

APRIL
2025

COMMUNITY NEEDS & ASSETS ASSESSMENT

FOR FATHERS IN
HARRISONBURG
ROCKINGHAM



**FATHERHOOD
MATTERS**

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
SECONDARY DATA	5
Father Absence Rate	5
Drug and Alcohol Use	6
Incarceration & Recidivism.....	7
Juvenile Justice	8
Poverty	10
Teen Pregnancy	11
Child Abuse	11
Educational Attainment.....	12
Employment	12
Mental & Behavioral Health	13
Marriage & Relationship with Mom.....	14
FOCUS GROUP RESULTS	16
SURVEY FROM MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS.....	29
AREA MAP OF FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS & SERVICES.....	30
CONCLUSIONS	31
SPECIAL THANKS TO	33

INTRODUCTION

Harrisonburg City and Rockingham County, Virginia has partnered with National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) to create a city/county-wide initiative to promote more engaged fathers (whether living with or apart from their children) and father-figures. The framework for creating the initiative is NFI's Community Mobilization Approach™ (CMA), which has been used by government and nonprofit agencies operating at state, county, and city levels across the United States.

The CMA, diagrammed in Figure 1 below, consists of three phases:

- Phase 1** - a needs and assets assessment of Harrisonburg Rockingham's ability to promote responsible fatherhood;
- Phase 2** - a Leadership Summit on Fatherhood attended by community leaders;
- Phase 3** - implementing an action plan for a fatherhood initiative involving a cross-section of Harrisonburg Rockingham's community sectors.

The start of Phase I involved introducing the CMA to community leaders at a Lunch Meeting hosted by Harrisonburg Rockingham Social Services on August 31, 2024, attended by nearly 40 city and county leaders from various sectors.

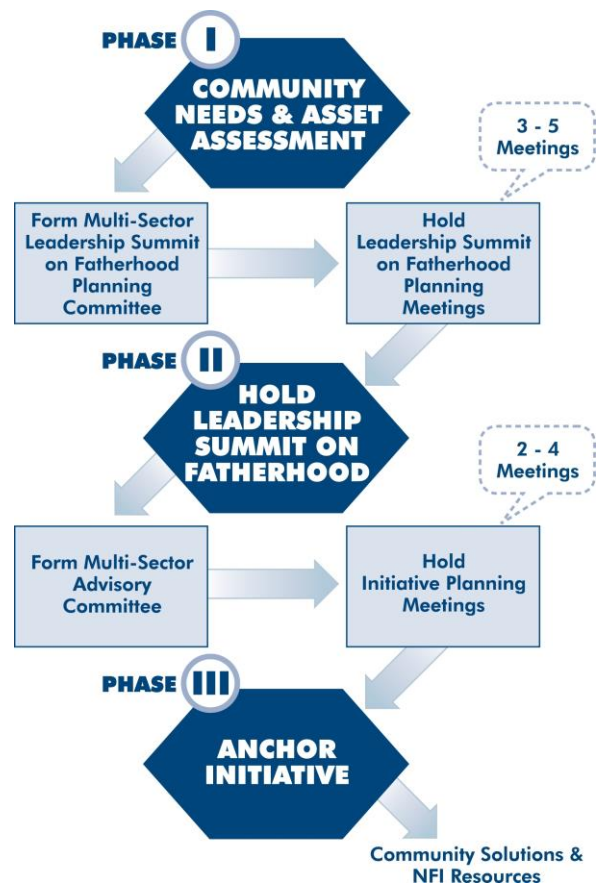
Following the initial meeting in August 2024, several community leaders met monthly to develop a launch plan for the Fatherhood Initiative, accompanying a Leadership Summit on April 24, 2025, under the direction of Erik Vecere, the Chief Partner Success Officer for National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI).

At the Leadership Summit, the following secondary data will be presented on issues related to father absence and involvement in Harrisonburg Rockingham. Together with Erik Vecere and the help of community leaders from multiple community life sectors, the goal is to develop an action plan for promoting responsible fatherhood, and to anchor an initiative.

This report is the culmination of Phase I, the Community Needs and Assets Assessment. This phase is driven by the application of NFI's research methodology called the *Rapid Ethnographic Assessment of Programs and Services (REAPS)* for fathers. It allows for collecting comprehensive data on the state of fatherhood programs and services in a community with the participation of community leaders.

This REAPS will help leaders in Harrisonburg Rockingham:

- Identify the need to address father absence with an emphasis on reducing drug and opioid misuse.



- Identify the services and programs for fathers that exist in Harrisonburg Rockingham and the service and program gaps.
- Identify the assets in Harrisonburg Rockingham that can be mobilized to promote responsible fatherhood.
- Identify potential strategies for the promotion of responsible fatherhood that can be woven into the social fabric of Harrisonburg Rockingham.
- Collect information critical to attracting funds for a sustainable city/county-wide fatherhood initiative.

The REAPS has four components:

1. Gathering secondary (existing) data.
2. Conducting focus groups with leaders in different sectors to supplement the data.
3. Analyzing the data and focus group results, and report writing.
4. Creating a community “assets” map using the results of components 1 through 3.



Fun Day with Dad @ Horizons Edge, Photos by José Martinez

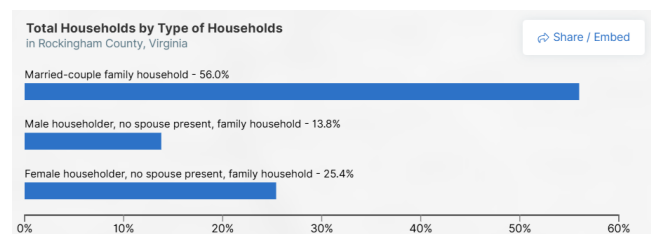
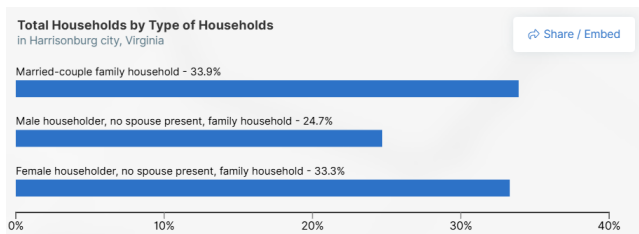
SECONDARY DATA

This section of the report presents the “Local Picture” for Harrisonburg Rockingham related to 12 issues (topics) of interest to community leaders. This is the most recent, readily available data from government agencies or nongovernmental organizations at the national, state, or local level. The Local Picture is followed by research on why father absence or presence matters to the issue as a way to draw the attention of community leaders to the impact of father absence and presence.

Father Absence Rate

Local Picture: According to the US Census Bureau, in Harrisonburg City, of all children under 18 years of age who live with single mothers is 33.3%. In Rockingham County, 25.4% are single-mom households.¹ However, it is noteworthy that there are 24.7% single-father households in Harrisonburg City, but 13.8% single-father households in Rockingham County.²

While the majority of children in father-absent homes grow up with single mothers, some non-resident fathers are involved in their children’s lives. According to the Virginia Department of Health, 27% of the children in Harrisonburg Rockingham are living in single-parent households in 2022.³



Why It Matters: Father absence is a crisis affecting a quarter of our nation’s children (24.1%).⁴ It has staggering human and economic costs. Decades of research show unequivocally that children who grow up without a resident father (i.e., biological, step, or adoptive) are at higher risk, on average, for a host of poor physical, cognitive (mental and emotional), and social outcomes. These children are more likely, for example, to be poor, use drugs, be abused, engage in criminal activity, perform poorly in school, be injured, and have emotional and behavioral problems compared to children who grow up with a resident father.⁵

These poor outcomes are not simply correlated with father absence, they’re caused by them. A meta-analysis of nearly 50 studies that employed innovative, rigorous designs to examine the causal effects of father absence concluded that father absence causes poor outcomes for children in educational attainment, mental health, relationship formation and stability, and labor force success.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2023. https://data.census.gov/profile/Harrisonburg_city,_Virginia?g=050XX00US51660#families-and-living-arrangements

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2023. https://data.census.gov/profile/Rockingham_County,_Virginia?g=050XX00US51165#families-and-living-arrangements

³ https://www.dss.virginia.gov/geninfo/ldss_profile/births/index.html

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2023. Current Population Survey.

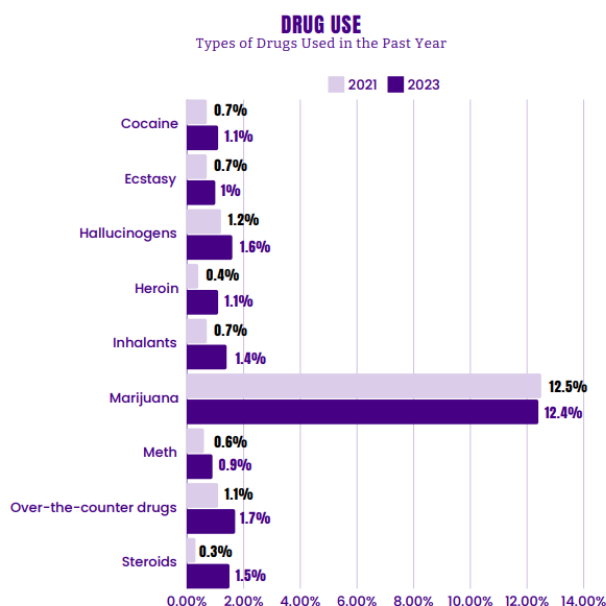
⁵ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.

