



VIVA
social impact
partners

First 5 Yolo Fatherhood Focus Groups: Summary of Findings

June 24th, 2025

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Executive Summary

Key Themes:

- Fathers expressed deep emotional connection and pride in their role, while also juggling provider responsibilities and personal sacrifices.
- Many experienced barriers to accessing benefits such as paternity leave and affordable child care.
- Navigating programs like WIC, Medi-Cal, and employment-related benefits was described as confusing and burdensome.
- Spanish-speaking fathers, in particular, appeared to have limited awareness and access to direct service information.

Opportunities for First 5 Yolo:

- Design father-centered supports (e.g., mentorship, peer groups)
- Expand in-person, bilingual programming, especially for first-time fathers
- Increase advocacy and awareness around benefit and service navigation
- Improve direct communication through text, email, and community outreach



Project Overview



Purpose

- First 5 Yolo County hosted focus groups to better understand the lived experiences of **fathers** raising children in the county.
- The focus groups aimed to explore:
 - The roles fathers play and the challenges they face
 - Unmet needs experienced by fathers
 - The kinds of support fathers wish were available
- Insights from the focus groups will guide the development of future father-focused engagement strategies and program design.



Approach

- **Two** virtual focus groups were facilitated by VIVA Social Impact Partners via Zoom
- **Session 1:** Facilitated in English, June 5th, 2025
- **Session 2:** Facilitated in Spanish, June 9th, 2025



Limitations

- Participation in the Spanish-language focus group was lower (2 participants) compared to the English-language group (7 participants).*
- While the perspectives shared in the Spanish-language session offered valuable and culturally relevant insights, the smaller group size limits generalizability. As such, these findings should be considered exploratory and directional rather than fully representative.

***Notes:**

Participation in the Spanish-language session was lower, which may be attributed to the timing of the group. The session was held during mass ICE raids and related community protests, which may have affected families sense of safety and availability.

10 participants had confirmed their attendance prior to the start of the Spanish session.

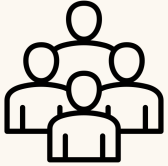
8 participants had confirmed their attendance prior to the start of the English session.



