“Wales said I was a good candidate to help him run the Nurturing Fathers Program. I was at school and studying Human Services and Chemical Dependency. And what got me involved was I always wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself and give back to my community. Because I feel like there’s a real dying need, and co-parenting was like nonexistent in the community I grew up in. I asked, why do you just see a mother taking their child to school and why isn’t the father around? And it made me think; when I was older I could do something about it. But I never had the way, or the means, or the opportunity to make my dream come true until I met Wales”. (Muhammed Harris 2018)

My mission in the Nurturing Fathers Program and the Fathers Care Workshop seeks to build the capacity of diverse parenting education programs to meet emerging demands and needs. The goal is to: improve family functioning, reduce time children spend separated from parents, and prevent family disruptions. The intended outcome is to facilitate greater communication among family members and increase community collaborators. This mission statement can be found on my private work website [www.fatherscareworkshop.com](http://www.fatherscareworkshop.com) and the Nurturing fathers Program website [www.nurturingfathers12304.com](http://www.nurturingfathers12304.com). The mission statement was crafted over time as several important points of significance culminated in my work.

**A Perfect Storm**

As I applied to the Graduate Program in Adult learning at Empire State College (ESC), I simultaneously also applied to become part of the inaugural Leadership Training Initiative (LTI). A goal of the Initiative was to partner with a community program and provide support and development in furthering their work. I understood this to mean a social justice issue. At the same time, I was finishing a two-year Fellowship with the Zero to Three Network in Washington D.C... I was actively pursuing advancing my role to provide support, promote collaboration and increase sustainability of community organizations focused on parent education of infants and toddlers. I was accepted to the Fellowship based on my experiences and not academic achievement, and was a very big outlier in terms of previously selected Fellows. At the same time, I was also approached by Walter Simpkins, a longtime colleague involved in fatherhood work in a community program called the Community Fathers Program in Schenectady. He requested help with providing evidence that fathering programs work so he could provide outcome measures to include in grant proposals.

This “perfect storm” provided me with an opportunity to do what I am known to do. I completed research. I made calls and connected with the program developer (Mark Perlman) of a 30 year old evidence based program called the Nurturing Fathers Program (NFP) that uses a very well-known, reliable, and valid evidence based model to measure success called the Adult Adolescent parenting Inventory (AAPI). After consulting with Walter for approval, I found myself enrolled in the 2015 training to become a facilitator in the Nurturing Fathers Program. As I completed more research and participated in learning through the LTI, I became amazed in regard to the deficiency of services for fathers in terms of fatherhood education and the ways this has been used by the System (Family Court & Parole), limiting fathers from connecting with their children.

I found that fathers have often been eliminated from Family Cases with the Department of Social Services (DSS) due to absence or lack of evidence that they are fathers so they aren’t entitled to services (fatherhood education). And courts, which require parenting education for fathers to move forward, don’t fund parent education. This is often required during Support Court hearings and trials. And, while fathers are required to follow through parent education, (Courts, Parole, Probation, and DSS), the community doesn’t generally fund this work as fathers are largely characterized as “dead beat dads” choosing not to be involved. Instead, it is up to people in the community to provide the services for fathers to reconnect with family. This in effect became a social justice issue, as fathers are being ordered to do something that doesn’t exist. If a father can find a private resource, the prohibitive cost is an obstacle to being able to follow through.

**Intention and Meaning in Partnership**

While the Community Fathers Program is primarily designed to serve fathers involved in allegations of domestic violence, the Nurturing Father’s Program (NFP) was different, and would appeal to wider lens of fathers and fatherhood work. It would in essence, be another resource to widen opportunities for fathers. While the Community Fathers Program primarily focuses on co-parenting and conflict resolution, the NFP focuses on parenting education and concrete skills for teaching and nurturing children and family growth and development. The Nurturing Fathers Program also uniquely has fathers look at recognizing and celebrating cultural differences in families and this increases its sense of being culturally responsive.

We (me and Walter), were also encouraged to use the NFP model because I would be able to return and train other fathers to become group leaders. Our intention and goal in our work is to promote independence and look at ways for fathers to become leaders in their own communities to create sustainability. In being able to train fathers to conduct these trainings in their own communities, we can then look at how to support and mentor the work. It was from the first class I led that I was able to recruit Muhammad Harris, an incredible person that helped by co-leading groups and become a group facilitator.

**The Nurturing Fathers Program**

Training with Mark Perlman in Sarasota, Florida provided me with a great opportunity to connect with other people involved in fatherhood work from around the country. Mark also made himself available throughout the time I was developing the work at home, to provide some guidance and reflection on program development. It was very enlightening to learn more about the valuable measure of the AAPI through its’ use in my work. The results were planned to be used by Walter with the numbers that he would need to demonstrate improved outcomes. Using the AAPI required time learning how to set up participants and provide graphic feedback (graph) for dad’s to see progress.

