



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Victor's journey though the FATHER Project

Joe Johnson column

"A person's most useful asset is not a head full of knowledge, but a heart full of love, and an ear ready to listen and a hand willing to help others." - Unknown

The FATHER project is inching its way closer to the four year mark. Hundreds of fathers have voluntarily entered and been a part of the love and energy that makes us who we are. In the spirit of having so many fathers be a part of the journey, it's time to highlight an inspiring story as told by the father himself...

"My name is Victor and I've been blessed with a little girl named Kathryn. Everyone calls her Kate. Kate is my little valentine's baby born on Feb 14th, 2013.

As a young father at the age of 21, I really didn't kick things off to being the world's greatest dad. By the time Kate was 10 months old I knew things weren't getting any better. So for a bit of hope, I reached out to my child support worker for any advice. That's when she told me about the FATHER project. This moment was the beginning of my journey to being a better father and becoming the "World's Greatest Dad."

So moments later, I contacted Joe Johnson, the FATHER Project case manager/parenting instructor. After a brief conversation, we set up a time for us to meet in person. After that one-on-one intake, I was very eager to move forward. I remember calling my Dad before I even left the parking lot to tell him I had signed on to the program. I could tell by the tone of my dad's voice that he was proud of me, which made me even more excited to be a part of it.

December 13th 2013, I sat in my first group. To this day, I still remember the conversation and group topic like it was yesterday. Showing up to groups started a change on how I viewed things in a more calm and positive way. The program is voluntary, but to stay actively enrolled, I was asked to attend at least twice a month. After the first week I was hooked and I found myself attending group every week. After each group I would feel anxious for the next week's topic. By May 20th 2014 we had a large group of dads ready to graduate. We had a graduation night that was recognized by our peers. It was a great feeling.

My next step in the FATHER project was joining a leadership group called "Nurturing Fathers Program" Boy was it an eye opener for me. It taught me how to make even more changes in a positive way. For example, I learned that rather than trying to change others, we need to start within ourselves. Others will start to reflect back in the same manner. Leadership for me was a lot more intense, especially going back to what we called "the little boy within". This step made me think back on my younger years as a little boy. It helped me to find things I felt were missing as a child and to connect with other things that I cherished. This process has helped me define myself and decide who I want to be in order to be the "world's greatest dad", a term Joe instilled in us at our very first group meeting. He said to never settle for being a good dad ...we can be good at anything. He encouraged all of us to become truly remarkable fathers who will want to be the world's greatest Dads to our kids.

I know that the one who benefits the most from the hard work of transformation is my daughter Kate. This process has made us closer than I could ever imagine.

By September 12th 2014, I graduated leadership. For the graduation, we were able to bring our kids, family and friends. Everyone who graduated felt great pride and joy. It took a lot of dedication to make it this far and it was well worth it.

I knew I had been impacted so much by the program that I wanted to give back. Wouldn't you know, I got a call from Joe about 6 months after I had graduated the entire program and got invited to be trained to facilitate group. I couldn't pass this up. On March 31st 2015, I facilitated my first group alongside Joe... something I will

never forget! To date, I have facilitated over 20 groups, each one more exciting than the last.

I not only have become a trained facilitator, Joe has asked me to come and speak in front of professionals, service clubs and others who ask for us. I do so proudly as a citizen father. It is an amazing experience to share your story in front of others and to receive the respect they show you for your sharing your story and time is unforgettable.

So, as of today, my journey through the FATHER Project has been a huge part of my life and my daughter's as well. I am thankful to Joe and all the staff who have made this program possible. I am no longer that 21 year old dad who got off to a bad start. I am reminded of that every single day when I get off work and come home. I give my daughter a big hug and I hear those powerful words...."I Love You Dad."

What a beautiful story shared from the heart of truly one of the world's greatest dads! If this is something you aspire to or if this inspires you, come check out the FATHER Project. Trust me, it will be worth your time, just ask Victor.

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About CHI St. Joseph's Health

CHI St. Joseph's Health is a 25-bed critical access hospital serving communities in Hubbard, Becker, Cass and Wadena Counties since 1946. In recent years, CHI St. Joseph's Health's award-winning teams received several national honors including: The Joint Commission Top Performer on Key Quality Measures in surgery; Top 100 Critical Access Hospital, HealthStrong; WomenCertified's America's Best Hospitals Women's Choice Award in obstetrics; and the Studer Group Fire Starter Healthcare Organization of the Month among other national, regional, and state recognitions.

About CHI

Catholic Health Initiatives, one of the nation's largest health systems, was formed in 1996 to strengthen the Catholic health ministry for the future. With deep roots in the tradition of expressing Christ's love by caring for those in need, Catholic Health Initiatives serves more than four million people each year through acute care hospitals; long-term care, assisted and residential-living facilities; community-based health services; home care; research and development; and reference laboratory services.

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