Drug and Alcohol Use

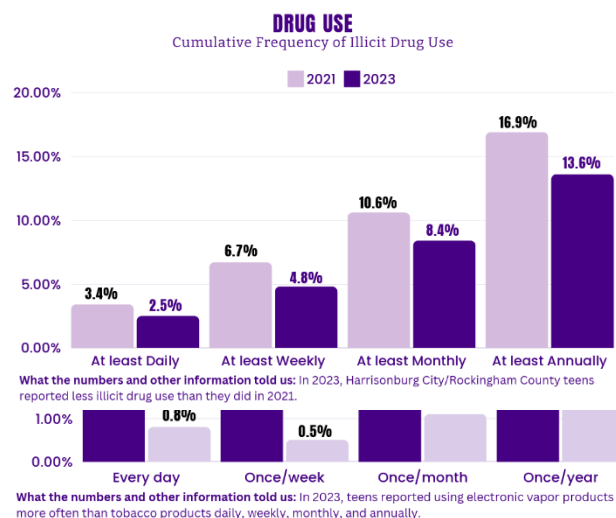
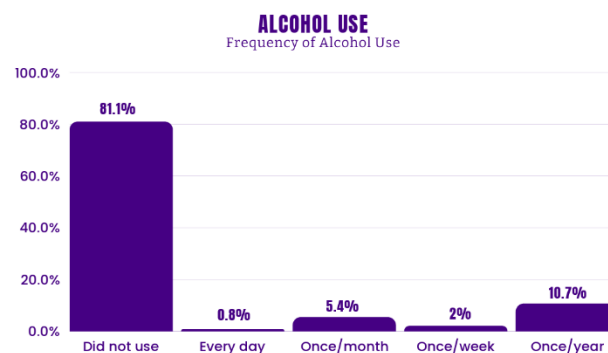
Local Picture: There were 5 overdose deaths in each Harrisonburg and Rockingham County in 2018, 8 in each Harrisonburg and Rockingham County in 2021, but 11 in Rockingham County in 2023, and 6 in Harrisonburg in 2023.⁶ From the data set is unclear which drug is the main driver of increased overdose deaths. However, the Virginia Department of Health states natural and synthetic opioids (esp. fentanyl) cause the most drug overdose deaths among Virginia residents.

Cocaine (531 to 1,167), Methamphetamine (233 to 1,381), and illicit synthetic opioids (50 to 1,008) have drastically increased from 2014 to 2023, as much as 16 times. For details on the trends of drug use in the region of Rockingham and Harrisonburg, see the report on the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services.⁷

James Madison University's Institute for Innovation in Health and Human Services (IIHHS) completed a Youth Data Survey in Oct/Nov 2023 for youth in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. Surveys were completed by 1,762 students between the ages of 12 and 19.⁸ Below are the self-reported results regarding drug and alcohol use:



What the numbers and other information told us: Marijuana remains the most used drug with 12.4% of youth using at least annually. Across the board, drug use observed an increase in 2023.



Why It Matters: Drug and alcohol use has a negative impact on Harrisonburg Rockingham's community health. Family structure impacts adolescent

⁶ <https://data.virginia.gov/dataset/vdh-pud-overdose-deaths-by-fips>

⁷ <https://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/sites/dcjs.virginia.gov/files/publications/research/drug-cases-submitted-virginia-department-forensic-science-cy-2023.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.jmu.edu/iihhs/yds-2023-report.pdf>

substance and alcohol use significantly, particularly for young men. Children from father-absent homes are more likely to use substances or alcohol. Research points to the importance of paternal involvement as a protective factor against alcohol and substance abuse.⁹

Incarceration and Recidivism

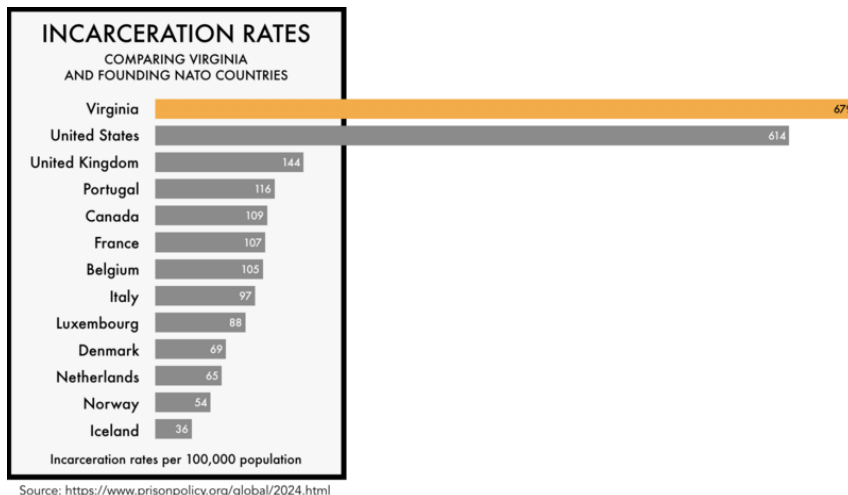


Local Picture: According to

Virginia Department of Corrections, the incarcerated rate is 679 per 100,000 residents.¹⁰

According to Captain Wimer, the average daily population for males at Rockingham County Regional Jail has ranged between 250 and 270 over the past three years.

The Rockingham-Harrisonburg Court Services Unit is a multi-jurisdictional project that provides Community Corrections and pretrial services to the City of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County.¹¹



District 39 Probation & Parole includes Harrisonburg City, Rockingham County and Page County. In FY2019, based on data from the Virginia Corrections Information System (VACORIS), District 39 has a recidivism rate of 33.8% (236 of 698 supervisees), the highest in Virginia, and nearly double the state average of 17.6%. Of the 698 supervisees, 531 are male (76%) and 167 are female (24%). At community start, 239 of those supervisees were ages 29 and younger.¹²

According to the definitions of key terms, “A supervisee is considered a recidivist if he/she is sentenced to a term of state responsible incarceration [7] within three years following his/her community start date, even if he/she is no longer on community supervision at the time of the recidivating offense. A supervisee is not considered a recidivist if he/she is not sentenced to a term of state responsible incarceration.”¹³



Why It Matters: The vast majority of incarcerated parents in the country are fathers, more than 9 in 10.

Incarcerated fathers can face several barriers to maintaining a connection to their children, including the desire of the non-incarcerated parent for the child not to visit their incarcerated father. The effects of paternal incarceration on children are negative and generational, including reduced cognitive abilities, reduced educational and academic outcomes, poorer health and well-being, increased stress, and reduced economic stability. Some studies have documented the negative effect of paternal incarceration on children’s biology (e.g., hormones). Incarcerated fathers are less likely than non-incarcerated fathers to provide both formal and

⁹ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.

¹⁰ <https://www.vadoc.virginia.gov/media/2143/population-summary-january-2025.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.rockinghamcountyva.gov/366/Court-Services-Unit>

¹² <https://vadoc.virginia.gov/general-public/recidivism-studies/>

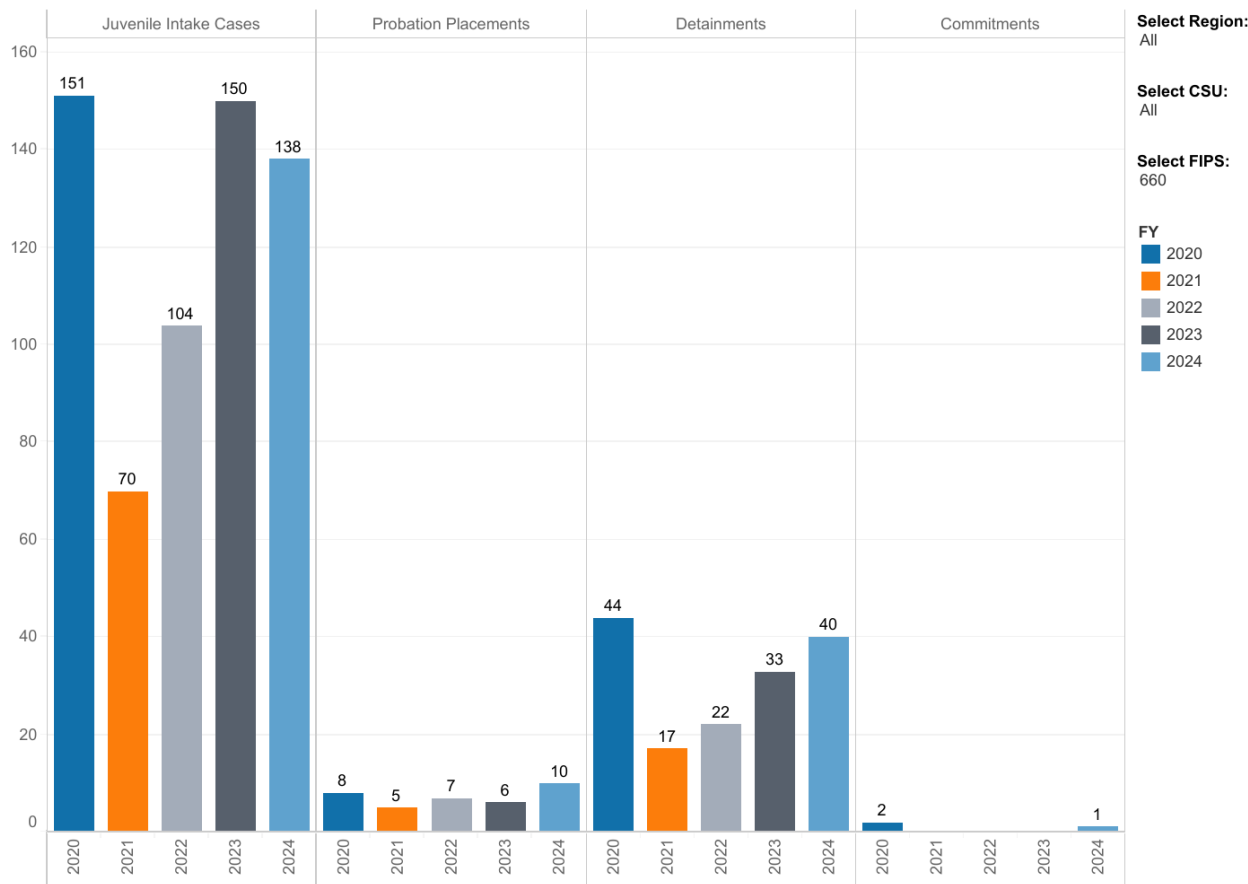
¹³ <https://vadoc.virginia.gov/general-public/recidivism-studies/>