Who We Heard From



Who We Heard From



There were a total of **9** participants across **2** focus groups

- English Focus Group: 7 participants
- Spanish Focus Group: 2 participants



Fathers had between **1 to 3 children**

- Children's ages ranged from **1 week to 8 years old**



Fathers were on average **32 years old**



Who We Heard From

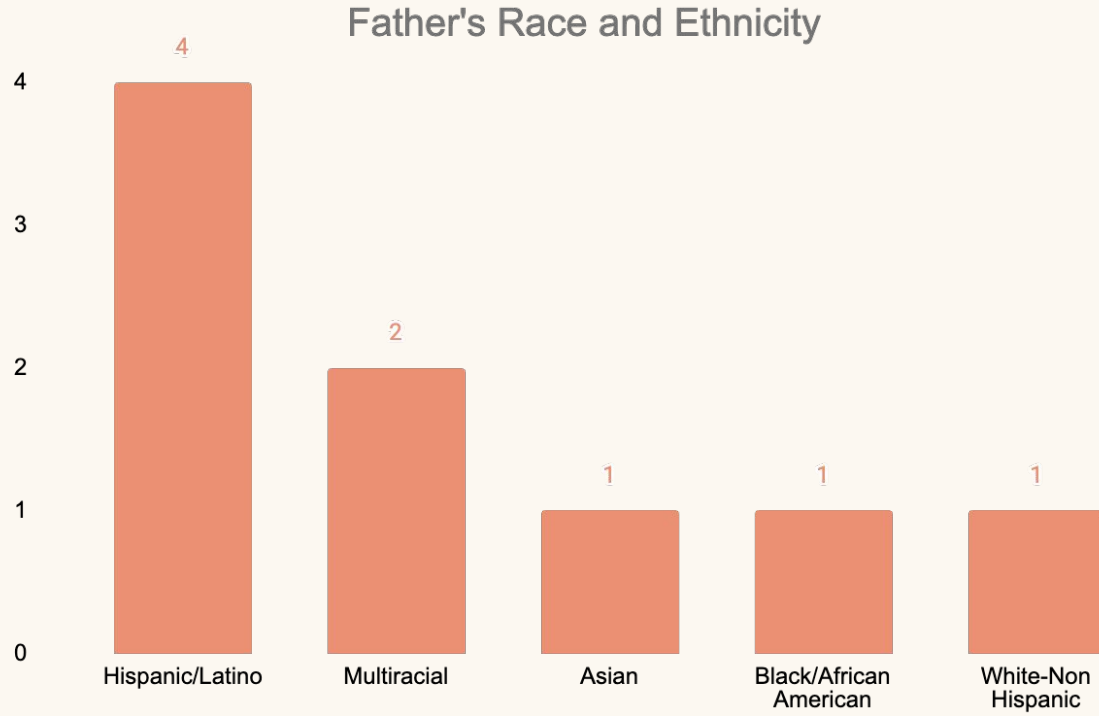


Length of residency in Yolo County among participants ranged from **5** to **30** years. Participant Locations included:

- Davis: 4 participants
- Woodland: 4 participants
- West Sacramento: 1 participant



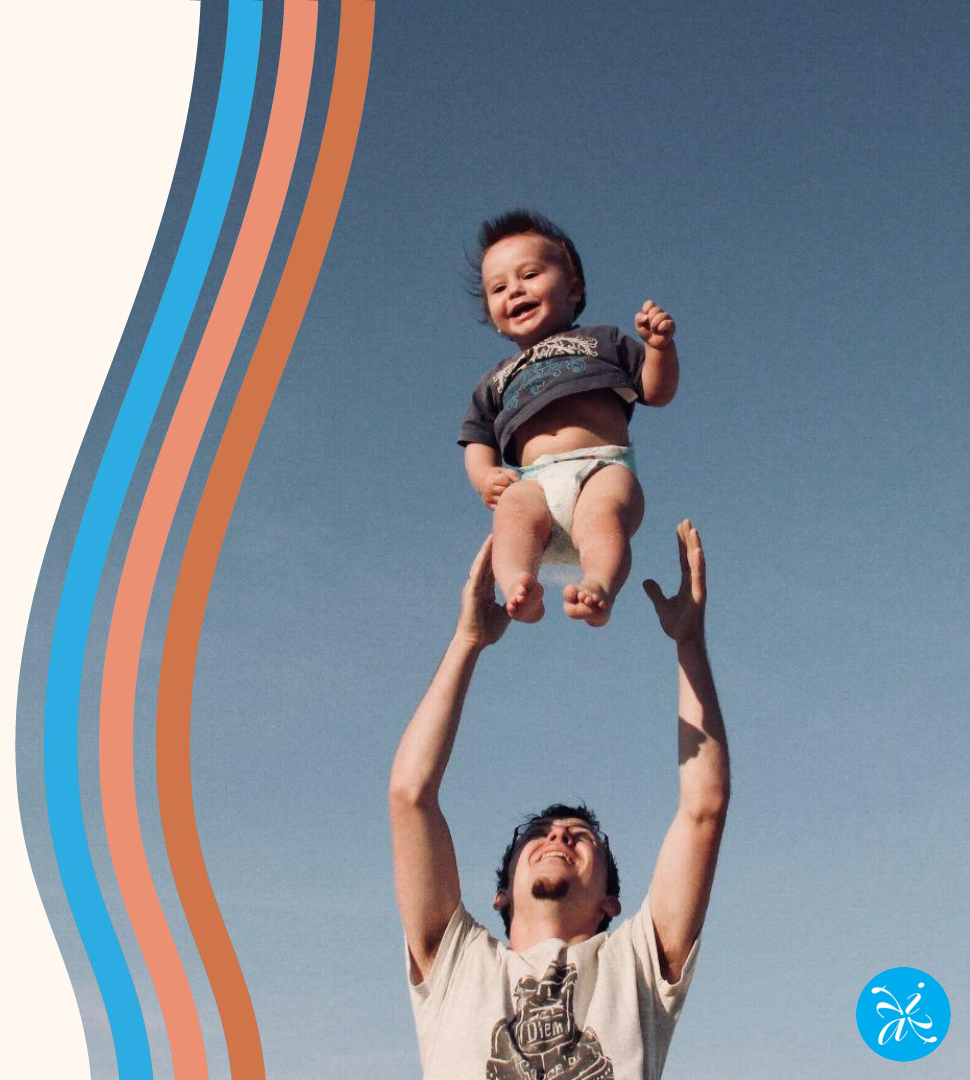
Who We Heard From



Key Findings

Topics Addressed:

