



# Best Practice Next Practice

## Family-Centered Child Welfare

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Father Involvement

## Father Involvement in Child Welfare: Estrangement and Reconciliation

*"The primary task of every civilization is to teach the young men to be fathers."*

—Margaret Mead

### in this issue

- 1 Father Involvement in Child Welfare
- 8 Fathers and Child Maltreatment
- 11 Father Involvement in Kinship Foster Care
- 14 Engaging Fathers in Child Welfare Cases
- 17 A Snapshot
- 18 A Dad's Story
- 22 My Baby's Father
- 27 Fathers in Training
- 30 Fathers in Prison
- 33 Fatherhood or Father-in-the-Hood?
- 35 A Father Finds His Way
- 38 Fatherhood Training Curriculum
- 39 Resources

On almost every indicator of child well-being, children today fare worse than their counterparts did just a generation ago. The reason proposed by some is the dramatic rise, over the last thirty years, in the number of children living in fatherless households. In 1960, less than 8 million children were living in families where the father was absent. Today, it's 24 million.

Where are the fathers? Divorce, single unwed motherhood, child-support and welfare policies, and incarceration are the prime suspects in their disappearance. Couple this with the pervasive attitude, from school systems and human services to the media, that "Dads don't matter. Men are inept parents." And even those men who wish to be involved with their children, regardless of their marital or financial status, have often been overlooked or marginalized. Yet research shows that children growing up without fathers are more likely to fail at school or to drop out, engage in early sexual activity, develop drug and alcohol problems, and experience or perpetrate violence.

### Importance of father involvement

A good father is critical to the optimal development and well-being of a child.

Father's role is more than that of economic provider of the past and now includes nurturing, caregiving, and emotional support in both obvious and subtle ways. Successful fatherhood correlates strongly with many attributes of children successfully growing up:

**Healthy child development.** This includes physical and mental health habits, success in school, self-respect and self-esteem, respect for others and for appropriate authority, constructive social and peer activities, as well as the avoidance of substance abuse, delinquency, and other forms of high-risk behaviors.

**Gender identity.** An appropriate masculine role model is believed to help boys seeking to create and understand their place in the world, and girls formulating the terms of respectful and happy relationships with the opposite sex.

**Responsible sexuality.** Understanding the emotional and social prerequisites and the consequences of sexual activity depends on a father's involvement. Programs to reduce teen pregnancy are a significant focus of father involvement initiatives.

**Emotional and social commitment.** The invisible bonds of affection and protection are strengthened in children through the demonstration of these bonds in day-to-day father involvement.

*Financial security.* Family self-sufficiency is greatly enhanced, even in poorly paid sectors of the economy, where father involvement is strong.

Fathers and men are discovering a fuller role in the lives of children and families in numerous ways. Virtually all human service fields are exploring and elaborating the positive lifelong outcomes associated with father and male involvement in the lives of children and families. Programs to help men be better fathers, understand their roles and responsibilities of rearing a child, learn about child development, find out alternative disciplinary options, and, in some cases, how to be a man, are emerging nationwide. For example, the Commonwealth of Virginia's Department of Social Services reports that in 1997 there were 15 programs for father involvement; in 2002 they

have more than 80. Head Start programs, community-based initiatives, such as the National Fatherhood Initiative, and programs for incarcerated fathers, are developing and showing results. But what about involving father and other males in child welfare?

### Father involvement in child welfare

If children's well-being is so closely tied to father involvement, why are so few fathers involved in the child welfare system? Does our family-centered practice truly include all the family? Or does "parent involvement" too often translate into "mother involvement" and family-centered practice mean only mother-and-child-centered practice?

While research shows father involvement benefits children's well-being, the child welfare system seems to contradict this in its

practice at all levels of the continuum, i.e., child protective services, foster care, kinship care, adoption, and family preservation.