informal financial support to their children. Incarceration also negatively affects relationships between fathers and the co-parents of their children.¹⁴ Fortunately, the negative effects can be ameliorated to an extent when incarcerated fathers build and maintain family connections. Strong family ties reduce recidivism rates.¹⁵

Juvenile Justice

Local Picture: Below are the Juvenile Intake Cases, Probation Placements, Detainments, and Commitments for FY 2020-2024.¹⁶ Harrisonburg has FIPS code 660, and Rockingham County has 165.

Juvenile Intake Cases, Probation Placements, Detainments, and Commitments, FY 2020-2024*

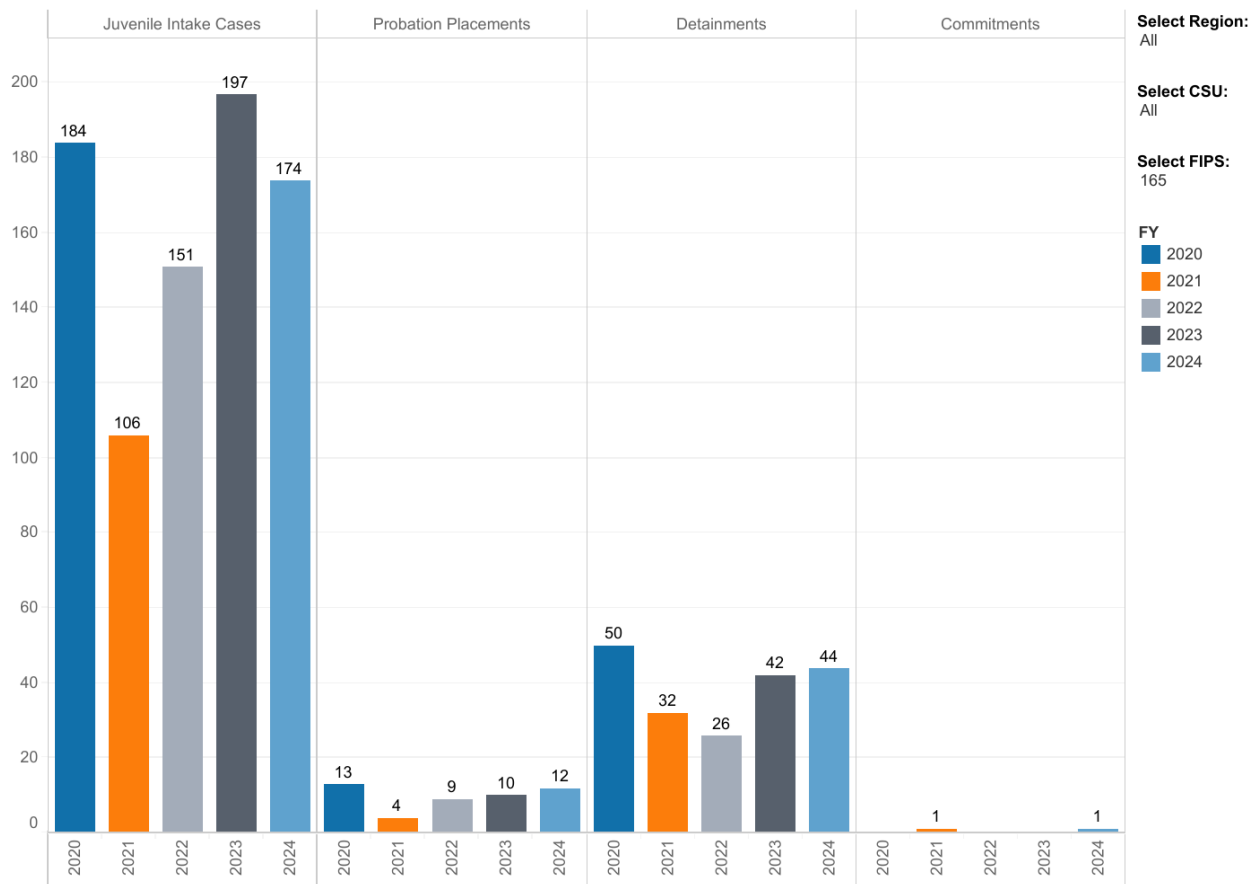


* Probation placements may include cases open in multiple CSUs, which are counted once per CSU.
* Detainment data are identified by the CSU that made the decision to detain the youth (not the JDC location).
* Detainments that were not assigned a detaining FIPS are excluded.
* Subsequent commitments are excluded.

Figure 1, Harrisonburg

¹⁴ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.
¹⁵ Prison Policy Initiative, 2024. Retrieved from https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/12/21/family_contact/
¹⁶ <https://www.djj.virginia.gov/pages/about-djj/drg-dashboard.htm>

Juvenile Intake Cases, Probation Placements, Detainments, and Commitments, FY 2020-2024*



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Figure 2, Rockingham

★ Why It Matters: Father Absence is associated with long-term effects on children’s delinquent behavior and criminal activity later in life. A cumulative effect of risk factors, such as low socioeconomic status and lack of social support, may contribute to those effects. Father absence due to incarceration may increase the risk that children engage in delinquent behaviors in school. Research suggests that there are differences in how father absence affects delinquency based on gender, with father absence being more closely linked to criminal activity for young men but not for women. Research also suggests that the quality of father-child relationships can have an impact on delinquency, with poorer quality associated with higher levels of delinquency.¹⁷

¹⁷ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.

Poverty

Local Picture: According to the 2023 US Census, 25.6% of Harrisonburg City residents live in poverty. This is more than double the rate of poverty for all Virginia residents, which is 10.2%.¹⁸ In Rockingham County, the rate of poverty is 11.6%.¹⁹

VDSS states: “Research shows that children born to teen and unwed mothers are more likely to live in poverty. Areas with a population that exhibits higher than average rates of teen and non-marital births may be more likely to need public assistance and family services.” In 2022, 2,723 children (27%) were born to unmarried women ages 15-44, and 308 children (6.5%) to female teens 10-19 years.²⁰

There are *ALICE* children in every community across the U.S. ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE households earned above the federal poverty level but less than what it costs to afford basic expenses for a household’s budget. ALICE households often do not earn enough to make ends meet, which leads to tough financial choices like whether to pay a bill or buy food. Of the 26,571 children in the Central Shenandoah Planning District (which includes Harrisonburg Rockingham), 11,072 are considered ALICE children, and 5,411 are considered Poverty. According to that data, in 2022, 52% of the population is below the ALICE threshold.²¹

Children living in single-parent households are more likely to fall in the ALICE population due to having only one adult income earner in the home. Here is the financial status by household member in Virginia from 2022:

Children by Household Financial Status and Household Characteristics, Virginia, 2022

	TOTAL	BELOW ALICE THRESHOLD	POVERTY	ALICE	ABOVE ALICE THRESHOLD
ALL CHILDREN	1,860,499	908,357	13%	36%	51%
LIVING ARRANGEMENTS					
Grandparent Living With Grandchild	231,276	141,534	15%	46%	39%
Married-Couple Household	1,274,787	473,811	5%	32%	63%
Single-Female-Headed Household	359,245	286,306	34%	45%	20%
Single-Male-Headed Household	87,464	50,444	14%	44%	42%
HOUSEHOLD WORK STATUS					
One Adult, One Worker	206,845	153,848	28%	46%	26%
Two Adults, One Worker	403,471	259,848	17%	48%	36%
Two Adults, Two Workers	682,077	198,144	3%	26%	71%

¹⁸ https://data.census.gov/profile/Harrisonburg_city,_Virginia?g=050XX00US51660#populations-and-people

¹⁹ https://data.census.gov/profile/Rockingham_County,_Virginia?g=050XX00US51165#income-and-poverty

