitators provided very detailed comments about the session topics which are included in the Lessons Learned section of this report due to their focus on the need to adapt program content to meet the young fathers' needs.

Overall, the young fathers indicated that the topics discussed during the program were both relevant and appropriate. One young father stated, "Everything that we talked about was [good]." Young fathers were able to recall at least several curriculum topics and most young fathers reported several topics that stood out as particularly relevant and useful. These topics included conflict resolution, co-parenting, dealing with child support, and responsibility. Regarding conflict resolution, one young father recalled a conversation in which he was encouraged to prevent arguments and conflict with his child's mother. This was important to him because preventing conflicts was associated with spending time with his daughter. He stated,

[the facilitator] was telling me like what to do, like, if I get in an argument with my baby mama, how to block that out, [what to do to] stop that stuff from going farther than what it is...like she'll get mad and then probably don't want to let me see my daughter. Try to prevent that from happening. Stop that before it start.

His peer added,

if you're not with your ...[child's mother] still have a relationship with her, a friend relationship, so you can more connect with your daughter so they won't...[say you]...can't see your daughter because we're not together...have a good friendship with her...tell her, cause you're friends I just want to be there for my daughter...

The statements above emphasize a child-focused perspective, the importance of being a responsible father, and fathers' desires to spend time with their children. This was further

emphasized by other fathers who made statements such as, “instead of spending money on your kids you can spend more time with them,” and “communicate with the child, do our baby know us, do they respond to us?” Regarding child support, fathers remembered receiving advice to enroll their children on their health insurance plans. Young fathers discussed the importance of understanding child support laws, the consequences of not paying child support, and the value of caring for a child outside of the formal child support structures. The young fathers expressed appreciation for interacting with a guest speaker, an older father who had experience with the child support system. Regarding responsibility, fathers stated that they learned, “how to carry yourself as a man;” and “how to be around your child.” One young father gave more details about his notion of responsibility which includes,

...taking care of myself and my child, responsibility...for one I know like finishing school, and then as far as me taking care of my child, work, and then still seeing my child, so being around and everything.

Many young fathers also recalled a documentary which they considered influential, “Men II Boys.” They felt they benefitted from the advice the men in the video provided to younger males. Young fathers recalled discussing additional topics, though not to the same extent as the aforementioned topics. Examples of these additional topics include discipline (i.e., “teaching kids right from wrong”), decision making, being a role model, and having patience. It is likely that the young fathers’ focus on a few particular topics reflects challenges with school attendance; a topic which is discussed in more detail under the “Lessons Learned” section.

The Impact of the Program Extended Beyond Fatherhood

Though the staff were not able to speak directly about the program content, they made observations about program impacts that extended into other areas of the young fathers' behaviors. Specific changes were noted with regard to fathers' improved behaviors, such as following directions, more appropriately receiving correction and feedback from adults, being less inclined to anger/fight, perceived increased attendance on programming days, and a change in attitude and language. One staff person noted that the young fathers' language and attitude toward their children's mothers became more respectful. He observed, "They went from 'man, that's my [b...h], that's my baby's mama' to 'that's the mother of my daughter, that's the mother of my son.'" The same staff person also indicated that the young fathers' critical thinking abilities increased. According to him, the fathers' new thinking process was similar to the following, "I'm a man, now I gotta start acting like a man. I gotta start speaking like a man. I gotta start thinking like a man 'cause I'm not just living for myself anymore, I'm living [for] somebody else." Several other staff persons speculated that some of the young fathers' attendance increased on programming days. As one staff person indicated, "Some come out...of their way to make it here. Like the young man who couldn't come this morning...he's trying to make it here this afternoon to make it to the group, and to school." The same staff person also spoke about another young father in the program whose behavior and attendance improved. Though she noted the youth also had additional support through wrap around services, she thought his participation in YFI was an important factor contributing to his improved behaviors.

Beyond improvements in the young fathers' behaviors, staff at one location also stated that the fathers in the program had a positive impact on their peers. They noted that the young fathers' peers observed the changes in the young fathers which inspired them to do better as well.

At both sites, staff noted that non-fathers became interested and began to ask questions about the content and nature of the program. Some staff and the YFI facilitators indicated that there were a few instances in which non-participants attempted to “sneak” into the program. This observation was supported by a staff person who reported,

...the other young men in the school... see this group of young men meeting consistently, every week, they have some pretty good food, and so there's been issues where other young boys that's not fathers, they wanted to go in there. And I don't want to say it's just for the food, I want to say it's because they see it's more like a brotherhood kind of thing....they wanted to be a part of it.