In focus groups of fathers and child welfare workers, funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the issues facing fathers in child welfare elicited some sharp responses. Overall, focus group participants who worked in child welfare admitted that it was easier to work with families made up of single mothers and children. One worker with 24 years of experience stated flatly: "We don't involve fathers. The system is mother focused." Another worker said, "If the mother says the father is dead, we stop right there. It quite simply is easier than trying to locate the father, especially if we feel the mom will not be cooperative." Yet another worker made the point, "A father in the family makes it harder. It's easier to let dad stay in the background and not deal with him. Then I don't have to deal with my own issues about men. It is easier to deal with mom only." Clearly, from this discussion, mothers are the gatekeepers to the father's participation. Mothers have to believe that the family will benefit from the father's participation. Furthermore, this discussion implies a systemic bias for excluding fathers. It is easier to manage the ongoing interactions over the course of a case by working only with one parent, the mother. In frontline

Children who grow up in father-absent homes are significantly more likely to do poorly on almost any measure of child well-being. For example:

- ◆ Almost 75 percent of American children will experience poverty before they turn 11 years old, compared to only 20 percent for families where there are two parents.
- ◆ Violent criminals are overwhelmingly males who grew up without fathers, including 72 percent of adolescent murders and 70 percent of long-term prison inmates.
- ◆ Children living in father-absent homes are also more likely to be suspended from school, or to drop out; be treated for an emotional or behavioral problem; commit suicide as adolescents; and be victims of child abuse or neglect.

practice, the potential for a compliant relationship with the mother takes precedence over a comprehensive working relationship with all the family.

### Improving father and male involvement

There are many reasons why fathers and men are “missing” when it comes to child welfare. These reasons are magnified within the distressed circumstances that are characteristic of the child welfare population. To address this absence of fathers, with the goal of creating greater accountability and responsibility

on all sides, we need to begin with this cornerstone fact: fathers and men are excluded within the policy, programs, and practice of child welfare.

Addressing the issues raised by father and male involvement in child welfare depends on integrated agency-based work bringing together two pieces: key fatherhood and male involvement issues and the way these issues intersect within child welfare. These are helpful guideposts about how to proceed as we begin the work of father involvement in child welfare. We need to understand the following premises:

### *Father involvement depends on recognizing the fragility of fatherhood.*

Nonresidential fathers in child welfare are at very high risk for noninvolvement with their children. All child welfare professionals need to recognize the many possible reasons for this, and not view it as either a father’s lack of interest in the children, the removal of a “risk factor,” or a means to streamline case planning. Instead, we need to shore up these fragile relationships. Legal paternity and child support payments create the critical institutional supports for constructive father in-

## Forgetting Fathers

Daniel was 3 and Dawn was 4 when their mother took them and disappeared. Her estranged husband, a limousine driver, searched obsessively for his children. He posted rewards, enlisted help from a retired police officer, and hired a private detective, all to no avail. As six years passed, he took to driving slowly through residential neighborhoods, looking for two blond children who looked like him. “I never gave up hope,” said the father, “But it was as if they were dead.”

Instead they were in foster care. In 1991 the authorities had found the children alone in their mother’s apartment. They were emaciated and had evidently been abused. But for three more years, through 33 court hearings, multiple foster placements, and the children’s complaints of new abuse, the foster care system failed to tell their father. After Daniel had been placed in a foster home, his emotional trauma brought beatings, not therapy. Separated from his sister and transferred to a group residence where bigger boys routinely abused him, he began openly longing for his father. He says the caseworker told him “Don’t think your father is going to come and rescue you, because your father’s dead.” In fact, the father was living nearby with a listed telephone number. The father finally received notifications about his children as part of a routine effort to free the children for adoption. But reunion came too late, as they had no recollection of him as their father—Dawn, 17, ran to the streets before he could win her back; Daniel had a mental breakdown and was in a therapeutic foster home. —adapted from the “When the Foster Care System Forgets Fathers,” by Nina Bernstein, *New York Times*, May 4, 2000.

involvement. But they also raise many issues. Policies requiring TANF reimbursement with child support dollars harken back to earlier policies that punished two-parent involvement and created incentives for single-parent families. Recent policy briefs have begun to raise our awareness of this issue (Elaine Sorenson, The Urban Institute). An implication is that difficulties arising in poor families as a result of legal paternity and child support do not necessarily disqualify a man from father involvement.