²⁰ https://www.dss.virginia.gov/geninfo/ldss_profile/births/index.html

²¹ <https://www.unitedforalice.org/local-maps/focus-children>

★ **Why It Matters:** Father absence increases economic hardship for children. Children living in father-absent homes are at greater risk for growing up in poverty, living in disordered neighborhoods, and experiencing food insecurity than are their peers with involved fathers. Involvement by a nonresident father, both in active engagement with children and payment of formal child support, may reduce long-term economic hardship (e.g., food insecurity) and income disparities.²²

Teen Pregnancy

📍 **Local Picture:** According to Virginia Department of Health, in 2020, there were 30 live teenage births in Rockingham and 30 live teenage births in Harrisonburg. There were 38 total teenage pregnancies in Rockingham and 40 total teenage pregnancies in Harrisonburg.²³

Virginia's Plan for Wellbeing shows Rockingham had 38 pregnancies of females ages 15-19 in 2022 and 50 teenage pregnancies the same year in Harrisonburg.²⁴ The Virginia Department of Health reported for 2022, 2,723 children (27%) were born to unmarried women ages 15-44, and 308 children (6.5%) to female teens 10-19 years.²⁵

★ **Why It Matters:** Growing up without an involved father has a significant impact on children's risk to engage in sexual behavior and age of initiated sexual behavior, thus increasing the risk of pregnancy and subsequent births to teen mothers. The closeness and quality of father-son and father-daughter relationships may reduce risks associated with sexual activity, including early sexual onset, inconsistent condom use, and sexually transmitted diseases. Paternal incarceration, limiting father involvement, increases these risks. Studies also point to the effect that father absence has on the age of menarche for young women and the younger age of early sexual onset for young women and young men. Overall, the effects of father absence on sexual activity in youth point to earlier and riskier sexual behavior for children who grow up in father-absent homes, while the presence of an involved father reduces these risks.²⁶

Child Abuse

📍 **Local Picture:** According to the Virginia Department of Social Services, between July 2023 and June 2024, in Harrisonburg, there were 516 accepted allegations of child abuse & neglect. The types of maltreatment allegations include medical neglect, mental abuse/neglect, physical abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse, substance abuse, and substance-exposed infants. In Rockingham, there were 1,226 accepted allegations of child abuse & neglect.²⁷

★ **Why It Matters:** Child maltreatment is influenced by multiple factors involving interactions at the community, family, and individual levels. Household economic hardship, unemployment, young maternal age, low educational attainment, personal history of abuse or neglect, alcohol or drug overuse, parenting stress, and depression can all be related to child maltreatment. While most perpetrators are parents of the children

²² National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.

²³ <https://apps.vdh.virginia.gov/HealthStats/stats.htm>

²⁴ <https://virginiawellbeing.com/virginia-community-health-improvement-data-portal/vdh-assessment>

²⁵ https://www.dss.virginia.gov/geninfo/ldss_profile/births/index.html

²⁶ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.

²⁷ https://www.dss.virginia.gov/geninfo/reports/children/cps/all_other.cgi

being mistreated, father involvement can be a protective factor for children especially if the perpetrator is the other parent. A nonresident fathers' support (e.g., in-kind informal support and formal child support) can act as a protective factor against child neglect, as most neglect cases in single-parent families are influenced by a lack of economic resources and increased rates of poverty.²⁸

Educational Attainment

 **Local Picture:** Educational attainment is calculated for persons over 25 years old. For Harrisonburg, between 2019-2023, 83.3% have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 89.4% in the US. In Rockingham, 87.0% have a bachelor's degree or higher, also between 2019-2023. Those in Harrisonburg with a bachelors degree or higher are 36.7% and 28.4% in Rockingham.²⁹

 **Why It Matters:** The presence of fathers is associated with increased levels of children's educational attainment, while the absence of fathers may reduce educational attainment and increase behavioral problems at school. Transitions such as divorce and separation may affect children's learning and success in school. The duration of father absence is a factor in educational success as is the quality of father-child relationships. Family structure not only affects educational outcomes for children but is also associated with educational expectations. Boys from father-absent homes and who are born out of wedlock are less likely to attend college than are girls in the same situation.

Students living in biological father-absent homes are twice as likely to repeat a grade in school; 10% of children living with both parents have ever repeated a grade, compared to 20% of children in stepfather families and 18% in mother-only families.³⁰

Employment

 **Local Picture:** The employment rate in Rockingham is 61.2%, according to the 2023 US Census report.³¹ The employment rate in the same year for Harrisonburg is 56.9%.³² In the civilian labor force, the total percent of population ages 16+ for 2019-2023 is 61.2% in Harrisonburg and 63.5% in Rockingham.³³

According to the Division of Child Support Enforcement, there are currently 1,237 fathers who owe back child support in Harrisonburg Rockingham (Rockingham - 776; Harrisonburg - 461). Despite DCSE's Family Engagement Service to engage fathers and reduce arrears, many fathers struggle to keep on top of their bills and current on child support, especially when they have little to no access to their children.

 **Why It Matters:** Evidence suggests that men who are under financial strain or who have unstable employment have more problems being responsible fathers and establishing a household than do other fathers.³⁴ Lack of economic and employment stability are likely to matter for children's and fathers' well-being.

²⁸ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.

²⁹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/rockinghamcountyvirginia,harrisonburgcityvirginia,US/EDU635223>

³⁰ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.

³¹ https://data.census.gov/profile/Rockingham_County,_Virginia?g=050XX00US51165#employment

³² https://data.census.gov/profile/Harrisonburg_city,_Virginia?g=050XX00US51660#employment

³³ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/rockinghamcountyvirginia,harrisonburgcityvirginia,US#>

³⁴ Roy, K. M. (2005). Transitions on the margins of work and family life for low-income African-American fathers. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 26(1), 77-100.

National data show that in recent decades fathers are spending more time with their children than ever. The increase in time fathers spend with children has, ironically, contributed to an increase in family-work conflict among fathers. Fathers now report more family-work conflict than do mothers. Moreover, greater family-work conflict leads to lower quality father-child relationships. Half of fathers report difficulty balancing work and childcare responsibilities. Full-time employment negatively affects father time. On the other hand, a supportive work environment reduces family-work conflict. And yet very few companies offer paid paternity leave. Nearly 9 in 10 fathers take leave after the birth of their child, but most of them take a week or less of time off. Nontraditional work schedules may have a negative effect on unmarried fathers' family-work balance compared to married fathers who work such schedules.³⁵

Mental & Behavioral Health

 **Local Picture:** In Harrisonburg, with a population of 51,978, there were a total of 24 deaths to suicide. In the Central Shenandoah Health District, the percentage of adults with Depressive Disorder is 22.5%, compared to Virginia's rate of 19.62%.³⁶

According to Sentara RMH Medical Center's community health needs assessment, in 2021, 8.5% of the visits among adults had an anxiety diagnosis, 12.8% with major depressive disorder, and 5.1% were diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Among youth ages 0-17, 40.3% of the emergency department behavioral health visits had suicidal ideations, and 4.8% had an anxiety diagnosis. See the chart below for more data.³⁷

Emergency Department Behavioral Health Visits

Sentara RMH Medical Center Emergency Department Behavioral Health Visits, Top 4 Diagnosis, 2021					
	Behavioral Health (Patient Frequency)	Suicidal Ideations	Major Depressive Disorder	Anxiety	Bipolar Disorder
Adults, 18+	1,972	18.1%	12.8%	8.5%	5.1%
Youth, 0-17	290	40.3%	16.2%	4.8%	0.3%

Source: Sentara RMH Medical Center Emergency Department encounters, 2021
*Patient Frequency includes multiple visits

 **Why It Matters:** Positive father involvement can be a significant predictor of children's cognitive development and emotional well-being, while father absence boosts externalizing behaviors and adolescent risk behaviors. Multiple adjustments (e.g., changing family structures) experienced by children in single-mother households can have adverse effects on children's behavioral health. Studies show differences based on gender, with some studies pointing to increased risk for girls. Importantly, the quality of the father-child relationship is very influential for children and their emotional and behavioral regulation.³⁸

While the research is limited, there is evidence pointing to the role of fathers and paternal care in predicting suicide risk in children. Perceptions of father love, connectedness to a father, and father presence are linked to lower potential for suicide in children, while weak father-child bonds, poor attachment, and father-child conflict

³⁵ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.

³⁶ <https://viriniawellbeing.com/virginia-community-health-improvement-data-portal/vdh-assessment>

³⁷ <https://www.sentara.com/Documents/s/SRMHCHNAAppendices2022pdf-275271>

³⁸ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.

