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TRANSCRIPT

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EPISODE NAME: Honoring and Celebrating Father’s Day with Fatherhood Programs of the Visiting Nurse Association

Today on Across the Fence with Father’s Day on Sunday we honor dads for the special role they play in our lives. Having a father figure provides benefits to children that we may not even be aware of. From performing better in school to having better health to getting into less trouble with substance abuse and other negative behaviors. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us; I am Judy Simpson. Father's Day is this weekend and many of us will be spending time with or remembering our fathers. Like being a mom, being a dad is often a challenging job but you may be surprised to learn that many children do not have a father present in their lives. One in three children in this country live in a household without a father or father figure. But a series of new programs are helping young fathers who are may be facing tough challenges to become successful as a parent and partner as well as provide training to help dads find stable employment. To find out more I'm joined by two guests. Josh Edelbaum is the Fatherhood Program facilitator for the Visiting Nurse Association and Jeremy Berquist is a father who has recently participated in the VNA program. Thanks so much for being with us. Jeremy let's start out in the spirit of Father’s Day. Maybe you could share some of the joys of fatherhood?

Jeremy.: It's a lot of the little stuff. The piggy tales I just mastered those. Waking up every morning she always gives me a big hug and a smooch every morning when we're getting ready for day care. It's a lot of little things.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about your daughter how old is she?

Jeremy.: She is three years old her name is Teagan and in my eyes the coolest little girl I’ve ever met.

Judy.: Nice. What have been some of the challenges that you have faced as a father?

Jeremy.: There's a lot of things. Especially I think considering when I have her have her alone it's just me and her. So again there's a lot of little things. She sometimes has trouble following rules every kid does that. It gets frustrating sometimes but with the groups I've been through they helped me learn a lot of new ways of handling it.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about what brought you to this fatherhood program.

Jeremy.: I separated with Hillary her mother. Came from Saint Johnsbury. Did some couch surfing with Teagan I got Reach Up and my Reach Up worker said I don't know if you're
interested or not but I heard about this really great program and I think it would be great for you and I said you know what that's given a shot.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about how the program has helped you. What kind of things did you learn and what kinds of things did you do.

Jeremy.: I learn new ways of communicating with Teagan's mother. The ways of avoiding fights with her. Ways of talking through issues that we have. And in reference to Teagan I've learned a lot a new ways of handling problems. And as Josh said he had a pet peeve. He hates when people say “good job” to their kids--they're not dogs. So I've been a lot more specific with praise for good things and discipline for bad things. A lot more specific, that way she knows what she's doing right and what she's doing wrong.

Judy.: Have you seen a difference and her when you use some of these techniques?

Jeremy.: Definitely. She responds very well.

Judy.: Did you think that it would be easy to be a father? Or that one day this baby is born and boom you are a dad and you know all the answers.

Jeremy.: I think every dad thinks they know all the answers but I definitely knew it was going to be hard. It's definitely harder than expected. When it first happened we were like let's get clothes and some diapers and we'll be all set. But then you have the kids and it's a lot different than when we first heard we're having her. A lot of good and definitely difficult at times.

Judy.: There a lot of families who are involved in raising children. Some families have a partner. You mentioned you're single so that's hard. There are a lot of extended family members sometimes available to help out but if you don't have that is hard. You have to be all those people.

Jeremy.: I do have some family that's near enough to help.

Judy.: Josh why is the VNA doing this?

Josh.: The VNA has supported fathers for quite some time through a program called Fathers and Children Together. That's an ongoing support group that has been part of our parent-child support center. The Family Room. It's a focus on trying to support and strengthen families. If we cannot acknowledge the critical role a father plays in his family then we were missing a large component. The father and the extended family of the father. We want to be able to support families in whatever capacity that they may need. Whether that's health services through the VNA or family services, parenting and services that we can offer the family.

Judy.: You mentioned three programs can you go into detail about the three different programs?

Josh.: Sure the VNA has had the Fathers and Children Together group for some time but we're excited to offer them a grant funded opportunity where we have a parenting education component that I offer and facilitate through the VNA. The Howard Center has a relationship skills based program and Vermont Adult Learning has a program to support men with employment services.
Judy.: Maybe you can tell us a little bit about some of the changes you see in the men who come through the programs.

Josh.: I think we're starting to see some guys that might not have otherwise made it through our tour voluntarily to our support group program. Whether it's to reach out to a support system or through the department of children families. We're trying to reach out to guys that have been fairly marginalized in their own roles in their own communities based on some bad decisions that they may have made in the past. We are really trying to focus on their value as a father not related to the decisions that there may have made in the past.

Judy.: Jeremy did you have any idea how important to you and your daughter's life?

Jeremy.: I definitely knew I was going to be a big deal for her. I knew we would have a special bond and we absolutely love each other.

Judy.: What are some of the techniques that you learned? You talked about some of the language you now use with your daughter that makes a difference. What are some of the other things that you've learned?

Jeremy.: I keep her active. We try not to stay inside that helps a lot. If you keep a kid active they will not act out as much. Different eating habits help. Reading an extra story helps. A lot of different things and a lot of the other fathers from a group are able to help with some issues as well. There's one morning she woke up and did not want to get dressed for day care. One guy said send her in her pajamas. One guy said make it a game. It was really cool to have a few different perspectives and ideas to bring back and try for the next day.

