

## **FATHERHOOD IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CARING DADS IN THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC.**

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### **What Did We Do?**

We created a French adaptation of Caring Dads (CD). From January 2017 to June 2019, four groups were successfully implemented at L'Accord Mauricie, in Trois-Rivières, Quebec.

In total 42 fathers attended a Caring Dads group—with 15 fathers fully completing the program. The remaining 27 fathers dropped out of their group at various points. The majority of fathers who participated in Caring Dads were referred by child protection services, while a smaller number were referred by L'Accord Mauricie or other social service organizations. All of the fathers had engaged in abusive behaviours (verbal, psychological, physical) towards their child's mother.

To investigate the implementation, L'Accord Mauricie conducted semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews with 8 fathers, 8 practitioners, four mothers and 2 program coordinators. An inductive theme analysis was conducted on the data.

### **What Helped the Implementation Process?**

#### **Alignment of program theory with need.**

There was strong alignment in the mission of L'Accord Mauricie and the goals of Caring Dads. In particular, staff involved with the program believed in the relevance of the program to the needs and realities of fathers that they served.

#### **Use of a motivational approach.**

The use of a motivational approach, and the provision of information about parenting, both helped to promote men's involvement and engagement.

#### **Agency credibility and staff expertise.**

L'Accord Mauricie is a well-known program both regionally and provincially. The expertise and trustworthiness of the agency, along with its strong

relationships with other organizations and services in the region, helped the process of getting referrals to Caring Dads.

#### **Outreach Initiatives.**

The referral process was heavily influenced by the diverse and ongoing promotional activities (i.e., information sessions held with leaders and child protection workers) and the organization's relationship with community organizations and institutions.

### **What were the Outcomes?**

**Group Cohesion:** Consistent with what we know, fathers who have a history of perpetrating abuse have specific needs relative to their parenting. Fathers integrated and participated easily in Caring Dads and they recommended the group to others fathers dealing with similar difficulties.

**Emotional Regulation:** There was an increase in fathers' emotion regulation—specifically, fathers gained a better understanding of their emotions, which led to better emotion identification and management. Fathers reported feeling more calm, respectful and empathetic.

**Behavioural:** Fathers were better able to control their violent behavior by instead opting for techniques discussed in CD (i.e., withdrawal mechanisms, and less authoritative parenting techniques that are more in tune with the needs of their children). There was a significant increase in father's use of non-violent behaviours, when dealing with stressful situations.

**Child-Centered:** Fathers learned how to let their children make choices, how to recognize them for their accomplishments, and how to congratulate their children for their successes. They felt that they gained a better understanding of their children's needs. Overall, fathers noticed an improvement in the father-child relationship, particularly with regard to emotions and communication.



# Safe and Understood

## What Were the Implementation Challenges?

### Structured Approach.

L'Accord Mauricie's usual approach is less structured, with considerable space open to deal with the participants' immediate concerns and emotions. The majority of fathers and facilitators reported wishing that they had more time to speak and listen to other participants' experiences (i.e., their emotions, parenting strategies, and challenges with their children). It was difficult for service providers to ensure that all session material was reviewed, while allowing time to share father's experiences.

### High Dropout.

Dropout rates were influenced by fathers' situations (i.e., accidents, difficulties at work, removal of children by child protection services) and gaps in meetings over holiday periods. Lack of strong coordination across Caring Dads and the referring agencies was another contributors.

### Change to Service Coordination Challenges.

Staff reported insufficient time to make the follow-up contacts with referrers and partners necessary for collaborative case management meetings. This meant that a key aspect of the partnership model of Caring Dads could not be achieved. It was challenging to meet time and staffing issues.

## What was the Takeaway?

Specialized programs for fathers who have been abusive in their families are necessary and can be effective. Upfront time and resourcing is needed to ensure a strong partnership model to promote referrals, facilitate safety of mothers and children, and prevent or respond to dropout.

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