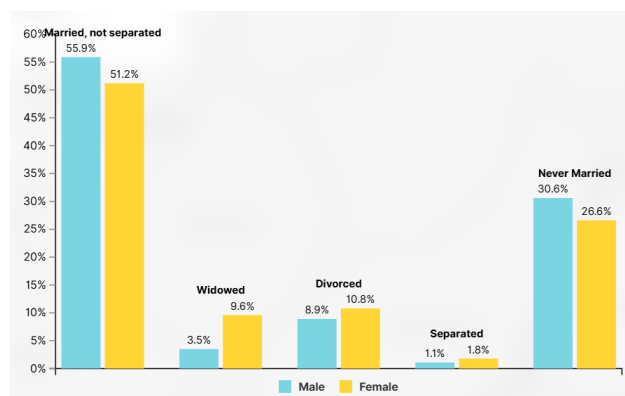
are linked to greater potential for suicide in children. Fathers may be more at risk for suicide if their own father committed suicide.³⁹

Marriage & Relationship with Mom

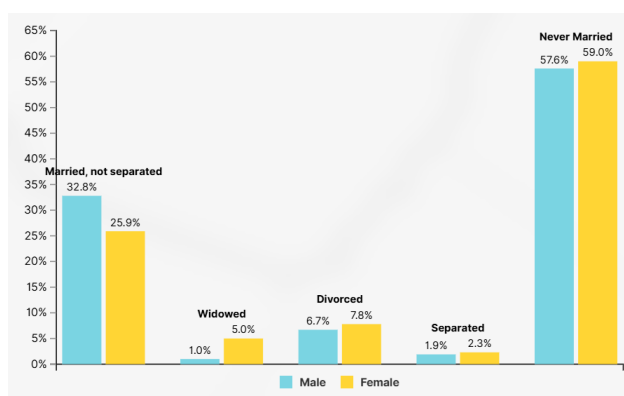
Local Picture: As of 2023, in Rockingham, 30.6% men and 25.6% of women were never married.⁴⁰ In Harrisonburg, 57.6% men and 59.0% of women were never married.⁴¹ See the chart below for a breakdown.

In 2022, the Virginia Paternity Establishment Program had a 92% paternal establishment rate. Paternity establishment is very important, as “babies who are born to unmarried parents do not have the same rights as babies born to married parents in the commonwealth of Virginia unless paternity is established. [Because] if paternity was not established, if the father died, the baby does not have automatic rights to death benefits like life insurance....[and] they have no access to that money.”⁴²

Children without established paternity, she said, also do not have access to their father’s health records.



Rockingham County, 2023



Harrisonburg City, 2023

Why It Matters: Americans today have a pessimistic view of marriage and parenthood, more so women than men. And fewer Americans are marrying than ever, especially men. Coupled with the rise in cohabitation—a more unstable relationship form than marriage—there has been an increasing emphasis in research on comparing the impact of relationship stability on father involvement.

Despite Americans’ pessimism about marriage, most research indicates that married fathers are much happier than are unmarried fathers. With the exception of some recent research, it also indicates that married fathers are more involved with their children than are nonresident or cohabiting fathers. The involvement of married fathers varies based on whether they live with all of their children (e.g., fathers in second or third marriages). Married and cohabiting fathers can be less involved with the children they don’t live with (i.e., non-coresident children) than are fathers who are unmarried and not cohabiting. Unmarried fathers may become less involved

³⁹ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.

⁴⁰ https://data.census.gov/profile/Rockingham_County,_Virginia?g=050XX00US51165#families-and-living-arrangements

⁴¹ https://data.census.gov/profile/Harrisonburg_city,_Virginia?g=050XX00US51660#families-and-living-arrangements

⁴² <https://viriniamercury.com/2023/08/28/92-of-virginia-babies-have-fathers-ided-on-their-birth-certificates/>

over time, but their involvement is important in the lives of their children. Marriage may matter more for the involvement of “social” fathers (e.g., cohabiting father figures) than biological fathers.⁴³

When fathers are involved in their children’s lives, mothers generally report higher levels of relationship (e.g., marital) satisfaction. However, different parenting styles can lead to relationship conflict and differences in perceived relationship satisfaction. Moreover, low relationship satisfaction/high relationship conflict may influence how well fathers cooperate with mothers to parent their children. Relationship satisfaction may differ between first-time and second-time fathers, with the former experiencing steeper declines in satisfaction. Father involvement is positively associated with couples’ satisfaction and reduced stress.⁴⁴



Fun Day with Dad @ Horizons Edge, Photos by José Martinez

⁴³ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.

⁴⁴ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2024. *Father Facts 9th Edition*.

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Community leaders in Harrisonburg Rockingham completed 9 focus group surveys. Focus group participants represented a variety of sectors and organizations serving children and families.

The goal of these focus groups was to help identify needs to address and local assets to mobilize around promoting responsible fatherhood. These results complement the secondary data reported above and will aid in developing a “city & county assets map” for Harrisonburg Rockingham. National Fatherhood Initiative® will also use the results to inform the remaining phases of the CMA, the Leadership Summit on Fatherhood (LSF), and an Action Plan to Promote Responsible Fatherhood.

The objectives of the focus groups were to identify: 1) the need to address father absence in Harrisonburg Rockingham; 2) the services and programs for fathers that exist in Harrisonburg Rockingham and the service and program gaps; 3) the assets in Harrisonburg Rockingham that can be mobilized to promote responsible fatherhood; 4) the leaders and organizations in sectors that are often a challenge to get to attend the LSF and to ensure that these leaders and organizations are invited to attend the event; and 5) information critical to attracting funding for a sustainable city- and countywide fatherhood initiative.

To accomplish the objectives, we asked the leaders a series of questions. This section of the report groups the questions by objectives and includes leaders’ responses and a summary of those responses.

The community sectors represented in the focus groups were:

- City/County Government
- Civic and Cultural Groups
- Education
- Faith
- Healthcare
- Law Enforcement
- Non-Profit/Social Service

INDIVIDUAL SURVEYS

QUESTION 1A:

What proportion/percentage of children in this community do you think are growing up without a biological, step, or adoptive father in the home?

Responses:

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| • Approx. 35% | • I believe about 60% |
| • 25% | • 30% |
| • 18% | • 75% |
| • Approx. 28% | |

QUESTION 1B:

Would you say that the proportion/percentage is higher, lower, or about the same as the rest of the state, on average?

Responses:

- Higher (43%)
- Lower (14%)

- About the same (43%)

QUESTION 1C:

Would you say that the proportion/percentage is higher, lower, or about the same as the rest of the United States, on average?

Responses:

- About the same (43%)
- Lower (29%)
- Higher (14%)
- Do not know (14%)

QUESTION 2A:

Please rate your level of concern about father absence in your community. Would you say your level of concern is:

Responses:

- Very high (43%)
- Somewhat high (57%)

One survey added: Depends on the reason they are absent.

QUESTION 2B:

Please rate the level of concern that other leaders in your area have concerning father absence in your community. Would you say the level of concern is:

Responses:

- Somewhat high (43%)
- Very high (14%)
- Somewhat low (43%)

QUESTION 3:

Please rate the level of awareness in the community at large of the problem of father absence.

Would you say it is:

Responses:

- Somewhat high (29%)
- Somewhat low (71%)

QUESTION 4:

How important is an involved father to the healthy development of his children? Would you say he is:

Responses:

- Very important (71%)
- Important (29%)

QUESTION 5:

What benefits, if any, do children receive from fathers' active participation in children's lives?

Responses:

- Children need a male role model in their lives. Fathers can provide stability, security, comfort, and encouragement.
- Wisdom, guidance, presence, authority figure, love, care, concern, provides basic necessities, better grades, school behavior.
- Stability, a role model, financially stable life (more at least), better educational outcomes at school,

better social skills.

- Has potential to contribute to a child's overall development via important long-term mental, cognitive, social, and physical outcomes and family functioning; can contribute to lower health, behavior, academics problems. Absence of a father may well indicate an ACE factor (parent divorce, separation, absence) having potential to contribute long-term human health issues.

Recommend reading of "The Effects of Involved Fatherhood on Families, and How Fathers can be Supported both at the Workplace and in the Home".

UNITED NATIONS Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) Division for Social Policy and Development's Expert Group Meeting on Family Policies and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, New York, 12 – 13 May 2016 BehsonRobbins.pdf

- Active fathers play a significant role in the child(ren) lives. Positive role model, emotional support, creating balance in the home in parenting, and creating lifelong bonds.
- Better educational success, better financial stability, less drug use, less criminal behavior. Better discipline.
- Healthcare treatments, any concerns that are addressed. Parents will often have different perspectives.

QUESTION 5A:

Are there any other benefits of father involvement? Please list them.

Responses:

- Fathers help children learn social skills, life skills, work and career skills.
- Stability
- I imagine the child has more self-confidence.
- There obviously are numerous potential benefits, reasons, offerings and leanings toward optimal development of children, not to speak of the personal satisfaction a father receives from fulfilling his duty as parent (ethics).

In terms of a human psyche, the father archetype has been considered an important aspect of male psyche and plays a significant role in shaping individual personality and behavior, esp. during childhood (correlative with a mother archetype), thus providing an important influence upon one's individuation process. If the actual father figure provides a negative, regressive influence, the archetype can become a corrective energy if reflected upon with support.

- The benefits of a father's involvement can be fewer behavioral issues, higher educational achievements, enriched social skills, and in some cases better emotional control.
- Better mental/emotional health of family members.
- Yes - additional support for child, knowledge of medical or mental health concerns that could run in families; can help with diagnosis and treatment.

Does the community benefit in any way from fathers' involvement in the lives of their children?

If so, how?

Responses:

- "It takes a village" - Fathers provide discipline, support and encouragement. They learn values, morals, ethics, etc.
- Yes, stability. Lower rates of misbehavior, acting out, better citizen, etc.
- Many defendants in criminal cases claim to want to be part of their children's lives.
- Active fatherhood benefits community by fostering strong, stable families, promoting positive social values, and contributing to the overall well-being of children, which leads to a healthier and more cohesive community with reduced social problems like crime and delinquency; thus, involved fathers can play a crucial role in shaping responsible citizens within a community.