*Father involvement is closely connected to the relationship to the mother.*

The father's relationship with the mother is the single greatest determinant of significant and successful father involvement. Mothers exercise disproportionate control over parenting. Because of this, they need to understand and participate in a family system that is more open to male involvement but in ways that does not threaten their own roles. Mediation and negotiation to promote the advantages of a father's involvement needs to be a standing and ongoing opportunity. "A Team Parenting Model," bringing together mother and father with selected service providers and peer supports, can minimize conflict and promote the children's best interest. Such services have been pioneered but not widely used. We have learned, however, that one-sided advocacy for fathers' rights is likely to increase polarization and exacerbate existing tensions between parents. A negotiation approach is also critical as domestic violence services grow and confront the difficult practice challenges of assuring family safety and well-being.

*Father involvement focuses the influence of families of origin.*

Grandparents and extended families have significant influence on father involvement. The mother's parents and kin influence access to children. The mother's parents' acceptance or rejection of the father can be critical to sustaining, rebuilding, or eliminating a father's role. Fathers' parents and kin are a resource for developing a new father's identity, especially if he is a young or teenaged father. The older generation can also be a force for maintaining conventional, and sometimes unproductive, gender roles. We need to understand the dynamics of the intergenerational families and see their strengths. Social network service models, such as family group conferencing or intergenerational services, need to incorporate the knowledge and skills necessary to work with these intergenerational dynamics to help and support fathers to gain and maintain access to their children. As we learn more about the constructive and positive relationships over a lifetime—which defines permanency—these models will include foster and concurrent planning resource families, open adoptive relationships, as well as specific supports for men and fathers sustained in different types of wrap-around planning.

*Father involvement requires understanding and using life transitions.*

Many fathers have difficulty sustaining emotional ties and social commitments when they also experience other risk factors (substance abuse, poverty, mental health issues, or unemployment) that are often characteristic of child welfare. To keep fathers involved requires understanding



and emphasizing life transitions. We need to give both residential and nonresidential fathers opportunities to understand their changing status and roles that accompany major milestones such as pregnancy, birth, and rearing a child.

Increasing their ability to provide familiar, stable, daily routines will help create important resources in a child's life. Fathers' participation in rituals, such as birthdays, holidays, and school graduations, are the building blocks of their engagement. Not surprisingly, men may need help in transitions from married or residential fatherhood to divorced or nonresidential fatherhood. More intense services, monitoring, supervision, and support are then needed to help fathers build continuity in the relationships that become fragile at these times. Divorce or separation within foster families is also important to consider. Similarly, the transitions over the course of a child welfare case fall under this heading. Assessments, case planning, and case reviews are not opportunities to confirm a father's problems and deficiencies, but are building blocks for responsible fathering. Protocols and standards for locating fathers, for engaging fathers through appropriate outreach activities, and for making them a part of child welfare case plans need to be included. "Reasonable efforts" to locate and involve fathers need to be part of child welfare casework practice.

*Father involvement relies on integrating an employment dimension into child welfare.*

Successful father involvement depends on a practice based on a solid understanding



of the difficulties and challenges of balancing work and family, especially within the economically distressed circumstances prevalent in child welfare. We need to pay attention to work-to-family role transitions, role conflict, and role differentiation. We need to reconsider the link between a father's unemployment and emotional disengagement and the tendency toward "punitive fathering," or tying fathers' involvement to his ability to meet child support payments, and improve interventions. The highest risk factor of all for loss of fathers' support and contact comes from the combined effects of unemployment and non-residential status. Here, the child welfare system's tendency to accept a father's absence conspires with a child support policy that allows debt to pile up. In our culture, which overwhelmingly defines self-worth through economic activity, the results are tragic. Too often, this practice inflicts punishment on children. At the same time, it is important not to link employment and involvement too closely; some

programs show that father involvement is a powerful motivator of employment. We must work to find the balance.