- Fatherhood & Family Life
- Navigating Fatherhood:
Support & Roles
- Desired Programs & Services



Fatherhood and Family Life



Fatherhood and Family Life

Key Themes: Roles and Responsibilities

- Fathers expressed a strong sense of **responsibility as providers and caregivers**, often balancing both emotional and financial roles.
- Fathers in both English and Spanish-language focus groups described **deep emotional fulfillment** in seeing their children grow, develop personalities, and bond with them.

“Estar presente... se les nota en sus caritas cuando uno apoya, cuando las escucha.”

Translation: “Being present... you can see it on their faces when you're there, when you support them and listen.”



Fatherhood and Family Life

Rewarding Aspects of Fatherhood

- **Six** fathers shared that seeing their children grow and develop has been one of the most rewarding parts of parenting.
- Fathers expressed pride in:
 - Watching their children learn new skills and reach milestones
 - Building emotional connections and seeing their children's personalities emerge
 - Spending quality time together and being present in ways they didn't experience growing up

“I didn’t have much time with my parents. I want to give that to my child.”



Fatherhood and Family Life

Rewarding Aspects of Fatherhood

- **All** Spanish-speaking fathers shared that the most rewarding part of parenting is the emotional connection with their children.
 - One father described the joy of coming home to a happy, smiling child, something he never imagined for himself, but now finds deeply fulfilling.
 - Another highlighted the pure, unconditional love from “those little innocent humans” as what stands out most.

“Para mí lo mejor de ser padre es saber que alguien me espera en mi casa sonriendo y feliz.”

Translation: “For me, the best part of being a father is knowing someone is waiting for me at home smiling and happy.”



Fatherhood and Family Life

Challenges Experienced in Fatherhood

- Personal and restorative time is limited after becoming a father.
- Two fathers shared that one of the biggest challenges has been the shift in their relationship with their partner, balancing emotional and logistical demands while trying to find meaningful time together.
- Fathers described the emotional challenge of navigating uncertainties as first-time parents, from learning how to change diapers to supporting their child in moments of distress.

"I used to do more for myself, exercise, walks, fishing... there's way less time for that now. It's hard to keep my energy and mentality up."



Fatherhood and Family Life

Challenges Experienced in Fatherhood

- Two fathers shared how difficult it can be to feel confident in making the “best” parenting decisions, especially without prior experience or support.
- One father described the emotional toll of navigating Child Protective Services and the legal system.
 - Frequent turnover among caseworkers forced him to repeatedly rebuild trust and re-explain his situation, without the navigation support he needed, leaving him feeling alone in proving his role as a capable father.

"I had to prove to the courts that I'm capable of being a loving father... I had to go through supervised visits. It's my baby."



Fatherhood and Family Life

Core Values Fathers Strive to Instill

- **Respect for others:** Teaching children to treat everyone with kindness and consideration.
- **Generosity and sharing:** Teaching their children to share toys with other children.
- **Honesty and integrity:** Expressed through examples like “no robbing.”
- **Emotional vulnerability:** Helping children feel safe expressing their emotions and learning how to manage them.



Fatherhood and Family Life

Important Qualities Fathers Strive to Embody

- **Commitment:** Showing up for medical appointments, school events, parenting tasks, and overall responsibility.
- **Adaptability:** Juggling multiple roles, work hours, and shifting family needs.
- **Desire to learn:** Especially among first-time fathers who expressed a need for guidance and a willingness to grow .