One staff person summarized the positive impact the young fathers were having on their peers by stating, “... [the] young men involved in the program are definitely becoming, kind of, the role models for the other students in the school.”

Suggested Program Improvements

As noted previously, there was an overwhelming sense of enthusiasm among the young fathers, staff, and facilitators regarding the usefulness and impact of YFI. Many noted the program was appropriate and relevant in its current state. In response to questions about how the program can be improved, young fathers often made positive statements about the program. They said things such as, “...we talk about everything that we're supposed to talk about as in being a father,” “everything was, it was alright,” and “I love the whole program.” One young father stated, “[you] can't criticize someone that's trying to help you.” Reflecting on the young fathers' responses to the program, one staff person noted, “I haven't really heard any complaints.”

Increased Time for and Integration of Programing. The high levels of overall satisfaction with the program were evidenced by young fathers' and staff members' stated desires for longer sessions or increased contact with the facilitators. One young father stated, “What I like the least

is the one hour, we should have like an hour and 30 minutes instead of like an hour... cuz I'm not done expressing ...how I feel." Another young father suggested, "The group should be twice a week." Similarly, a staff person suggested, "Maybe instead of 16 weeks it can be 22 weeks." Increased program time was the most endorsed suggestion with regard to program improvements. The subsequent suggestions were each only suggested by one or two persons.

More time on particular topics. With prompting, a few fathers indicated their desire to spend more time on a few topics in particular. The topics were related to fathers' versus mothers' rights to children; that is, better understanding why mothers relative to fathers apparently have automatic legal rights to the child. Another young father wanted to have more discussion around the influence of mothers and fathers on their children. Specifically, he had questions around whether or not women can raise male children without the assistance of fathers, and he asked, "Are men much different than women in raising a child?" Finally, one young father wanted to talk more about the reasons that parents separate and the effect the separation and subsequent relationships have on children.

Off-campus Activities and Outings. Though not a current component of the program, facilitators report that they have considered the possibility of adding off-grounds activities to the program. This, however, comes with some logistical challenges as programming is conducted during the school day. Therefore any potential activities with the young fathers would need to occur during non-school hours. Further, facilitators indicated that there's future potential to add some "engagement" sessions in which fathers, mothers, and children are engaged in some healthy activities together. One future idea proposed by facilitators included a close out session in which the YFI participants, their children, and the mothers of their children are invited to attend. The idea of outings was met with mixed responses by the young fathers; some of whom

welcomed the opportunity to spend time during the program engaged in father-child activities (that perhaps the mother could also engage in). In contrast the idea did not appeal to others, particularly those who felt they “had other things to do,” were busy, or had conflictual relationships with their child’s mother. Those that were interested suggested outings such as bowling, skating, and a trip to the “buffet.”

Lessons Learned

This section primarily incorporates the reflections of the YFI facilitators who had intimate knowledge of program planning and implementation, and talked extensively about the lessons they learned as a result of implementing YFI. Where appropriate, a few staff observations are included to support facilitators’ observations, statements, and assessments. Some of the lessons learned were addressed during the delivery of the program and some represent considerations for future programming.

Need to Adapt the 24/7 Dads Curriculum. As noted in the program description, the NFI’s 24/7 Dads curriculum was adapted by YFI facilitators based on their assessment that the original 24/7 dads curriculum was “way too dense” for the young fathers served by YFI. The facilitators further noted a need for the program to be more culturally and contextually relevant to the predominately African American population being served by YFI. Concerns about the 24/7 Dads curriculum were echoed by one staff person who briefly reviewed the curriculum and wondered about the relevance of some of its components. She stated,

I looked at the curriculum, and I don’t know how strictly [the facilitator] follows it. Sometimes I wonder if it’s the most applicable to our students. Sometimes I think it’s a little more geared toward older fathers...it just seemed a little generic so I don’t know if our population of students would be able to, and I don’t know how, like I said how strictly he follows it...I think he likes to bring in, like I know he has brought in videos and I think he tried to bring in things that are relevant to them.

The facilitators initially began implementing content from the 24/7 Dads workbook, yet discontinued its use around Session 6 (The Fathers' Role) and began to incorporate additional curriculum as described in the beginning of this report under the Program Description heading. The new materials were derived from a number of sources such as the Sankofa Development and Educational Manual for Fathers, as well as videos and other handouts the facilitators have used in previous work with men and fathers of color. As another adaptation, the facilitators implemented a "check-in" exercise called "PIES," which required each young father to begin and often close each session by identifying their Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, and Spiritual (PIES) status. The facilitators also implemented a means to manage group behavior which was adapted from one facilitator's previous work at the Chicago Youth Center. This simple strategy involved saying a random word, "four," which signaled the group to calm down or get back on track. Both facilitators and YFI participants implemented this strategy. Finally, the facilitators invited guest speakers, such as older African American fathers, to discuss topics such as child support and dealing with the court system.