*Father involvement requires assistance in building relationships with community systems.*

Fathers whose families are involved with child welfare have the additional burdens of meeting the terms and complying with many community systems: the courts, child support agencies, child welfare, social/health/mental health services, and schools. Without adequate community-based resources for coaching, brokering, advocating, and supporting fathers, adding these tasks to a father's everyday life can be highly stressful. This stress affects a father's relationship within the family.

*Father involvement depends on fathers working with fathers.*

In the literature and program review on which these recommendations are based, peer support—fathers working with fathers—is the glue holding programs together. This is especially important in the face of the accumulated barriers addressed above. Caseworkers who are male and have the knowledge and skills can make a big difference. “Support fathers,” used as a component of safety planning, can make a difference. Father-to-father support within community-based partnerships works. The accumulation of these activities will eventually achieve the critical mass needed to “tip the scales” towards a balanced appreciation of the role of fathers in child welfare.

**In this issue**

This issue of *Best Practice/Next Practice* examines child welfare systems' weak-

nesses and strengths in father involvement. We present some of the available research on father involvement in child welfare. Findings from the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect Consortium (LONGSCAN) (p. 8) and from a recent study of kinship care (p. 11) summarize many of the key issues. This research demonstrates the systematic under-representation and misrepresentation of fathers in critical child welfare. Our disproportionate knowledge of “fathers' problems” and general lack of contact to diminish a father's participation in case planning and services make father involvement increasingly difficult over the life of a child welfare case. As noted in “A Case Manager's Perspective,” (p. 14) we need to evaluate our own interactions and attitudes in working with fathers; additional training is necessary. As the father involvement “Snapshot” of best practice (p. 17) suggests, fathers need to be involved actively across the continuum of child welfare practice. One of the most promising practices to do this is family conferencing: the involvement of a broad range of family members and committed friends in a critical decision-making process on behalf of children. Our Resource Center is committed to site-based strategies for developing family conferencing as a systemic family-centered practice reform.

Our interview with a father (p. 18) illustrates that prevention services alone are inadequate; often men need an array of programs to help them become better fathers. If a man wants to be a father and raise his child, he should be given the same tools and opportunities offered to a mother. Other articles in this issue show strong work in the area of father involve-

ment in child welfare. We feature different approaches and programs. My Baby's Father (p. 22) is a strengths-based systemic approach to identify and understand the constructive roles of fathers in achieving reunification and permanency. Fathers in Training (p. 27) is a three-tiered solution-focused program for men within and outside of the child welfare system. "Fathers in Prison" (p. 30) examines how changes in child welfare systems and collaboration with the prison systems can assist the more than 500,000 fathers who are in prison today. "Fatherhood or Father-in-the-Hood" (p. 33) describes an effective street-level approach to engaging very vulnerable, recently released or paroled fathers and helping them to improve their children's lives.

## Conclusion

Addressing father and male involvement will not be an easy task. It is not just a matter of adding statements about the role of fathers to training materials, or creating a new program category to enhance male involvement at any one point in the system. The issue of father and male involvement is a deeply systemic one that touches on multiple points of the child welfare system. We hope that the resources we present will wrap the fabric of hope around father involvement in child welfare enhancing safety, permanency, and well-being for children—and their fathers.

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, [www.fatherhood.hhs.gov](http://www.fatherhood.hhs.gov)

Virginia Department of Social Services, *Virginia Fatherhood Campaign Materials*, [www.vahealth.org/fatherhood](http://www.vahealth.org/fatherhood)

## Fathers and Child Maltreatment: Findings from the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect

by Wendy Lane, MD, MPH

What are the key factors that influence the health and development of children? Researchers have tried to answer this question for many years by looking at the role of the child's mother, the school, and the neighborhood, among other factors. Until recently, the role of fathers in their children's lives has been mostly overlooked. If the contribution of fathers was studied, the focus was often on white, middle-class families. Few studies in the past have addressed the role of fathers in disadvantaged or at-risk families. When examining the antecedents and effects of child maltreatment, it is no surprise that the role of the father-child relationship, both as a protective factor and a risk factor, has been virtually ignored.