Josh.: That's a great benefit of this group process is that these guys have the opportunity to share with each other. Certainly helps to facilitate conversation with real experiences coming from these men as they learn from each other share with each other. Jeremy was talking about the things you gained from this program. Jeremy has for sure and he has shared an extensive amount of his own experience that has been very helpful and supportive of these other men. There’s just not many places that dads have an opportunity to do that with each other.

Judy.: I think that's true in any situation. I know moms get together for play groups and that kind of thing and share that information and it seems very organic but dads don't always have that opportunity.

Josh.: We're trying to change that. That the grant certainly helps us but the VNA has supported this for some time. I'm a father myself. I recognize the role that I play within my own family system and what my father meant to me. I believe that's part of our mission to try to help support men who otherwise may not have services directed toward them.

Judy.: Are some of these men surprised to learn that there are a few services available and changes that they can help with?

Josh.: There are. I'm getting a number of phone calls from people who say I wish this was something I knew about years ago. Some fathers that have young children now but some older children from the past too who said I wish they had the opportunity when they were brand new
fathers. There's a surprise but I think as Jeremy is spending time with people from his own community and friends and sharing information word of mouth is started to spread through our community here and people are getting the idea that fathers make a difference as Jeremy's shirt indicates.

Judy.: I think fathers in the past in past generations have been less hands-on then they are now. Do you think there was a stigma that said the dads are not supposed to do these kinds of things.

Jeremy.: I think it definitely dads are supposed to go out and get a job. Dads are supposed to do the discipline and that's about it. When I have Teagan I do it all. I have to do the discipline I have to make her feel better when she falls down. I snuggle with her when she needs it I read her stories make her dinner I clean for her and do everything. It definitely has changed. I'm sure probably very recently even. A lot of fathers have that stand back and do as I say not as I do. Their very strict and serious I think.

Judy.: I know in our family dynamic and I went back to work part time and my husband was in charge of the two little ones. He didn't do things the same way I did he do them as own way that that was good too.

Josh.: Different does not mean deficient. We do things differently and there's unique value that moms and dads have. Certainly with these programs were trying to highlight the value that men have but that's certainly not in any way diminished the value that mothers have as well. I think as you're stating the pendulum has been stuck on the side of mothers being the nurturing and more caring role and we'd like to see that center itself a little bit more.

Judy.: I wonder what has been the reaction of your daughter's mother to how you deal with her and how your coping?

Jeremy.: I've shared not all but some of the information I've learned. She seems to take it in and actually use it. I am not there to see it but she does seem to use the information that I give her that I've learned. Which I'm really happy about. Our conversations over the phone our either short and sweet if we can't do it in a good place or sometimes we have good long conversations and work through whatever problems were going through at that point in time.

Judy.: Your daughter's young she is only three and it seems like in my experience as soon as you get something down as far as a routine or you get used to something everything changes. The child goes through a whole other phase. How are you equipped to handle that and as that's something you can go back to the VNA and get more help with that as well?

Jeremy.: Definitely they have all kinds of programs out there to help us. I could probably fill a week over there.

Josh.: It would be good to have you.

Jeremy.: This a lot of people in one place so if you're having a problem there's a lot of people to ask and that's a lot of different points of view.

Judy.: Can you talk a little bit about that Josh?
Josh.: Some of the programs?

Judy.: Yeah.

Josh.: Part of my hope is through this grant we bring in some men that might not otherwise come through our doors. As Jeremy was speaking to me a range of other services. Large play groups parent education based programs. We offer cooking programs and offer movement and educational opportunities through those programs as well. All of our programs are free so were open to anyone that's interested in coming to attend our programs at the family room. Mothers fathers grandparents. We're multicultural multi age program. The children we serve are all under the age of six. So it centers around the idea of how do we parent children from their youngest ages and reduce stress. That's part of what we hope to do; reduce isolation and stress and provide information and resources that supports families at a critical time for this age group.

Judy.: You talk about isolation and stress you tend to feel like you're the only person going through this and you are the only one who's doing this when in fact we all do. How can people get access to this care.

Josh.: They can contact us at the VNA Family Room. To be able to contact me directly related to our Fatherhood Program where we have such a range of services as checkout our web site the VNA website. Where we'll give you a description of our services and our mission as it is similar but somewhat different from the agency as a whole but has are focusing on this younger age group. Give us a call and come check this out there's nothing like coming to see the Family Room in action.

Judy.: Maybe you can end here Jeremy talking about what your hopes are for your daughter?

Jeremy.: I hope she never starts dating. I hope she stays three years old forever. I'd like to be able to provide for her a little bit better than the way my parents were able to provide for me. Get her that car when she turns 16. I just want her to be happy with her life and the way everything goes in it.

Judy.: Something tells me as long as you're part of it she's going to be very happy.

Jeremy.: I think so, she's quite happy already.

Judy.: That's awesome. Thanks for joining us today.

Jeremy.: Thanks for having us.

Judy.: That's our program for today I'm Judy Simpson will see you again next time on Across the Fence.

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