- The community can benefit from active fathers, if they are willing to get involved in the community and be a mentor to those that need it.
- Strong families have always been the foundation of strong and healthy communities and nations. Greater likelihood of thriving communities with less crime.
- Yes

Do women or mothers benefit in any way? If so, how?

Responses:

- Fathers demonstrate how to live, support and encourage mothers/women.
- Protection, comfort, care
- Stability, child care, income, team-mate
- Single parenting is clearly a stressful position in most cases; sharing in the responsibilities in some fashion can reduce overall individual and system stress.
The addition of a father figure has potential to strengthen family bonds and stability, which is critical for children's overall well-being. At the same time, being mindful of variables how individuals affect one another through personal resources and stressors (risk & resilient factors) and quality of relating to a family system. Recognizing in the words of Tolstoy (Anna Karina), "All happy families are the same; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." The flow of a once distant, estranged father brings with him his own attachment style and shadow along with other forces that can have unfavorable, favorable or neutral effect on others in the family system (subsystems). Since parents' risk levels influence children directly and indirectly through parenting behaviors, the need for additional support is advisable in some cases. Since many parent relationships end and take on alternative relationships, there are options/variables in terms of how a father (or father figure) might provide a praxis of fathering a child/youth; e.g., co-parenting, offering respite to a mother, regular contact contributing to the burgeoning a child's outlook and development, being a part of appointments (school, medical, etc.) which over time can add to trust and engagement.
- Yes, they benefit because it takes the burden off them solely, and they have support in raising their child(ren). Helps to balance the household.
- Huge benefit! Less poverty and overwhelm Better financial stability. Better mental/emotional health.
- They can - to have an involved co-parent to share parenting responsibilities.

QUESTION 5B:

What does being an involved father mean to you?

Responses:

- It means I am present to listen, love, encourage, guide, shape and motivate.
- Actively involved in their child's life, providing for them, caring for them, "walking" with them through life's ups and downs, teaching them how to be a man.
- Spending time, activities, wisdom/knowledge, involvement in education (help with homework, reading together).
- One only has to look at the animal kingdom to see how necessary a father's involvement at some practical level is crucial in the development and actualization of a parent, child and family as a system in a community.
An involved father has potential to offer numerous benefits at various level of human development and functioning, which can be actualized by examining, acknowledging and identifying one's strengths, resources/support, primary duties and desired outcomes (over time), prioritizing needs of family and children and ensuring helpful, nurturing activities and strategies that promote discerned outcomes in various life domains and functioning.
- Support, balance, mentor, trust, role model.

- Loving, caring & providing for needs of children & spouse. Being present and bonding with children. Taking responsibility for well-being of family.
- Having and following through with parenting responsibilities including but not limited to attending medical/mental health appointments, school events, sporting events, etc.

QUESTION 6:

How important do you think it is to mobilize resources in your sector to address father absence in this community? Would you say it is:

Responses:

- Very important (43%)
- Important (57%)

QUESTION 7A:

Are you aware of any assets/resources within your own organization that could be mobilized to address the issue of father absence? If so, which ones?

Responses:

- Youth services has a new supervisor. This role was created to develop ideas for supportive youth programs in our division.
- Our facilities can be utilized, congregants participation, servanthood, great speakers, mentors
- Not really. It's not something he takes into account in prosecution.
- Mental health and substance abuse treatment and services for children, adolescents and adults (outpatient psychotherapy, medication management, SA treatment)
Psychotherapy for children can accommodate the parent(s) within a treatment plan with goals. For overwhelmed families with high levels of stress and community service involvement, the agency can support via case-management and care coordination and family systems support
Practitioners can address an absent parent's context with support and engagement as long as a client and custodial parent agrees.
For new parents of high need children (has higher potential for parent cut-off and distance) the agency provides Infant and Toddler Connection, which can help reduce stress around the complexity of a child's needs.
The agency provides a school-based support with master-level counselors who can follow a student who might be undergoing change with an addition or reunification of a parent figure in the home to support academic and functional stability. If a parent would be placed in the local jail, the agency offers medication management, transition planning, mental health assessments, and mental health and substance use educational groups for inmates at Rockingham County Regional Jail.
- My org has resources that benefit the parent as a whole, not just for a father or mother.
- We provide male advocacy for fathers of pre-born babies to encourage them to take responsibility for their partner and baby.
- We offer parenting workshops, co-parenting classes, and supervise visitation.

QUESTION 7B:

Are you aware of any assets/resources within other organizations in your sector that could be mobilized to address the issue of father absence? If so, which ones?

Responses:

- Our youth services division has a preschool and an after school program that could be mobilized to support.
- Other churches
- Probation? Court services?

- Numerous agencies in our community offer family and parent support in various forms that can advantage a parent's desire and needs to step-up and/or develop their capacity to parent and for improved self-care. (Family/parent mentoring/education; family-centered Treatment model)
Several agencies in the local region offer family services of various strategies that have potential to support a parent's engagement with care.
- N/A
- I'm unaware of any.
- Social Services - 24/7 Dad Program

QUESTION 7C:

Name any specific assets/resources in other sectors that could be mobilized.

Responses:

- The Lucy Simms Center is strategically located beside the Big Brothers/Sisters organization.
- Adding a requirement to Probation Terms that the father complies with a fatherhood program. Recovery court maybe? Add a fatherhood class as an option.
- Pertinent academic departments at local universities
Local organized communities (various): civic, ecclesial, non-profit
Governmental: DJJ, adult probation, courts, CSB, DSS
- N/A
- Pediatric & OB offices & hospitals could offer education and classes for fathers. Also schools could offer classes or opportunities for father involvement. Churches can stress importance of fathers.
- InsideOut Dad class

QUESTION 8A:

Are you personally committed to addressing this issue?

Responses:

- Yes
- I can in ways that are needed and helpful.
- Very. I suspect that more father involvement will lead to lower anti-social/criminal behavior.
- Within the flow of life and the encounter offered by way of time and chance, I periodically have opportunity to provide support, hospitality, some level of praxis with a father whose journey may include connecting with his children from a place of absence, distance and modification.
- I can be committed to creating awareness of the issue. Knowledge is key!
- Yes

QUESTION 8B:

Are you aware of other leaders in your sector committed to addressing this issue?

Responses:

- The only other person that I know who could support the issue is Matt Little, the Special Events Division Manager.
- I'm sure other church leaders would be.
- Not really
- Some therapists and case managers.
- Maybe some of the local mentor programs and local pastors.
- No
- Yes

QUESTION 8C:

Are leaders in the community at large committed to addressing this issue?

Responses:

- Based on attendance at recent meetings, I believe other leaders in the community are committed to addressing the issue.
- I think so if they are educated and given the opportunities.
- I believe so. It's a matter of law.
- Can really only speak for self and a few friends on this question.
- Maybe so.
- I'm unaware of any.
- Unsure.

QUESTION 9:

Please describe any programs or services in your community that are either specifically directed toward fathers or that contain a fatherhood component.

Responses:

- Big Brothers
- I think of different sports programs in the city/county or the boys club (Big Brother).
- Parenting class?
- Family mentoring, educational services have built in flexibility to work with a parent and the family context to resolve needs addressed.
- Not sure.
- Child Support Enforcement
- Co-parenting class (Community Counseling Center and Valley Family Support Services)

Are there any in your sector of the community life?

Responses:

- Not sure
- Small group mentors, youth leaders.
- Not really
- With local family services agencies
- Unsure
- Yes

Are there any in other sectors?

Responses:

- Not sure
- Maybe mentorships, apprenticeships.
- I'm not really certain.
- Fatherhood Foundation of Virginia - Making Better Dads; <https://vadad.org/>
- Unsure

QUESTION 10:

What gaps in programs or services for fathers exist in the community?

Responses:

- Not sure.
- I don't know.
- Quantity of programs and lack of awareness; at least as far as I can tell.

- My guess is housing support, mentoring, and support partners.
- It would seem to me that there are significant gaps. Lots of men in college are getting women pregnant then advising abortion because they don't feel ready to be a parent.
- Incarcerated fathers, fathers that have limited parenting skills but are not connected to Social Services or the Community Services Board to receive service support.

QUESTION 11:

What would be some effective strategies to promote responsible fatherhood in your sector?

Responses:

- Invite fathers to participate in preschool, after school, youth services programs, activities and events.
- Preach on it, teach on it, strong men's ministry.
- Prison/jail outreach programs; probation program at emphasis on crisis involvement.
- Inclusive strategies, activities and encounters
Psychotherapy, SA therapy
Family therapy (various)
- Support the mentors already doing the work in the community, and partner to bring awareness
- Don't "penalize" families by denying public benefits when a father is present in the home.
- Community knowledge.

QUESTION 12A:

What barriers might exist that would prevent the mobilization of leaders and organizations in your sector to promote responsible fatherhood?

Responses:

- Lack of communication, language barriers, cultural difference.
- Intentionality, making it a priority.
- Agency conflicts (Courts v. Doc); Privacy laws that limit information sharing.
- Simply not being in one's missional scope, practical capacities. See below.
- Language barrier, lack of support, lack of mentors, lack of knowledge on the issue.
- Stereotyping: men don't want to ask for help nor be forced to participate in programs that could be beneficial. People are already too busy/overworked.
- Lack of information.