### LONGSCAN Studies

Three recent studies from the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect (LONGSCAN) consortium, published in *Child Maltreatment*, examined the role of fathers and father-figures in families at increased risk for child abuse and neglect. The LONGSCAN consortium consists of five ongoing longitudinal studies of children's health, development, and risk of child maltreatment, each based in a different region of the United States. Although the sites share a common longitudinal design and battery of measures, the degree of actual maltreatment or risk

for maltreatment varies by site. For example, in one site families met criteria for "high risk" but they had not necessarily been maltreated. In another site, families were involved with Child Protective Services (CPS), and in one site the children had been placed in foster care. Findings from these LONGSCAN studies on father's role in child maltreatment are discussed below, along with their significance to the child welfare system.

### Father surrogates

Radhakrishna and others examined the relationship between the presence of a father surrogate in the home and the risk for child maltreatment in their article "Are father surrogates a risk factor for child maltreatment?" Participants included 70 mother-child dyads from the Southern LONGSCAN site who had been reported to CPS, and 140 unreported families, who served as controls. Household structure was examined periodically to assess whether the child was living with a biological father, a non-biological father-figure, or no maternal partner. Mother's age, mother's level of education, child's race and sex, receipt of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), number of siblings in the home, and maternal depression were considered.

The study found that children who lived in homes with a non-biological part-



ner were at least twice as likely to have been reported to CPS as compared to children living with their biological father or no father. Between ages 6 and 8 years, nearly 27 percent of children who lived with non-biological father figures had a documented CPS report, while rates for children living with a biological father or no father were 3.8 percent and 18 percent respectively. Unfortunately, the authors did not examine the relationship of the perpetrator to the child in their analysis. Therefore, it is unclear whether increased maltreatment risk might be related to direct abuse or neglect by the father figure, increased stress placed on the family by the presence of an unrelated male in the home, or other factors. However, the results make clear the need for CPS workers to consider the increased risk to children of having an unrelated father figure in the home. At the same time, most non-biological fathers do not maltreat children, and they may offer a great deal to their families.

### Male influence on child health and behavior

The second study, by Marshall and others, examined fathers' and father figures' potential influence on behavioral and health outcomes among children reported to CPS. Age 4 and 6 year interview data from 182 Northwestern children, who had been reported but not necessarily substantiated for child

maltreatment, were included in the analysis. Child characteristics, family/parent characteristics, parental and family functioning, extra-familial relationships, aspects of the neighborhood, service utilization, and maltreatment history were also studied.

Maternal use of minor violence against the child, more CPS referrals, being male, and being African American were associated with increased child aggression. However, the presence and involvement of fathers had little direct effect on child aggression. The authors did find that 6-year-old children whose father or father figure was absent had increased aggression, but only if the child had an African American caregiver. Six-year olds without a father or father figure had decreased aggression only if the child's caregiver had a strong religious affiliation. The presence and involvement of fathers/father figures also had little overall direct effect on child depression. For children with African American caregivers, however, father's absence was associated with increased depression. These results suggest that CPS caseworkers should consider the potential beneficial effects of religious affiliation on families with absent fathers. In addition, they should be aware that father's absence may be particularly harmful for African American children.



### Males' effects on child functioning

The third study examined the effect of fathers on the functioning of 677 six-year-old children enrolled in any of the LONGSCAN sites. Dubowitz and others assessed four aspects of children's functioning, including behavioral problems, depressive symptoms, cognitive development, and self-perception of competence and social acceptance. The children rated father support in terms of companionship, emotional support, practical support, and tangible support provided by the father or father figure. Children who reported stronger father figure support had a better perception of their competence and social acceptance, and they had fewer depressive symptoms.

Father figure support did not affect children's externalizing behavioral problems or cognitive

development. The findings showed no significant difference for biological fathers compared to non-biological father figures. This study provides additional evidence that father involvement may be beneficial to children. Therefore, clinicians and case-workers should encourage positive interaction and support between fathers (including father figures) and their children.

