

Fathering Washington's Future: Maximizing Children's Potential

Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
Economic Services Administration

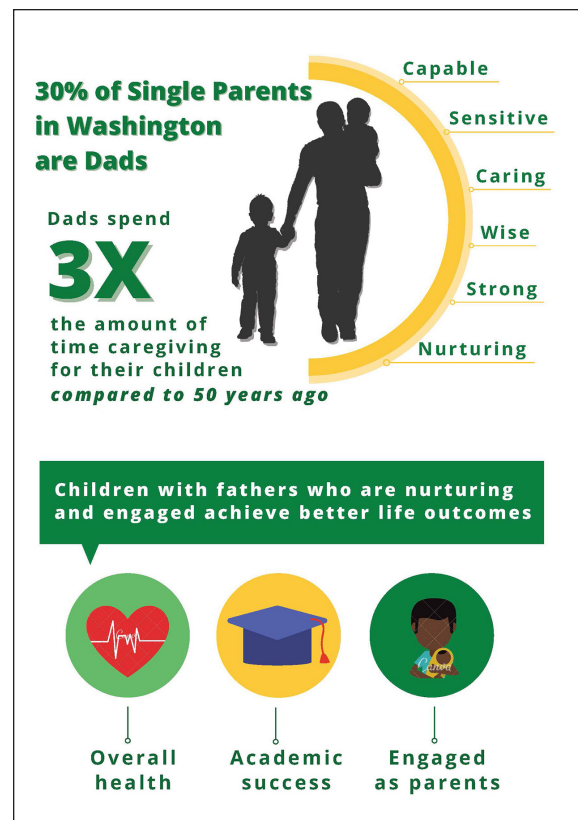
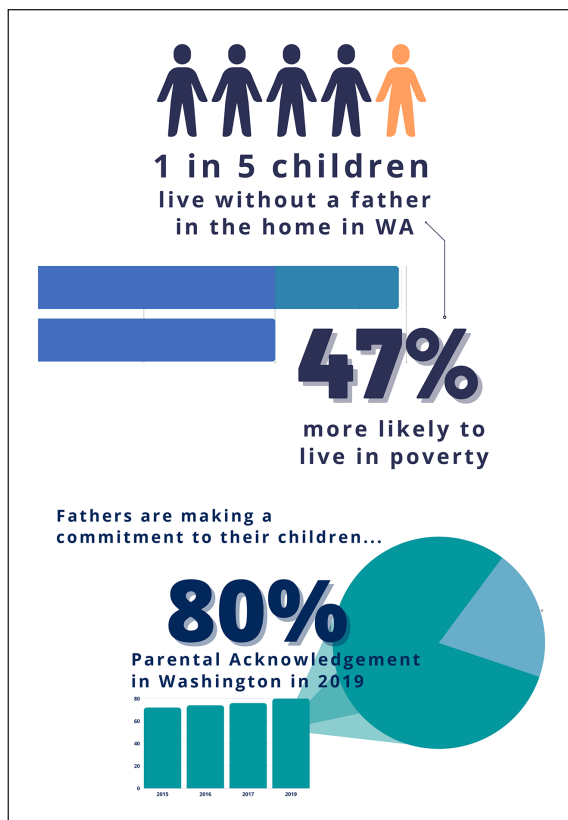
Fathering Washington's Future: Maximizing Children's Potential

ESA transforms lives by connecting children, adults and families to the resources and opportunities that help them reach their full potential in life.

Washington state recognizes that investing in children, especially young children, is a paramount duty. The people of Washington cannot expect a healthier, more resilient, more prosperous future if we don't invest in our children now — and that includes investing in fathers and families. Fatherhood programs can positively engage fathers and father figures in the lives of their children. Doing so, especially starting at birth, has proven to contribute to language development, reading and math skills, and social-emotional development that will have long-term impacts on children's emotional and economic well-being.

The positive and protective impact of fatherhood and the father-child bond on early childhood development is undeniable, and is particularly important for the child's development before the age of 3.

A father's role is unique. It functions in concert with the presence of the mother, enhancing the mother-child relationship and facilitating positive adjustment in children. Conversely, the absence of a father figure — even in infancy — can result in negative behavioral outcomes and delayed development. Quality of time is important. While resident fathers are more likely to interact consistently with their children, resident and non-resident fathers have a positive influence through intentional interaction.



ESA's Goal to Reduce Poverty by 2025 and the Role of Fathers and Father Figures

The well-established benefits of reducing poverty and inequality inspired ESA to establish a 2025 goal to reduce poverty by half in a way that eliminates disparities. ESA is proud to be a founding and sustaining partner of the **Washington Interagency Fatherhood Council**, a cross-cutting, collaborative, transformational group of more than 25 state and local providers, academics and — most importantly — fathers with lived expertise, which helps further the goals of reducing poverty and inequality.

- **Vision:** Fathers and father figures in Washington become the parents their children and families need them to be.
- **Mission:** Amplify the voices of fathers and father figures in Washington state to promote fatherhood inclusion, equity, diversity and research activity that strengthens families and maximizes children's potential.

Dad Allies Initiative

Launched in 2021 and under the WIFC umbrella, the Dad Allies Initiative builds capacity in community and programs to increase fatherhood-specific, inclusive education and support services. WIFC will leverage the Dads Allies initiative to increase visibility and workforce capacity to meet the unique needs of fathers and marginalized families.

Activities include:

- A series of *Fathering Community Cafés* across the state and within specific populations to amplify the voices of fathers, engage community providers and coalesce around our *North Star Father-Friendly Principles*.
- Formation and promotion of a set of *North Star Father-Friendly Principles* that will guide WIFC's collective work to transform systems for children and families. Partners will be asked to implement the principles at their home agency.
- An ongoing father-friendly *Provider Learning Collaborative* series delivered by local and national thought leaders on timely issues facing fathers and father figures in meeting their needs for education and support to build a strong father-friendly provider network.

North Star Father-Friendly Principles

WIFC subscribes to a set of guiding principles as it works to promote a stronger father-friendly provider network of services for fathers and father figures. The council asks all providers to consider these principles and actively engage stakeholder dialogue around how they would align their work with the principles.

How Do We Become a Father-Friendly State?

Promote Fatherhood Inclusion

Policy and programmatic action will require strategic assessment of how services can be tailored and sustained for the multitude of family needs and can better align with and reinforce the unique needs, interests and strengths of fathers and father figures.

Reduce Toxic Stress and Promote Equity

Policies and systems must strengthen safety-net programs, identify and remove barriers to resources for fathers and parents, promote equity, and prioritize systemic racism elimination and violence prevention.

Foster Positive Co-Parenting Relationships

Consider how policies, programs and services can foster positive co-parenting and reduce the stress associated with single-parent households. Adapt to the shifting socio-cultural dynamics of families; embolden efforts to strengthen families.

Invest in Fatherhood Research

Research that incorporates a fatherhood-focus is limited. Invest in stronger data that articulates the role that fathers play in their children's lives and the expressed needs of fathers through their own voices.

Coming Soon

The fourth annual Washington State Interagency Fatherhood Council Summit is coming in April 2022. A full schedule, list of speakers and summit theme will be available soon.

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(8/2021)