Flexibility versus Systematic Program Implementation. The facilitators noted the importance of flexibility with regard to presenting and discussing program content. Though they prepared topics for each session, the young fathers sometimes showed up needing to discuss specific life experiences, circumstances, or subjects before they could focus on the planned topic for the day. The facilitators noted that the need for flexibility was a challenge to the consistency of program implementation both within and across sites. On any given week young fathers in different group sessions may have focused on different topics, which facilitators indicated, reflects reality. Stated differently, their challenge was to maintain flexibility by suspending curriculum when kids are "in a different place," while consistently implementing critical

elements of the YFI program. One facilitator noted that it was important to “let the kids drive the conversations sometimes—to let them own it.” In one example, the facilitators observed that the young fathers,

...were pretty assertive around the idea that they didn't need men... very assertive...and it's a kind of a hostility too, because it's [an] anger from them being absent, 'well the hell with you then...I can deal with it'...

In response to this observation, the facilitators incorporated a documentary called “Men II Boys.” One facilitator explained his rationale for incorporating this documentary. He stated “it showed a bunch of men telling young men how to be men.” As a result the facilitator observed that the young fathers “...started seeing men.... [and] themselves differently as fathers. The facilitator explained that as a part of the discussion around this video (and for all other discussions), “...we always tie in ‘how you gonna be with your child?’”

Need for Greater Integration. The YFI facilitators shared somewhat mixed observations about the degree to which the program was integrated into the school environment, yet both agreed greater integration would be beneficial. One facilitator wondered if enough was done to advance idea of the program with administrators and teachers. He wondered how to cultivate deeper relationships amongst the staff. The other facilitator agreed with this need yet felt that relationships between facilitators and staff, as well as awareness of the program, increased as the programs progressed. His observations likely reflected various informal interactions as relationships between the facilitators and staff were developed and strengthened over time. This is supported by the following comment from a staff person who recognized the opportunities afforded as a result of the positive relationships between the facilitator and the young fathers. She noted,

In the school system...there's not a lot of men, especially African American men, and so one thing that I've actually relied on... even though he's not a staff person, he's been able to build those relationships with the young men...I've actually pulled him in on conversations that [I] may have to have with a young man student and he's been really open to it and the student has been very receptive to it.

Facilitators agreed that they need assistance from the school with tasks such as identifying and recruiting young fathers and assisting with the completion of paperwork such as pre- and post-test surveys. They speculated that YFI could be intentionally designed to become more integrated within the school systems. Facilitators could, for example, attend staff meetings approximately three times a year to introduce the program, provide information about the program curriculum and general updates about the progress of the program, and discuss ways that staff can support the program.

Similarly, a few staff persons also expressed their desires for the facilitators and/or program to become more integrated within the school system. Whereas the facilitators discussed their needs from the school, the staff expressed their needs from the facilitators. For example, one staff person suggested that the program could be extended to include a male staff person at the school who can be a source of support for the boys on non-program days. Some staff made suggestions based on their perceived needs of the young fathers, but also acknowledged their uncertainty as to whether or not their suggestions were already being implemented. One staff person wondered, for example,

Is there a way to add an engagement piece so that you're following up with students on days that you're not here, um, and we're always looking for anything that can assist us with attendance. So if this group of eight students, you know, they can bring under their wing and mentor in more ways than just fatherhood, you know making a phone call, making sure they're in school, checking up on them.... It takes a community to raise a student, or a child.

The aforementioned suggestion reflects a challenge to the program mentioned by a number of staff persons and the YFI facilitators: school attendance. As one staff person noted, “it’s a great program, the only problem is getting students to attend; that’s getting them to attend school.” Another noted that attendance is a problem at the school and that it affects YFI’s participation rates as well. She qualified this by saying that when students come to school they almost always elect to go to the program. This notion was supported by a staff person in the other school who stated, “I know our school... attendance is an issue and we have students that come and go because we have open enrollment so we’re constantly getting new students...” This person went on to reiterate, “it’s coming to school that’s the issue ‘cause they’re happy to go to the program.”