### Conclusion

Taken together, these three studies demonstrate that the effect of father and father figure presence is mixed, at times leading to positive child outcomes, while at other times having negative effects. As Dubowitz demonstrated, children with strong father or father figure support may feel more competent and less depressed than children with less support. Father figures were no less likely to exert these positive influences than were biological fathers.

In contrast, Radhakrishna demonstrated that the presence of a father figure may affect some children negatively, as children living with father figures were more likely to be reported to CPS than children living with a biological father or no father.

Finally, Marshall found few direct effects of fathers or father figures on child health or behavior. Only in African American families was father/father figure presence associated with decreased child aggression or depression.

Not surprisingly, the question of fathers' or father figures' influence in children's lives has no simple answer. It varies. In general, certain benefits were evident, and this supports other research. In a small number of families, however, fathers, particularly non-biological father figures, may contribute to children's abuse and neglect. Because all of the LONGSCAN subjects are considered at-risk, these results may not apply to the general population of American children and fathers/father figures. More research is clearly needed to better explore the nature and meaning of father-child relationships.

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## Father Involvement in Kinship Foster Care: An Empirical Study

*This article focuses on the results of one empirical study on father involvement “casework practice with fathers of children in kinship care.” We include it because we believe it is representative of practice in child welfare today.*

John O’Donnell conducted this study to increase knowledge about casework practice with biological fathers of children who are in the child welfare system. The study was based on data gathered from caseworkers in two private agencies’ kinship foster care programs. As O’Donnell states, “Kinship foster care was considered a particularly opportune child welfare service in which to study practice for two reasons. First, the use of relatives as foster parents for maltreated children has increased significantly in the past decade. In some states, such as Illinois, kinship foster home placements now outnumber placements in nonrelated homes. Secondly, kinship foster care inherently promotes the involvement of biological family in the care and treatment of placed children.”

### Research participants

Research project staff collected data on the cases through in-person interviews with the 54 caseworkers who were responsible for services to the 100 selected children and their families. The children were primarily young African American children. Caseworkers knew the identity of 91 of the 100 fathers who also were primarily African American. This study was

limited to the 82 fathers whose identity was known to the caseworker, who were living, and whose parental rights had not been terminated.

### Caseworkers’ knowledge about the fathers

One of the most striking aspects of this study is the caseworker’s lack of information about the fathers. Caseworkers did not know the marital status of 41 percent of the fathers nor the housing status of 54 percent. (Of the 48 fathers whose marital status was known, 71 percent had never married and only six percent were married to the mother of the child in placement.) The caseworkers had no information about the education or income of most of the fathers. For 67 percent of the fathers, caseworkers were able to identify one or more problems that affected the father’s ability to care for the placed child, but in 50 percent of the cases, caseworkers stated that they did not know whether or not the fathers had any strengths for caring for their children, and stated that 15 percent of the fathers had *no* strengths.

### Casework practice with fathers

Caseworkers’ accounts of their contacts with fathers were consistent with their general lack of knowledge about this group. In 63.4 percent of cases, caseworkers reported no contact with the father in the preceding six months. While case-



workers did have at least one telephone communication or in-person meeting with 30 of the 82 fathers, only a small percentage of fathers had contact with caseworkers on a regular basis.

Nine activities were used to measure fathers' participation in case planning and service delivery, including engagement, participation in the family assessment and development of the plan for the child, participation in the most recent case review, and the father's receipt of services from the agency. The data indicate that few fathers were engaged in helping efforts on behalf of their child. Only five of the 82 fathers were receiving services to assist them in assuming greater responsibility for the child.

