

AMTC NEWS



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AMTC & Associates Newsletter

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Pleased to Provide Continuous Quality Improvement

AMTC & Associates is proud to serve diverse clients across the nation. We strive to provide the best services possible for each organization, based on specific needs in each location. While each client is a unique partner that strives to improve their community, I am particularly grateful to have an opportunity to serve clients in my home state of Wisconsin. In this newsletter, we highlight the Milwaukee County Department of Child Support Services (CSS) New Pathways for Fathers and Families program and their seven implementation partners.

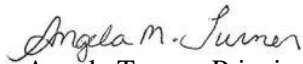
I am often asked how I became interested in Fatherhood programs. I've always had a strong interest in family dynamics and how those relationships affect a person's day-to-day life. Early in my career, I worked as a case manager by providing employment services to noncustodial fathers. This work was in Winnebago County, about an hour and a half northwest of Milwaukee. What was true then is also true now. Fathers want steady employment and a stronger connection with their children. Pathways helps with both!

When I moved to Milwaukee in 1993 many people told me that Milwaukee is very different than Winnebago County. In many respects, they were right. Each location has its unique challenges and needs, which is what makes our partners so important and relevant. I was already well versed in programs and services to help fathers, but it took some time for me to gain a better understanding of Milwaukee neighborhoods and culture. I love that CSS's seven implementation partners have close ties to the communities they serve, thereby fostering strong connections.

Another subject that is covered in this newsletter is the use of focus groups to assess programming. Each assessment tool serves a distinct purpose. Focus groups provide feedback that other measurements might not catch, which I appreciate since I'm naturally an inquisitive person. I also love observing nonverbal communication that occurs during focus groups. That said, anyone who plans to conduct a focus group needs to make sure it is utilized as an evaluation tool under the right circumstances. For example, focus groups do not always represent the larger population. AMTC works with clients so they avoid common focus group pitfalls. We thoroughly train facilitators in all aspects of focus groups, among them facilitation skills and how to craft group questions.

As an evaluation and performance measurement firm, we work hand-in-hand with our clients to fulfill their potential and expand their capacity. AMTC's staff assists clients to develop comprehensive tools and procedures. We help to measure performance for continuous quality improvement. As part of this process, we collect data through various methods. In addition to focus groups, we utilize key informant interviews and surveys as a method of data collection. The data empowers our clients to make decisions, sustain their program and improve their services.

We are grateful to provide top-notch services to our clients. On behalf of AMTC & Associates, we encourage readers to stay connected. Please reach out to us if there is a topic you would like addressed in future newsletters.


Angela Turner, Principal

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**Angela Turner,
AMTC Principal**

“Fathers want steady employment and a stronger connection with their children. Pathways helps with both!”

Partnerships in Milwaukee Improve Lives

By Joshua Becker

It is hard to believe that it has been two years since we started planning for an exciting grant to benefit fathers in Milwaukee County. We are fortunate to partner with the Milwaukee County Department of Child Support Services (CSS) for this initiative. Although we announced the grant in our newsletter in the spring of 2016, we are pleased to provide this update on the great work by Milwaukee County and its seven implementation partners.

CSS works to improve the quality of life for children in Milwaukee County. It oversees more than 125,000 child support cases per year by providing a wide range of services. CSS was able to expand its reach with a federally-funded grant called New Pathways for Fathers and Families



Keith Parris (standing at microphone), Outreach Coordinator for Milwaukee County Pathways for Fathers and Families

from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Assistance. Pathways specifically focuses on addressing fathers' needs as a way to improve families.

"Through Pathways it is our hope to educate fathers in healthy relationships, responsible parenting and economic stability and provide an array of other support services that will enable the young men in our community to succeed. This funding enables CSS to work with area community agencies in addressing the unmet needs of fathers in our community," said Jetaunne Richardson, Program Manager for Milwaukee County Child Support Services.

Pathways will provide services to thousands of fathers over a five-year period, ending in September of 2020. The grant targets low-income fathers or any father-figure that cares for a dependent, such as adoptive fathers, stepfathers and even expectant fathers. Funding targets individuals in certain neighborhoods that experience: 1) high birth rates to unmarried parents, 2) low percentage of households with two married parents, 3) high rates of fatherless households, 4) high poverty rates, and 5) high unemployment and incarceration rates. There are certain requirements to enroll. A dependent must be younger than 25-years-old and must live in Milwaukee County.

CSS has partnered with seven organizations to implement Pathways. These are Center for Self-Sufficiency, Community Advocates, COMPEL, Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative, My Father's House, Inc., Next Door Foundation, and U MOS. We are particularly proud of these implementation partners and the innovative skill-building workshops they provide throughout Milwaukee. Their approach is to meet fathers in places that are conveniently located to address their unique needs. For example, we work with educational providers in Head Start where fathers may have enrolled their children. Other locations include an American Job Center and the House of Correction.

Fathers learn financial skills, such as budgeting and exploring careers. Most importantly, fathers learn to become more effective parents. Fathers also learn how to improve their relationships with the child's mother, whether they are living with the mother or while living apart. Participants can receive referrals for additional support services. For example, Centro Legal and Wisconsin Community Services provide help with important legal and driver license services. Employ Milwaukee, Northcott Neighborhood House, the Social Development Commission and the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership provide job training and placement services. The Alma Center provides programs on domestic violence and trauma resolution.