Pre and Post Test Concerns. The facilitators’ concerns about the appropriateness of the program materials extended to the pre- and post-tests that accompanied the 24/7 Dads curriculum. Facilitators questioned the usefulness of the provided measures, noting that the fathers did not take the surveys seriously and/or likely inflated pre-test scores. This observation was based on the comments made by YFI participants when they were filling out the pre-test surveys. One facilitator stated, “...cause the fathers, when they fill it out they [say], “yeah, I know [everything], I’m good on everything.” The facilitator further speculated that the young fathers thought something to the effect of, “I’m just filling out paperwork, it don’t matter what I say.” Further, the facilitators expressed concerns that the likely elevated pre-test scores would leave no room for change on the post-test measure. They speculated that new pre- and post-test surveys should be developed to better capture the adapted material that was presented to the young fathers. Such surveys also needed to be worded in simpler terms to which the fathers could relate and understand based on their developmental and reading levels. When students

were asked about the surveys only about one young father indicated that the pre- and post-tests were relevant and necessary. Several other young fathers noted that the measures were not relevant, that they didn't understand the purpose of them, or that, in hindsight, they didn't remember the measures that well. Finally, other factors likely affected the usefulness of the current pre-post survey data such as attendance, and the adapted curriculum. That is, the pre- and post-test surveys align with the 24/7 Dads A.M. curriculum, but may not correspond as well to the adapted program content that was presented by YFI.

Broader Needs. The facilitators had several additional thoughts regarding program improvements and the broader needs of young males. They noted the need for stipends and other resources (e.g., jobs, bus tokens for transportation) for the young fathers. The facilitators also noted the need to increase the incentives associated with YFI beyond providing food during the sessions. They suggested ideas such as planning a gathering on a weekend, a social event for example, to which the fathers could bring their children. Finally, the facilitators noted the need for programming that captures a broader audience; that is, prevention programming that starts before young men become fathers. The facilitators described this as a need for a continuum of services and noted that the program concepts, values, morals, and attributes were not only relevant to fatherhood, but also to manhood more generally. They stated that the participants' peers were "...having the same experience that the young fathers are having in terms of their engagement with men and other issues that they're experiencing."

Conclusion

The Young Fathers' Initiative (YFI) is a 16-week (approximate) fatherhood program adapted primarily from the National Fatherhood Initiative's 24/7 Dads A.M. Curriculum Program (<http://store.fatherhood.org/24-7-dad-programs/>). YFI was developed for young fathers attending two option schools in low-income neighborhoods in Chicago: Excel Academy (EA)

and Ombudsman Educational Services (OES). The current evaluation focused largely on qualitative findings from focus group and individual interviews with YFI participants, YFI facilitators, and staff. Consistent with small non-representative and convenience samples, the current findings cannot be generalized beyond those who participated in the evaluation of YFI. The findings do not reflect, for example, the experiences and perceptions of young fathers who were not available on the scheduled interview days, or those who were enrolled but never attended any sessions.

Despite this limitation, the qualitative findings provide important insight into the usefulness of the program by triangulating experiences and perspectives of staff, facilitators, and young fathers across two program sites. All three groups provided positive reports regarding their experiences with and observations of the YFI program. Noted gains for the young fathers included positive relationships with African American male role models, increased understanding and consideration of their roles as fathers and men, and some improvements in the young fathers' behaviors (e.g., responsibility, following directions, respect), and relationships with their child's mothers and others. Positive relationships between the African American male facilitators and the young fathers were noted as particularly salient given the lack of father figures and positive male role models available to the young fathers. Young fathers were reportedly pleased with the program overall, had considerably limited suggestions for program improvements, and apparently related well to the adapted program materials. Topics that were most reported as useful by fathers included conflict resolution, co-parenting, dealing with child support, and responsibility.

As noted, suggested program improvements were sparse among young fathers and staff. The most suggested improvement was increased time for YFI programming, which was

suggested by staff, young fathers, and facilitators. Increased integration between the school and the YFI program was also noted, albeit from different perspectives, by both facilitators and staff. Many suggestions for integration appear modest, and may positively impact future programming. Attendance is reportedly a school wide challenge that impacts the attendance rate of and survey data collection associated with the YFI program. The need to adapt the original curriculum to better address the specific needs of the population was one notable lesson reported by the facilitators. Adaptations reflected the race, age, immediate needs (e.g., immediate experiences; lack of father figures), and interests of the young fathers. The adaptations require flexibility with regard to program implementation. Also notable is the reported need for better pre- and post-test data that accurately reflects the administered curriculum as well as the young fathers' language, attendance, and reading levels. Many of the reported lessons learned by facilitators were implemented during the course of the current program. Overall, YFI was enthusiastically endorsed as a useful and important program by facilitators, staff, and young fathers who participated in the evaluation.