### Caseworkers' characteristics and father involvement

Forty-five of the 54 caseworkers were female, 26 were African American, 24 were white, three were Latino, and one was Native American. Forty-four had a bachelor's degree, seven had master's degrees in fields other than social work, and three had master's degrees in social work. The mean length of experience in human services was 3.2 years, and the mean length of experience in kinship foster care was one year. These caseworkers served an average caseload of 22 children from eight families, and the average length of time that a caseworker had served a case was 12 months. The analyzed data indicated that:

- ◆ There was no statistically significant difference between the white and African American caseworkers in regard to the average number of contacts with fathers.
- ◆ There were no differences in the average number of service activities among fathers served by white and African American caseworkers.
- ◆ There were no significant associations between the length of caseworkers' professional

experience in kinship foster care or all human services and either the number of contacts or service participation.

- ◆ Practice did not vary significantly by the size of the caseworkers' caseload or the length of time the caseworker had served a case.

### Placement with maternal and paternal relatives and father involvement

Fathers whose children were placed with paternal relatives had more contact on average with caseworkers than those whose children were placed with maternal relatives. The fathers with children in paternal family homes were engaged in a mean number of 2.45 activities compared to a mean of .90 for those with children in maternal relatives. The most plausible explanation for this finding is that placement with paternal relatives usually afforded caseworkers greater access to the father.

### Caseworkers' responses to the lack of involvement by fathers

The study also examined to what extent caseworkers developed ways for working successfully with fathers, pursued opportunities to connect with noninvolved



fathers, or even identified lack of paternal involvement as a concern. Caseworkers' responses suggested that they seldom gave attention to the fathers of the children in their caseload:

- ◆ Eighty-two percent of the fathers had not contributed to the most recent case assessment. When asked what additional information they would have liked to have had available for this assessment, caseworkers mentioned information from or about the father in four percent of the cases.
- ◆ Ninety percent of the fathers had not participated in drafting the most recent service plan for the child and family. In only 16 percent of these cases, caseworkers cited fathers' lack of participation as an impediment to case planning.
- ◆ Caseworkers had at least monthly conferences with their supervisors. In 84 percent of the cases, caseworkers reported no discussions about the father with the supervisor. Similarly, in 83 percent of the cases, caseworkers did not note any discussion about the father in their contacts with external agencies such as the juvenile court, the

public child welfare agency, and community service providers.

- ◆ Caseworkers typically made monthly visits to the homes of foster parents who were related to the father. In 61 percent of these cases, not a single reference to the father was made during these home visits with the fathers' relatives, even though the caseworker had reported not knowing the father's whereabouts in many of these cases.

### Policy and practice implications

The findings of this study have several implications for child welfare practice and policy:

- ◆ The low level of paternal involvement in planning and services, coupled with the caseworkers' apparent disinterest in paternal involvement, raises serious concerns about their willingness and ability to work with fathers. The field needs to develop child welfare caseworker's knowledge about fathers, fatherhood, and current research on the paternal role in families.
- ◆ Particular attention needs to be paid to caseworkers' perception

of minority fathers which may include preconceived, negative views of inner-city African American fathers. This may require training among professionals at all levels in child welfare agencies.

- ◆ Child welfare staff do not know how to assess the full range of paternal capacities or to match these capacities to the needs of individual children. In addition to training, the development of paternal assessment instruments would also help staff to consider a broad range of roles and responsibilities in determining fathers' parenting potential.
- ◆ The fathers' needs span several service areas such as job training, drug treatment, and paternal skill development. The current fragmentation of these services hampers the development and implementation of comprehensive services.

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*Excerpted from: O'Donnell, J. M. (1999). Casework practice with fathers of children in kinship foster care. Kinship care: Improving practice through research. James P. Gleeson and Creasia Finney Hairston, Eds. Washington, DC: The Child Welfare League of America Press. 167-188.*



