

A Shout-Out to Fatherhood Programs Across the Great State of Ohio

by Harold Howard, OPNFF Board President

My father just celebrated his 72nd birthday, and we'll be spending this Easter weekend together doing what we've done for years—watching the grand spectacle that is WrestleMania 41. I often tell people: I hit the fatherhood lottery. To this day, my dad is still the first person I call for advice or just a listening ear.

One story I love to share captures just how lucky I've been. It was freshman orientation at college. My entire family had made the trip to Tennessee to see me off. I was nervous—overwhelmed, honestly. As they left my dorm room one by one, my father stayed behind. He looked at me and said:

“Son, if at any point this isn't for you, I'll turn around and come back to get you.”

That simple gesture changed everything. My fear turned into focus. I knew I had someone in my corner—no matter what. And I was determined to finish what I started, to make the man who had sacrificed so much proud.

I share that story because my dad is just one of many men across Ohio who give their all to be the best fathers they can be. But here's the truth: not every dad starts with the same set of tools. Some begin with a full toolbox. Others only have the box. No matter the starting point, the mission is the same—acquire the tools necessary to meet your child's needs.

That's where Ohio's fatherhood programs have stepped in—and stepped up.

Across the state, you're doing transformative work: building dads up with the skills, resources, and confidence they need to thrive as parents. And you've done it by listening. You've asked fathers what they need most—and here's what they told us:

Top Goals Among Fathers:

- 48% want to be better fathers and improve their parenting skills
- 38% want to strengthen relationships with their child(ren)'s mother
- 32% are focused on finding employment

Support Areas in Highest Demand:

- 77% enroll in fatherhood classes
- 53% need job assistance
- 46% need help securing housing
- 35% seek help with child support issues
- 35% need help gaining access to their children

You're not just offering support—you're providing connection. From substance use treatment to mental health services, from job training to legal advocacy, your programs are helping fathers rebuild not just their lives—but their families.

While conversations about the future of fatherhood services continue, the **Ohio Practitioners' Network for Fathers and Families (OPNFF)** stands firm in its belief: that when we provide comprehensive services—including parenting education, case management, co-parenting support, employment services, and legal advocacy—fathers gain the tools to become engaged, loving, and resilient parents.

And when fathers thrive, families thrive.

So here's a heartfelt shout-out to Ohio's fatherhood champions: **Your work matters.** You're changing lives, one father at a time. Keep listening. Keep showing up. Keep building stronger families across our state.

Please keep an eye out for upcoming virtual events from OPNFF. We want to hear from you—how we can better support your work, and what kinds of training and webinars would be most helpful to you. As always, visit opnff.net to learn more about our advocacy, our programs, and our unwavering commitment to the practitioners and fathers who are building a better Ohio—one family at a time.