

Dad in the Mix

Something clicked in Don Cinkan's memory as he sat in a meeting for dads at the AIU's Sto-Rox Family Center. The fathers were learning how their children develop fine motor skills, and when the discussion turned to coloring, Cinkan spoke up.

"I remember disciplining my son, DJ, whenever he picked up a crayon or colored outside the lines. Then by the time he got to school, writing was his worst subject 'cause he was afraid to do it wrong. He's OK now, but it was a mistake I made," he said.

Learning from others - that is the emphasis behind the AIU's new fatherhood program, Dads in the Mix. Designed for fathers with children younger than five-years old, Dads in the Mix is a 12-week program that teaches fathers about various facets of their child's emotional and educational development.

"A lot of fathers love to play with their children, but they don't always know the right age-appropriate activities," said Larry Klinger, a facilitator for the AIU's Fatherhood Initiative program.

Funded by a grant from the Parents as Teachers National Center, Dads in the Mix also tackles issues such as stress management and relationships. The male-only atmosphere provides the type of support fathers need when discussing difficult issues such as fatherly guidance and family income.

"Men don't put their laundry out there for everyone to see," said Art Johnson, a fatherhood facilitator at the AIU's Lincoln Park Family Center.

"But they're receptive to learning from each other," he said.

In addition to building awareness and self-esteem, Dads in the Mix is free and offers fathers the opportunity to learn about their children during activities. On one evening, fathers experienced life through a child's eye as their children played games and completed crafts. In an era where many childhood programs are promoted for mothers, Dads in the Mix gives fathers the opportunity to not only be a part of their children's lives, but also to develop their innate nurturing skills.

For Cinkan, he shakes his head as he thinks about how quickly his son, DJ, has grown. Already seven-years old, DJ is doing well in school, earning all A's and B's on his report card. Cinkan looks at the floor, but his pride is obvious. So too is his desire to help younger fathers in the program.

"It's all OK now, but I just wanted them to know what I did so they don't make the same mistake," he said.

For more information about Dads in the Mix, or any of the AIU's Fatherhood programs, contact Larry Klinger at 412.394.5955. ▶