Appendix A. Semi-Structured Topic Guide: YFI Participants

Goals:

1. Gain an understanding of youths' experiences with the program including their perceptions of the program's benefits and challenges, and sense of satisfaction with the program.
2. Gain an understanding of participants' perceptions of how the program can be enhanced/adapted to better meet the needs of young fathers.

Introduction:

- Thank individuals for participating in focus group
- Explain the purpose of the focus groups → to learn more about your experiences with and/or thoughts about the YFI project. Specifically, I would like to know whether or not you thought the program was helpful (and if so, how) and if there are any ways you think the program can be improved.
- Remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers and that their honesty is greatly appreciated

Focus Group Questions:

1. *Acknowledgement that the purpose of the first question is to generate an alias to be used during the focus group session (i.e., students will be called by the name of the car they identify; see below).*
 - A. *If you were a car, what kind of car would you be and why?*
2. When you were first asked to join YFI what did you think of the idea?
 - A. What did you expect from your experiences?
 - B. Did your expectations match your actual experiences?
3. Think for a moment about the topics covered each week with the YFI project. Were those topics/issues relevant to your experiences/needs as a father? Why or why not?
 - A. Were there some topics that were particularly relevant/helpful? If so, which ones?
 - B. Were there some topics that didn't seem very relevant/helpful to your experiences/concerns/needs as a father? If so, which ones?
4. Are there issues or situations/concerns you've faced as a young father that you wish were talked about in the program but weren't? If so, what are they?
5. Think for a minute about the surveys you took about your fatherhood experiences (with the YFI staff), both at the beginning of the program and at the end:
 - A. Overall, what did you think about these surveys and the questions that were asked about being a father? Relevant? Make sense?
 - B. Did you feel you were able to answer the questions accurately? Honestly? Please explain.
6. What, if anything, did you learn by participating in the YFI project?
 - A. Do you think you will use what you learned in YFI in real life as you parent your child?
7. Beyond fathering, are there other ways the program has influenced your life and decisions?

- A. E.g., relationship with mother? Educational or behavioral decisions?
- 8. What will you remember most about your experiences in YFI?
- 9. What aspects of the program you liked the least?
- 10. What aspects of the program you liked the most?
- 11. Would you recommend this program to a friend or relative who became a young father?
Why or why not?

Appendix B. Semi-Structured Topic Guide: School Personnel

Goals:

1. Gain an understanding of staff's observations of the YFI program based on their interactions with participants before, during, and after the program.
2. Gain an understanding of staff's opinions on the utility and impact of YFI's work with the young fathers at their schools that participated in the program.

Introduction:

- Thank individuals for participating in focus group.
- Explain the purpose of the focus groups → opinions on the utility and impact of YFI's work with the young fathers at their schools that participated in the program.
- Remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers and that their honesty is greatly appreciated.
- Encourage participants to think specifically about fathers whom they know for sure have participated in the YFI project, but to try not to refer to these fathers by name.

Focus Group Questions:

1. To begin, can you please tell me about the frequency and type of interactions you have with fathers participating in the YFI project?
 - A. Daily? Weekly?
 - B. In what capacity? Teacher? Etc.?
 - C. Observations of students? Interactions with students? Both?
 - D. Have you had a chance to observe
 - E. Before, during, and/or after the program?
2. In general, what have you observed about the fathers as they have engaged in the YFI project?
 - A. Do the fathers seem to enjoy/not enjoy going to the program? Look/not look forward to it?
 - B. How do fathers seem to respond to the program?
3. Overall, does this program seem to be helpful, neutral, or not helpful to the fathers? Please explain.
4. The program is largely focused on supporting the young men as fathers. Are there other areas in which the program might impact fathers?
 - A. Behavior?
 - B. Motivation?
 - C. School/academics?
5. Are there any other observations you have of the program overall or fathers in the program that I have not asked you? If so, please explain.

Appendix C. Semi-Structured Topic Guide: YFI Facilitators

Goals:

1. Gain an understanding of facilitators' experiences implementing YFI.
2. Gain an understanding of facilitators' perceptions of the strengths/challenges of implementing 24/7 dads with teenage dads-other demographic factors?

Focus Group Questions:

1. Can you tell me about the curriculum of the program? What is involved in the program content?
2. What are the strengths, challenges, and benefits of implementing this program?
3. What lessons have you learned through implementing the 24/7 dads program?
4. How do you think the program should be adapted to better meet the needs of the population (age, etc.)?