



**Testimony for 2019 Budget Hearing Committee on Human Services Child and Family Services Agency
(DC Councilmember Brianne Nadeau, Chair)**

Three participants from the Father Child Attachment (FCA) program testify to Brianne Nadeau at the 2019 Budget Hearing for the Child and Family Services Agency as to why Mary's Center's FCA program is beneficial. All three testimonies come from immigrants, two men—Carlos Sanchez and Guillermo BH—and one woman—Anabel Gutierrez—who speaks on behalf of her deceased husband and her family and what the program meant to them. All of the participants spoke of the FCA program's ability to provide resources to an immigrant community that would otherwise not know how to access them, for instance, providing them with diapers or helping them fill out forms in English. The participants also spoke on the innovation of the program, and how it is not often that resources are given to improve a father's role in a child's life.

Carlos Sanchez Participant of Father Child Attachment Program at Mary's Center:

Chairwoman Brianne Nadeau and Members of the Committee, I have been in the Father-Child Program since August 2017. At first, I did not know exactly what this program was about, until I started the Father Cafe sessions, which grabbed my attention and made me understand that this program helps fathers how to parent their children. I found it interesting because is not usual that fathers get together to talk about their parenting experiences and challenges. It opened my perception of what the program is and my desire to continue in it.

I have not had a health care insurance for 4 years because the process is too complicated for me and the program assisted me setting this challenge as a goal with small steps. The Family Support Worker (FSW) that comes to see me worked with me step by step to start applying for health care insurance, reminding me the importance of having it. The first goal was to renew my passport as a form of ID needed to apply for the insurance. Because of that goal I renewed my passport, which I needed to apply for insurance. My FSW encouraged me not only to apply for health insurance but also to renew my passport, which was another pending task I had. I am just waiting for the passport to arrive to continue the insurance application process.

When I think in the Program the first thing that comes to my mind is help. They provide me with the tools I need to be prepared as a father to help my children in a better way, especially during the father groups. The father groups were very significant to me, because it was the first



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things I learned from the program, and it impacted me in a positive way, sharing experiences among other fathers. I put in practice some techniques when I am with my children at the supermarket, preparing them with the rule of “walking” before getting there and reward their positive behavior. Another good thing about the groups was the handbook provided to me, which I used as reference with my children, and I would show it to another father to convince him how good the program is so he can join as well.

I would ask to the people responsible to sustain and provide funds to the Father-Child Program, to please continue funding them so low income and families with no resources like mine can benefit.

Carlos Sanchez

Anabel Gutierrez Participant of Father Child Attachment Program at Mary's Center

Chairwoman Brianne Nadeau and Members of the Committee, when my husband and I enrolled in the Father-Child Program in May 2010, I was pregnant with my first baby. The home visiting services we received have been a great help for me and my family. My children have benefited from supplies provided like diapers, books, toys and learning materials. My husband enjoyed participating in father groups and outings, especially fishing trips and cookouts. After my husband passed away in October 2017, the program extended the services to my family, assisting me with the funeral home arrangements, vital records, Mary's Center medical providers and the DC Fire Department and support to transport my husband's body to El Salvador. The Family Support Worker (FSW) accompanied me to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, assisting me with following up with my application status, and ensuring I was connected to the services needed. Also, I was accompanied a couple times to the Social Security Office to report my husband's death and request Social Security benefits for my children. The FSW connected me to free legal resources for assistance with my husband's assets and debts, especially the family's vehicle, which I need to transport the children to school and day care every day. The vehicle was on my husband's name and had a remaining balance, so I had to pay the balance to change it to my name through a small estate at court. The FSW accompanied me during that process, helping me understand the information provided, documents required and steps to take.

I think CFSa should continue to fund this program because they really show interest in helping and supporting families, services are free and they visit you at home. Our time in the program ended, but other families should benefit from this the same way we did.



There were times that we did not have money to buy diapers, and the program always provided them, and toys as well. I remembered when our FSW connected us with a teacher that visited us to help our older child to learn numbers and colors, to prepare him to start school. We are living here at the Housing Choice Voucher Program thanks to the Father-Child Program, who helped us searching for an affordable place to live, provided us contact information and encouragement to submit the application.

We have participated in some of the outings that the program has hosted: 2 fishing trips, several family day celebration cookouts and a pool event. My husband always said: “they support us, so we support them”. He also mentioned that he appreciated the Father’s Café sessions he participated in. For example, he said that he liked hearing other fathers telling their stories about challenges and successes with their own children and of them as fathers and partners. I also remember my husband saying to me after one of the sessions he attended that it is important to understand why the children misbehave instead of punishing them.

There is a memorable moment when the FSW took a video to record my husband and child. My older child was just a few months old, we were sitting in the sofa, I had the baby in my arms and my husband grabbed the guitar and started to sing to him a lullaby. Then my husband’s brothers came from their rooms when they heard the guitar playing and joined with another guitar and a violin. In the blink of an eye my child was having a wonderful serenade. Throughout the time my husband was in the program several videos were recorded of him playing and having fun with my two children. Now they will be able to see how much their father loved to play with them.

I am recommending this program to my brother, who has a child, because he could really benefit from the services that the Father-Child Program offers to fathers and their families.

Anabel Gutierrez

Guillermo BH Participant of Father Child Attachment Program at Mary’s Center

Chairwoman Brianne Nadeau and Members of the Committee, I have been enrolled in the Father-Child (FCA) Program since October 2014. This program is important because it has helped me and my family in many ways. For example, finding the apartment where we have been living for a few years already; the program provided me the contact information and encouragement to submit the application because I had no knowledge about housing programs at that time. Our current place is comfortable, spacious and we do not have housing issues. The Family Support Worker (FSW) that comes to visit me helped me complete the application for the Social Security retirement benefits, which I started to receive this month. Without my FSW support, the application would have taken longer as everything is in English; the letters I



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received, the phone calls I needed to make, follow up appointments and application status updates request were hard for me to complete by myself as English is not my first language.

I have noticed that every time I call my FSW for assistance on any issue I have, I never receive a no as a response. My FSW is always available to come or consult over the phone, and I feel like he cares about me. To receive a service like this always makes me happy and this is another reason why I consider the Father-Child Program an important program in the community.

The father groups that the program hosts were very nice. I enjoyed listening to other fathers' experiences and had the opportunity to share mine so we learn from each other. I have learned a lot on every session on how to better care and love my children, increasing my communication with them, even when they are not currently living with me. That is why I would participate again in the Father's Café sessions and will recommend it to other fathers. Also, a memory that is still present within my family was a Family Day Celebration Cookout day at the park. I was playing soccer with my kids and then I fell trying to kick the ball, which was very funny for everyone. My children still remember that day as if it was yesterday.

I have friends and relatives that live in Maryland and they tell me that I am blessed because I have the support of the Father-Child Program. They say that they wish a program like this was offered in their communities and that is why I do not want to move out from DC.

It would be nice for this service to grow up and increase the services for other families for them to have the same benefits as we have had; workers that care for you, that are available to answer your calls and visit you as scheduled on time, is important to me and a great blessing.

Guillermo