QUESTION 12B:

What barriers might exist that would prevent the mobilization of leaders and organizations in the community at large on this issue?

Responses:

- Financial support, communication, lack of interest.
- Time, busy, fears, lack of vision or specifically see how they can make a difference - understand truly the need and seeing a vision of what can be.
- Coordination; different methods/different definitions of success;
- Lack of trust of public systems
Uncertainty (change), stress (increase, adding to), resistance (varied), burn-out (already at serious levels), societal malaise Cultural feminist shift seeking gender and power balances and general disinterest in themes that may elicit phallogocentric assumptions [this highlights the long-standing need to unite opposites and entertain with hospitality the vast space between.
- The commitment to continuing the cause.
- Stereotyping: men don't want to ask for help nor be forced to participate in programs that could be beneficial. People are already too busy/overworked.

- Lack of information and understanding the benefits of prevention and early intervention for children. Supporting the present fathers leads to healthier children to adults later on.

QUESTION 13A:

Do various agencies/institutions within your sector in this community collaborate on other related issues?

Responses:

- The Parks and Recreation Department is one department under the City of Harrisonburg umbrella. Department leaders meet regularly.
- Not very well or often (except H'burg United ☺)
- Drug treatment, general rehabilitation.
- Children, youth, family services and engagement, family relational restorative efforts, family problem solving, building supportive systems with families.
- Yes, I believe so.
- No
- At times

QUESTION 13B:

Is your agency/organization involved in any of those collaborative efforts?

Responses:

- Yes, the Director of Parks and Recreation is part of the Executive Leadership Team for the City of Harrisonburg.
- No
- Yes, both examples.
- Yes, within the confines of operating as a publicly funded behavioral health and developmental services.
- Maybe. I am not sure.
- Yes

QUESTION 14:

Are there any existing successful programs, services, or initiatives in your sector of the community that focus on any social issue that could be expanded to include a fatherhood component? If so, what are they?

Responses:

- Preschool Program, After School Program, Open Gym Event
- No, we do host a variety of groups here (including NA, Young Life Capernaum, Young Lives, Cru, IV, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Soup Kitchen, etc.)
- Maybe probation? If they go along with it.
- Yes, openness to helping families and individuals in various contexts with variety of supportive services.
- Not sure.
- No
- What does successful mean? How is change measured?

QUESTION 15:

Are there other leaders in your sector or in other sectors who might be interested in planning a Fatherhood Summit? If so, who are they?

Responses:

- Not sure
- JJ Slye, Chris Johnson (DUCC in general), Matthew Kirkland, Steve Wingfield
- Jail leaders, law enforcement, and probation.

- You might check with the administrative staff at CSB, those who may connect an initiative to the mission approach of a department, e.g., children's services.
- Some of the community pastors: Rev. John Butler at First Baptist Church. Pastor Chris Johnson at DUCC. Mentors in the NAACP and Northeast Neighborhood Association Community Center.
- Unsure of any
- Unsure

GROUP SURVEYS

Addressing Father Absence - The first five questions are specific to identifying the need to address father absence in Harrisonburg Rockingham.

Question 1:

Is there a need to address father absence in Harrisonburg Rockingham?

Responses:

- Yes, Fatherhood Absence AND Fatherhood involvement more broadly.
- I believe there is a need to address missing fathers. Also, grandparents raising their own children and grandchildren is a big factor as well. Children need a positive male role model to express concerns, share stories and learn how positive relationships work with a male figure.

Question 2:

What are the most pressing needs in Harrisonburg Rockingham in addressing father absence?

Responses:

- Fathers in the home, want to be involved, not sure how fathers out of the home want to be involved.
- I have many grandparents that are parenting. Most grandparents I talk to are caring for their daughter's child or their son's child. These children are being raised by a grandparent(s) and a semi-absent (in and out) biological mom or dad. I was just talking to a grandmother today who said, "I have raised so many children." I believe that these grandparents need more love and support.

Question 3:

If you had to pick one need that is the greatest, what would be picked and why?

Responses:

- Male leadership, role models, support
Where are access points for fathers to be involved and learn - identifying what supports exists with fathers and where are the gaps?
- The most apparent need is financial. Several of the students that I've talked with feel the need to work to help support their families. We had one student who was working the night shift at a poultry plant. He'd come to school after working all night. The students who are working have much less time to devote to academics and healthy extracurricular activities. On top of all that, these students often don't have a positive male role model in their lives. Many seem to

find someone to fill that role through a teacher or coach, but they can't really take the place of a good father at home.

Question 4:

Is there a type of father in Harrisonburg Rockingham who is most in need of being a responsible father?

Responses:

- Teen fathers, first time fathers, fathers new to the country.
- As you know, every situation is different and there are a variety of ways that fatherlessness affects children and the breakdown of the family. I think that one issue is that even if the father is technically still in the home, he is either working so much that he doesn't see the children as much (maybe because of shift work) or, in some cases, passively sitting by watching the family run without his proactive involvement. I think that in our society we have (to some extent) emasculated men but not allowing them to lead their families and by not providing them support to be able to do this well. I do think that many faith-based communities do this very well. However, it takes initiative on the part of the father to desire to parent well. So, is there a need, yes. I think that there is a need because of the breakdown of the family system.

Question 5:

Do other leaders in Harrisonburg Rockingham believe there is a need to address father absence?

Responses:

- Somewhat. When this issue is brought up, leaders seem to agree but not sure how to engage or where to start.
- I don't necessarily know if they realize that this is an issue in our community. Typically, the leaders have friends who live similar lives, with a supportive family, strong network of friends and a religious background.

Existing Fatherhood Programs and Services - The objective of questions 6 through 9 is to identify current services and programs for fathers that exist in the city/county and any gaps remaining in services and programs.

Question 6:

Has there ever been a countywide initiative or an initiative in any community in Harrisonburg Rockingham to address father absence/promote responsible fatherhood?

Responses:

- At Linville-Edom Elementary School, we have a Panther PACK (Positive Adults Caring for Kids) program that includes moms, dads, grandparents, etc... (all to which have been background checked.) They help around the school, are in classrooms, and do a safety check around the school building. I've seen commercials for 'Father Focus,' but I'm not really sure what that involves. When my son was at John C. Myers Elementary School, they had a program for dads

to come in and volunteer (Watch Dog Dads or something like that).

Question 7:

What programs and services for fathers exist in Harrisonburg Rockingham?

Responses:

- Healthy Families Blue Ridge serves fathers in the program, but does not have any male home-visitors. Young Lives for teen parents, but no active male leaders. (These two are not specific to only father.) There used to be parenting classes - no longer.
- I am not certain but it would be good to see a listing of the court ordered mentoring services, along with seeing what kind of programs the churches or other civic groups offer. Here are a few organizations that come to mind: <https://www.riversidefamilysupport.com/> , <https://www.harrisonburgcenterforhealing.com/>, <https://vadad.org/>

Question 8:

What monthly or annual events are there for fathers in Harrisonburg Rockingham?

Responses:

- Coffee clubs, Parent Teacher Organizations, Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Volunteer Coaching, Volunteering in Schools, Volunteering for Non-Profits.

Question 9:

What programs or services for fathers don't exist that are needed in Harrisonburg Rockingham?

Responses:

- Parenting programs, support, new fathers class.
- One-on-One Mentorships: Pair children with male mentors who commit to meeting regularly (weekly or biweekly). Group Sessions: Host monthly group activities, such as sports, service projects, or skills workshops. Community Engagement Events: Partner with local organizations for events like career days, educational fairs, or outdoor activities.

Assets to Promote Responsible Fatherhood - The objective of the following question is to identify the assets in the city/county that can be mobilized to promote responsible fatherhood.

Question 10:

What assets or resources exist in Harrisonburg Rockingham that can be mobilized or used to promote responsible fatherhood? (Consider dividing the responses into the various sectors, as listed at the top of the survey.)

Responses:

- Sentara, city/county support
- Existing non-profits (Boys and Girls Club, Big Brothers Big Sister), Working with large employers to host family events that build community, Churches that host open community events.

Identify Leaders and Organizations - The objective of the following questions is to identify

leaders and organizations in sectors that are often a challenge to get to attend the Leadership Summit on Fatherhood (LSF). These leaders & organizations will be invited to attend the LSF.

Question 11:

Which organizations should send a representative to the summit?

Responses:

- The representation at the summer kick off meeting (Aug. 30, 2024) was successful.
- Education, Law Enforcement, Chamber of Commerce, Non-Profits, Civic Organizations.

Question 12:

Which individuals/people in the following sectors should attend the summit?

Responses:

- Identified male leaders in our community. School PTOs, Church leaders, Coaches, Educators

Attract Funding - The objective of the following questions is to collect information critical to attracting funding for a sustainable city/countywide fatherhood initiative.

Question 13:

Are there any private family or community foundations that could be approached to fund an initiative?

Responses:

- Sentara Cares, Sentara Community Health, United Way?
- Community Foundation, Rockingham Educational Foundation, Harrisonburg Education Foundation.

Question 14:

Are there any corporate giving programs or foundations that could be approached to fund an initiative?

Responses:

- Sentara Health White Rose?
- Walmart Community Grants - <https://www.walmart.org/how-we-give/program-guidelines/spark-good-localgrants-guidelines>
- Cargill, Georges, Pilgrim's Pride, Merck, Molson Coors

Question 15:

Are there any philanthropists/wealthy individuals who might be open to funding an initiative?