The role of AMTC & Associates is to provide performance measurements and evaluation systems for CSS and all seven implementation partners. Sara Woods is a Senior Evaluation Associate for AMTC and is a liaison for the overall project. She is helping to lead a study that will determine whether programs are successful. "In my



Sara Woods, AMTC Senior Evaluation Associate

"What really inspires me is that men are going out of their comfort zone to talk about their issues, to better their life with their children."

role as a Field Researcher, I get to meet the fathers and hear their stories,” said Woods. “All of these men are so excited about their children. What really inspires me is that men are going out of their comfort zone to talk about their issues, to better their life with their children.” At this point in time, there is not enough data in the study to draw any statistical conclusions. However, Woods has noticed on her own that fathers who participated were highly engaged and satisfied with the services received.

There is good reason to be excited. Richardson noted, “Milwaukee County Child Support Services is once again the only Child Support Agency in the US to be awarded the Pathways for Fathers and Families Grant from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (DHHS ACF). As a previous awardee of a DHHS ACF grant it has shown that proactive outreach by a child support agency coupled with Fatherhood services can contribute to increased contributions from fathers. In most cases increased contributions lead to increased time spent with children. Statistics show that children with more involved fathers have better outcomes.”

AMTC is pleased to partner with CSS and its partners. Milwaukee County can be a healthy place for everyone. These partnerships are a step in the right direction.

Focus Groups Deliver Results and Insights



**Ann Wolter, AMTC
Senior Evaluation
Associate**

“Evaluation is also about hearing from people, using qualitative methods such as interviews, observations and focus groups.”

By Ann Wolter, Senior Evaluation Associate

Evaluation is not just about quantitative methods using data, scales and statistical methods. Evaluation is also about hearing from people, using qualitative methods such as interviews, observations and focus groups. Qualitative methods can be applied to examine and interpret quantitative data or to collect data that other methods cannot. As with most research firms, AMTC & Associates uses both quantitative and qualitative measurement strategies in what is called a mixed methods approach to evaluation. For years AMTC has developed and implemented tools for observations that include focus groups and interviews; however, this year AMTC has taken an even larger leadership role in this area. Focus groups and training for focus groups has been front and center to meet expectations set by funders.

In the history of evaluation as a profession, focus groups (originally dubbed “group interviews”) were reportedly used by researchers in as early as the 1920s. However, the use of focus groups grew significantly after they were used by network radio researchers in 1941. Researchers wanted to pinpoint why audience members liked certain programs versus others, so they measured likability scores for different programs: members of the studio audience listened to programming with a set of instructions. They pressed a red button when they heard something they didn’t like and a green button when they heard something they did like. This was typical quantitative data collection. Afterwards, however, the same participants discussed with researchers the reasons for their positive and negative ratings. This mix of both quantitative and qualitative data collection resulted in Nielsen’s first national radio index in 1942!¹ Ever since, social scientists and program evaluators have used focus groups and mixed methods to learn and understand the specific beliefs people hold about a topic or area of interest.² AMTC continues the tradition.

AMTC and their clients use focus groups with program participants, staff and partners to evaluate program performance and determine participant needs. For example, an organization might learn that staff needs more training in a specific area or that a section of the curriculum was more important to program participants than another. In 2014 AMTC held a focus group with program staff who provide Healthy Relationship Education (HRE). The HRE facilitators noted significant findings: participants frequently reported that specific lessons helped them end abusive relationships. Subsequently, AMTC collected additional data on this issue that we eventually passed on to a program funder who used the data to create a relationship abuse scale for a new program survey. Results may lead to national data on this important aspect of healthy relationship and marriage education.

In the past year, AMTC has conducted focus groups with *staff* who are implementing and managing programming in the areas of teen pregnancy prevention and fatherhood. We have also implemented focus groups with both youth and adult *program participants* who receive healthy marriage and teen pregnancy prevention programs. Additionally, AMTC provided extensive *training* for teen pregnancy prevention grantees on how to conduct effective focus groups. These grantees are responsible for implementing their own focus groups with community leadership teams as well as program participants. AMTC trainings for teen pregnancy prevention grantees included: best practices in planning and conducting focus groups, how to develop effective and meaningful focus group questions, the roles of the moderator and assistant moderator and how to analyze results and complete a focus group report.

Through focus groups, both AMTC and program staff have identified continuous quality improvement considerations in many areas including:

- data entry
- enrollment
- program fidelity improvements
- program curriculum
- community mobilization efforts
- program sustainability
- marketing related to site outreach and recruitment
- referral processes and community resource sharing
- staff management and training
- staff roles, relationships and meeting design
- survey modifications and control group design



Ann Wolter (in middle row, center) conducted a focus group with St. Louis Healthy Marriage program participants.

AMTC focus group reports present findings in objective terms and include executive summaries. We review the report and summary with program managers and work with the client to interpret results and use the findings for improvements. Additional questions are often generated, sometimes leading to modifications to the evaluation plan.

Focus groups are an exciting evaluation method to look beneath the surface. We can gain a better understanding of existing data and/or discover new information. Anyone who is interested in discussing focus group services may contact AMTC at info@amtcassociates.com. We are happy to explore your needs, options and whether focus groups are right for your continuous quality needs!

¹ Maclaran, P., Saren, M., Stern, B., & Tadajewski, M. (2009). (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Marketing Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing Inc.

² Stewart, D. W., and Shamdasani, P. N. (1990). *Focus groups: Theory and practice*. Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol. 20. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

AMTC brings solutions to you.

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