Navigating Fatherhood: Support & Roles



Support and Roles

Key Themes: Support & Roles

- Fathers took **active roles during pregnancy and birth**, including attending doctor appointments and taking paternity leave.
- Spanish-speaking participants **reported few work-related barriers**.
- English-speaking fathers described **stressful experiences** navigating state systems (e.g., paternity leave, disability, unemployment), often feeling **confused, unsupported, or overburdened**.
 - One father shared the emotional toll of repeatedly having to “**prove**” himself to the system due to frequent caseworker turnover, constant judgment, and lack of support, causing significant stress despite his commitment to being a present parent.



Support and Roles

Challenges or Barriers to Support During their Partners Pregnancy

- **Four out of seven** parents in the English language session found accessing paid paternity leave and/or unemployment benefits challenging.
 - Ranging from difficulty getting approved or receiving sufficient time off, to one participant's partner facing barriers from her employer in securing unemployment.
- **Four out of seven** parents in the English focus group highlighted childcare as a challenge due to the financial burden or child care support from family members.
- **Four out of seven** parents in the English focus groups expressed the challenge of balancing work and parenting responsibilities, such as coordinating work schedules around their child.
- While fathers were involved, services like home visiting and services were often accessed solely by the child's mother.



Support and Roles

Supports Fathers Wish they Had During Pregnancy or Childbirth

- Delays in services like lactation support left two fathers feeling uncertain and unsupported.
 - First time fathers felt unprepared during pregnancy and birth. They would like access to information about what to expect next immediately after the child's mother gives birth.
 - Timely referrals and supports during the first few days of birth is essential.
- For those without nearby relatives, there was a desire for a support network.
- One father in the Spanish session noted a preference for in-person support services during pregnancy and childbirth period rather than virtual supports.



Desired Programs and Services



Programs and Services

- **WIC** was commonly used but described as **confusing and difficult** to navigate (especially at grocery stores).
- **Income eligibility limits** excluded families from programs like Medi-Cal and SNAP, despite still struggling financially.
- **Home visiting was a positive resource**, though typically accessed by the child's mother.



Programs and Services

Information Gaps

- Fathers often learned about services through partners, family, or social media, not by their own research.
- Fathers lack awareness of the programs and services offered by First 5 Yolo. In addition, two fathers were unaware of the breadth of services and programs provided by organizations they currently engage with such as health services offered through Partnership HealthPlan.
- Emphasized the need for direct, father-friendly communication (e.g., text, events, social media)



Programs and Services

Programs and Services Fathers Requested

- More father-specific engagement (mentorship)
- Workshops for first-time parents (e.g., car seat safety, feeding, lactation, general information on what to expect)
- More in-person services and events
- Access to diapers, food, and basic resources
- Communication via text or email about available services
- Access to affordable childcare



Programs and Services

- **English Session:** Some fathers voiced clear frustration about programs not considering fathers or having father-specific services.
- **Spanish Session:** Both participants mentioned that mothers were the main point of contact for home visiting and other services.



This may indicate different expectations or comfort levels with service systems, or different program outreach strategies by language. It supports the need for **father-inclusive design** with the consideration of access.



Programs and Services

- **English Session:** Fathers shared detailed experiences of frustration with Medi-Cal, WIC, and income cutoffs, describing the systems as complex, inflexible, or difficult.
- **Spanish Session:** Fathers had fewer reported interactions with formal systems. One was unaware of what services Partnership HealthPlan offered; another did not use WIC or Medi-Cal at all.



The **two Spanish-speaking fathers** in the group appeared to have limited awareness of available services, learning about them primarily through partners. This suggests an opportunity for more direct outreach and education.



Key Opportunities for First 5



Key Opportunities

- Design **father-centered supports**, including mentorship, peer groups, and culturally relevant outreach
- Expand **in-person programming**, especially for first-time parents and bilingual families
- Support **system-level efforts** to improve fathers' access to benefits (e.g., WIC, paternity leave, child care) through advocacy, communication campaigns, and cross-sector partnerships.
- Offer **workshops and resources** that build confidence in day-to-day parenting
- Use **simple, direct communication channels** (text messages, family events, community networks) to increase awareness and engagement