Responses:

- Joe & Debbie Showker

Question 16:

Are there any communities within the city/county with leadership that would be open to funding a position that would focus on promoting responsible fatherhood and could attract funders to fund it? For example, one with a mayor, county executive, or a state legislator who has a passion for father

involvement or improving child well-being?

Responses:

- Healthy Families - Advisory Meetings; Hand-in-Hand
- I am not sure. It would be good to talk with the mayors of the surrounding towns, Broadway, Bridgewater, Grottoes, Dayton, Timberville, Elkton, and Harrisonburg.

Question 17:

Do any of the funders within the city/county or a community within the city/county have a history of collaborating to fund services, programs, or initiatives?

Responses:

- Yes

Question 18:

Is there an influential organization that secures a lot of funding from multiple sources (e.g., public and private), that operates across the city/county or in one of the communities, and that would be willing to seek a large amount of funding to implement a city/countywide initiative?

Responses:

- Sentara, United Way

Question 19:

Is there a university, college, or research and evaluation firm within the city/county that might be willing to evaluate the impact of an initiative pro bono?

Responses:

- JMU's Public Administration Grad Program- <https://www.jmu.edu/mpa/index.shtml>
- ISAT's Capstone Project- <https://www.jmu.edu/cise/isat/research.shtml>

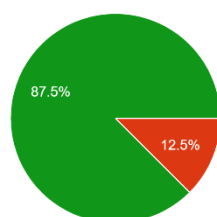
SURVEY FROM MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS

Eight mental health professionals in Harrisonburg/Rockingham (experience & specialization charted below) completed a different survey, about the role of fathers in the treatment and well-being of child clients. Their responses help us understand the dynamics of father involvement and the impact it has on the mental health treatment of children in our community.

Scan the QR code to view the survey questions with their results >>

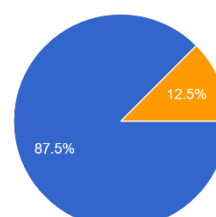


Years of experience as a mental health counselor (Optional)
8 responses



• Less than 1 year
• 1-5 years
• 6-10 years
• 11+ years

Specialization (Optional)
8 responses

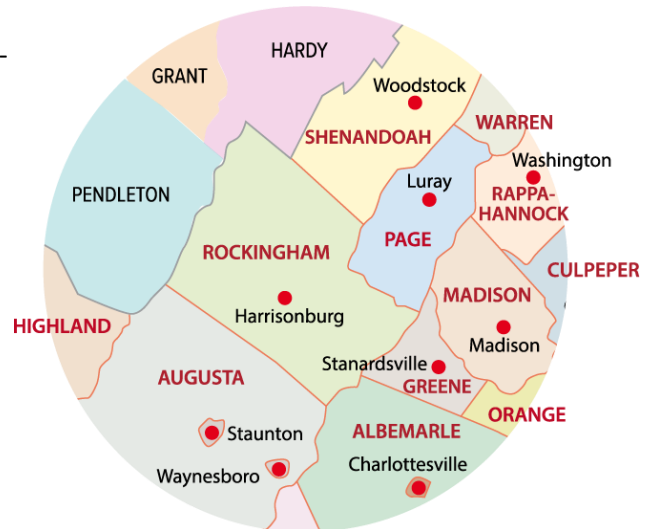


• Child/Adolescent Counseling
• Family Counseling
• General Counseling

AREA MAP OF FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS & SERVICES

The assets map below shows the known father-specific programs and/or services in Harrisonburg Rockingham that also serve fathers. Leaders should use this map as a starting point for the city/county-wide initiative by:

- Raising awareness of the father-specific programs that already serve fathers in Harrisonburg Rockingham.
 - Contacting father-specific programs that don't serve fathers in Harrisonburg Rockingham but serve surrounding communities to explore partnerships that can extend those services to fathers in Harrisonburg Rockingham.
 - Meeting with staff at father-specific programs that don't serve fathers in Harrisonburg Rockingham, but serve surrounding communities to learn how Harrisonburg Rockingham leaders can apply what was already learned to engage fathers.
1. **AVA Care:** Men's Advocacy (support and mentoring for men when facing unintended pregnancy)
 2. **Community Counseling Center:** Co-Parenting Class
 3. **Cub Run Elementary School:** WATCH D.O.G.S. (short for Dads of Great Students, invites fathers and other father figures to serve on school campus)
 4. **Division of Child Support Enforcement:** Family Engagement Services (incl. financial assistance & job search resources, co-parenting resources and resources for fathers)
 5. **FairField Center:** Online court-approved co-parenting class for separated households - "Meeting in the Middle" & Mediation Services
 6. **Hand-in-Hand Resource Mothers Program** (free home visiting support for teenage mothers and fathers)
 7. **Harrisonburg Center for Healing:** Parenting and Family Issues, Parenting Support, and Conflict Resolution
 8. **Harrisonburg Rockingham Social Services:** 24:7 Dad Program (12-weeks, evidence based, for fathers and father figures)
 9. **Healthy Families of the Blue Ridge:** Parenting Support & Education
 10. **Linville-Edom Elementary School:** Panther PACK (Positive Adults Caring for Kids)
 11. **Mercy House** (family shelter with programs for parents struggling with housing instability, including financial education & assistance)
 12. **Riverside Family Support:** Parent/Guardian Services, incl. Parent Education, Co-Parenting Education, and Therapeutic Parent Coaching
 13. **Sentara RMH:** New Dad 101 (3-hour virtual class) is only class just for Dads & hosted by vadad.org. Partners are also invited to attend the Childbirth Education (4th trimester), Infant CPR, and Breastfeeding classes.
 14. **The Central Shenandoah Valley Office on Youth - Augusta County:** InsideOut Dad (a 12-session program for fathers at Middle River Regional Jail), and 24:7 Dad (6-week condensed in-person/virtual program for dads)
 15. **Valley Family Support Services:** Court-approved co-parenting class - "Two Parents Two Homes", Parenting Class, and Co-Parenting Education
 16. **YoungLives** (YoungLife's program for expectant & parenting adolescents; just no active male leaders, yet)



CONCLUSIONS

Studies have shown both father absence and father presence have a significant impact on the lives of children and their families. According to National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI), “when we [engage and] empower fathers, we transform the lives of children and elevate the well-being of entire families and communities.”

Community leaders of Harrisonburg Rockingham are interested in addressing and reversing the trend of father absence and helping strengthen fathers, and reducing barriers to them being involved in their children’s lives, particularly when they live in separate households. Until now, however, there have been several individual efforts within various sectors to engage fathers, but not a community initiative.

Over 20 years ago, Sentara Rockingham Memorial Hospital received grant funds through Virginia Department of Social Services to engage fathers. They hired Brian Kelley as a Resource Father, who worked in that role for 3-4 years but stopped due to lack of community support and interest. In NFI’s Community Mobilization Approach™ guide it says, “To promote involved, responsible, and committed fatherhood, communities must do more than expand programs and services to include fathers and create new programs for dads. Communities must change the cultural institutions that form the different sectors of society.”

As the area map in the previous section illustrates, there are a number of parenting education groups and classes offered in the community, but little to no father-specific programs that include building fathering skills. Counseling practices have shared that youth male mentors often have a wait list, as there are so few male professionals in the social work field.

Faith-based organizations are plentiful in Harrisonburg and Rockingham. There are over 230 churches, which could potentially provide mentorship and support for fathers in their community. Harrisonburg City and Rockingham County each have a Parks & Rec program, with athletic coaches who serve as positive male role models to all children, including the ones growing up without a father in the home.

Several elementary schools state they have had programs like *All Pro Dad* or *WATCH D.O.G.S.* designed to engage father figures in the lives of their children and at school. However, these programs took extra time and effort from school staff to organize and manage. According to a teacher, “All this extra work, combined with the feeling from teachers that it wasn’t super helpful, led us to drop the program eventually.”

This assessment of programs and services for fathers provides secondary and primary data that points to the need and value in starting a city/county-wide initiative to promote responsible fatherhood. The more awareness is raised around the vital role that fathers play in breaking the cycle of these issues is crucial to the health of Harrisonburg Rockingham, the more community leaders will be motivated to become part of the solution.

Since July 2024, Harrisonburg Rockingham Department of Social Services (HRDSS) has been funding its father engagement efforts using Fatherhood Incentive Funds Mini Grant received from Virginia Department of Social Services. While there are prospective state and federal grant opportunities to promote responsible fatherhood, moving forward, Harrisonburg Rockingham will need to identify other funding sources, should those grant opportunities not continue.

HRDSS has been proactive in planning, hosting, and facilitating meetings and discussions around the issue of fatherhood absence and presence. HRDSS is interested in continuing to serve as the lead agency and act as the fatherhood champion, driving the community forward in subsequent phases.

This report concludes Phase 1 of the Harrisonburg Rockingham CMA. The focus will now turn to the Leadership Summit on Fatherhood (Phase 2) and creating a Harrisonburg Rockingham Action Plan to Promote Responsible Fatherhood (Phase 3).

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***Thank you for your desire to make a generational impact
in our community, and championing fathers!***



*If you have feedback or corrections
to this report, please email
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