

**NEWS RELEASE**  
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## **Health Department launches new program to help strengthen fathers**

**(Lawrence, KS)** – The Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department is launching a new Healthy Dads Healthy Families program to help fathers who want to connect and provide for their children.

Children without a father figure in their lives experience a range of social problems, including increased rates of poverty, teen pregnancy, crime, substance abuse, poor health and emotional problems. Research also indicates that fatherless children are more likely to struggle academically and are less likely to attain academic and professional qualifications in adulthood.

The National Center for Fathering classifies father-absent homes as a national emergency with an estimated 17 million children, or 23 percent of the U.S. population under age 18, living in a home without the physical presence of a father. In 2014, 1 in 5 children in Douglas County were living without a father in a family, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

“Dads matter in children’s lives in so many ways. They help shape a child’s outlook on life,” Health Department Director Dan Partridge said. “Mothers and fathers are there to be role models for their kids and get them prepared for life, and when you’ve got one hand tied behind your back, the job is harder.”

Healthy Dads Healthy Families Coordinator Jery Marquez will provide support for fathers in one-on-one meetings or group settings. He will focus on working with fathers who reside at the Lawrence Community Shelter and Douglas County Corrections Facility, but the Healthy Dads Healthy Families program is open to any father in Douglas County. Marquez will work with a full-time Dads Coach and a part-time Career Services Coach, who will work at the shelter.

Marquez has been involved in fatherhood initiatives in Lawrence for seven years. “When dads are involved in their children’s lives, the children’s success is higher. They are more confident and have more self-esteem,” Marquez said. “Unfortunately, our society has a low expectation of fatherhood. It is something we need to change.”

The Healthy Dads Healthy Families program will use a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to help fathers. This approach includes:

- Developing and enhancing fathers’ positive parenting skills through participation in a peer support fathers group using the “Quenching the Father Thirst” curriculum, which was developed by the National Center for Fathering.
- Creating a professional development system for partner agency staff to improve consistency and reinforcement of the curriculum.
- Supporting responsible fathering by maximizing career development services and case management services offered in the community.

The Health Department received a one-year \$185,000 grant from the Kansas Department for Children and Families to start the program.