From a social justice perspective, Mark and my research helped me to break out of older and outdated community scripts of ways to see fathers and fatherhood and look at newer models of fatherhood. For example, dads are not “deadbeats”; they are often faced with obstacles that prevent them from being able to parent cooperatively. And old roles of dads as “breadwinners” are now replaced by fathers as primary caregivers. And while as a parent educator I am seeing these roles changing, the community is still often stuck in the older framework that blames dads. A powerful learning experience for me in this has been related to a more informed understanding of the long term result of mass incarceration, particularly in regard to African American and Latino men and their families.

**Organizational Membership**

As I began my term with the LTI, I was approached by a colleague and asked if I would be willing to serve a three year term on the National Parent Education Network ([www.npen.org](http://www.npen.org)). I was unanimously elected and have served on the Council completing 2 years of my 3 year term. I have served as the Secretary and Executive Board member. In NYS, I have served for five years as a Steering Committee member on the NYS Parent Education Partnership ([www.nyspep.org](http://www.nyspep.org)). I have served on: the Credentialing Committee, Chair of the Communications Committee, and Chair of the Mini Grants subcommittee. I also have presented for 3 years at the NYS Fatherhood Conference (Westchester, N.Y.). I have also presented at the Community Fathers Annual Conference in Schenectady. I was also extremely proud to have been awarded the prestigious Certified Family Life Educator credential through the National Council on Family Relations ([www.ncfr.org](http://www.ncfr.org)) three years ago.

**Effect of Education on Service**

One of the most important aspects to all of the work I have been involved in has been the hands on use of my Graduate learning to the community projects I am working with. As a Graduate student in the Adult Learning program, I have learned about many theoretical perspectives, improving critical thinking. I have used this when speaking about the importance of fathering and fatherhood in churches, mosques and synagogues, as well as community based organizations Schenectady. I have integrated fatherhood research and practice throughout my learning and implemented this practically in my work.

For example, as I studied New Media New Literacies, I developed a podcast series called the Fatherhood Community Chat <https://soundcloud.com/user-513198695/sets/fatherhood-community-chat> . In this video series I have been interviewing: fathers, community based organization leaders, doctors, educators, faith based leaders, and people in leadership roles. During my Club participation in the Education for All and Human Services club, I worked with the President to rent the documentary *Daddy Don’t Go* (<http://www.daddydontgothemovie.com/>) to show at ESC locations in NYC and Newburgh and Schenectady to raise awareness. Working with a community donor and ESC, we even secured having a father and producer from the film, come to the showing and participate in a community discussion following the film. The recording of this is a podcast episode! Since then, I have traveled around NYS showing this film at colleges, schools, churches, and community groups.

I found myself immersed in children’s picture books regarding fatherhood through the Keep-Mills Residency (2017) focused on Building Community in Times of Struggle <http://fatherscareworkshop.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Annotated-Bibliography-of-Chidlrens-Pictures-Books-of-Fathering.pdf> . As a proponent of reading and literacy, I researched fathering and fathering portrayals in children’s picture books. A master bibliography was compiled; and a literature review with an annotated bibliography of 50 of the books reviewed was published on line at [www.fatherscareworkshop.com](http://www.fatherscareworkshop.com) in the research section. I have presented on this work several times around the country at conferences and had a lot of positive feedback.

Through my study in New and Emerging Technologies, I learned many valuable skills in terms of social networking and social media and how to share the message of what I am doing. Having never done this before, I developed a website for the Nurturing Fathers Program so that fathers in the community leading these groups would have access to resources I used (video & tools). The website can be used by family, friends and business to see how the group is individualized here. And can be used by facilitators in the future. I also developed a Face Book site <https://www.facebook.com/Nurturing-Fathers-Program-of-Schenectady-1672180226400492/>.

**Emerging Work**

Mark Perlman validated my 2.5 years of work and development in fatherhood when I was certified in October 2017 as Master Trainer in the Nurturing Fathers Program. Celebrating my accomplishments and research, Mark has provided me with a path to train other people to become trainers in the Nurturing Father’s Program. As a result, I have recently signed a contract to train a group of 15 emerging fathering educators at the Buffalo Prenatal-Perinatal Network. I am looking forward to utilizing many of the skills in assessment and evaluation that I have learned in the Master’s Program in terms of this future training and development.

While it has been a bit of a challenge to nominate myself for this award as I don’t believe in self-promotion, I hope that ESC will see the value in the work that I have done in my service work through my education. It will be an honor for the Community Fathers Program, the Nurturing Fathers program, and fatherhood overall to see some recognition of this important social justice issue that has long been overlooked.