## Engaging Fathers in Child Welfare Cases: A Case Manager's Perspective

by Donna Hornsby, MSW

A while ago, I inherited a combined on-going child protective services and foster care case. The case had been opened for more than six years prior to my involvement. The two children who had been living with their mother had recently joined a third sibling in foster care. All three children had different fathers. The mother refused to tell me anything about the children's fathers. One of the children, "Marissa" had no mention of her father or paternal family in the case narrative, but when reviewing Marissa's file, I found a man's name on the case information sheet. I contacted child support regarding this and was told that paternity had



not only been established, but the father had been paying child support for several years. I located the father immediately and without difficulty. He was extremely upset that his child had entered foster care and that he had not been informed prior to the dispositional hearing. He came into my office that day with his wife and two youngest children and filed a petition for custody. We planned a visit for him and Marissa for that afternoon. We also made arrangements for him to meet the child's therapist and begin sessions. He was very interested in Marissa's schoolwork so we scheduled a meeting for him to talk with Marissa's school's principal, her teacher, and her school guidance counselor. I explained to him the agency's case planning process, which requires all interested parties (family members and service providers) to attend. He expressed his desire to attend these meetings, but said he could not miss any more work. Together we decided that we would meet once a month at 8:00 p.m. to accommodate his work schedule. Not only did the father and his wife attend each of these meetings, but so did the therapist, school counselor, and foster parent. After conducting a comprehensive family assessment and home study, Marissa was returned to her father. The father's home provided a safe and stable living environment, which her mother's could not. The child's basic needs were met within the father's home. The father continued the

child's therapy sessions by arranging his own payment plan with the therapist, he met regularly with the school, and he maintained contact with me even after his case had been closed. The father also arranged for the three siblings to continue having contact after he was awarded custody of his child.

How did I engage this father? First, I reassured him of my desire to help him strengthen his relationship with his child. I allowed him to express his anger about not being informed earlier about Marissa's entry into foster care and was able to validate those feelings. I accommodated his work schedule, which showed him my respect, understanding, and commitment to his involvement in the case planning process.

Best practices in social work tells us that our work with families should be based on a holistic approach, which requires engagement of *all* family members and individuals that play a role in the family. Yet, when I think about families with whom I have worked, I realize how few fathers were involved with case planning and more importantly how few were involved with their children. While I am proud of the outcome in Marissa's case, her case is, unfortunately, atypical. Why have my successes with fathers been so limited?

Although I have experienced success in engaging fathers in some

cases, I see many barriers to engaging fathers in most child welfare cases. I find it much easier to work with mothers. To begin with, you clearly know that they are a biological parent of the child. Most of my cases require DNA testing to establish paternity, which can be a long process depending on the current relationship between mother and father. If the mother and father are no longer involved in a relationship, the father's role in the child's life decreases. Many mothers provide false information or request that the father have no contact with the child. Therefore, it is difficult to know the truth about either parent and to balance the mother's wishes versus the best interest of the child.

Interestingly, agency "culture" is often more supportive of mothers. Most posters, brochures, flyers, and public service announcements focus on the needs of mothers and their children. The limited print media that is geared toward fathers is usually punitive and frequently related to child support enforcement. While I understand and accept the child support regulations, the obligation to report fathers to child support undermines engaging them in the child welfare processes. Many of the alleged and legal fathers in my caseload refused to be involved or keep in contact with the agency to avoid child support obligations. Furthermore, many of the



fathers in these cases were unemployed or were low wage earners barely making ends meet.

There are few resources specifically for fathers. The parenting classes and support groups in my community are all designed for mothers. While we do have in-home providers who work with both or either parent, the service providers in the community are focused on the relationships between mothers and their children. It takes a very special father to be the only man attending a parenting class or nutrition program. Also, many fathers in my caseload worked long hours and need services to be provided during nontraditional work hours.

Another barrier in the engagement process is related to caseload size. Federal, state, and local policies have added to the paper work load of case managers, which im-

pacts the time available to work with children and their families. I have worked in several different child welfare offices. In one office the focus was the paper work, the numbers, and the data. In another office the focus was the practice with families, and little attention was paid to the paper work or the numbers. I found that when my caseload was high there was no way to do either good case practice or adequate paperwork. Yet when caseloads are manageable, caseworkers can find ways to balance good case practice and meet paperwork requirements. When I was able to balance these two competing obligations, I could devote more time to engaging all family members, including fathers, and I got to really know the children in my caseload. Case managers need to learn and use good time management and organizational skills; supervisors need to learn ways to assist their staff in these areas. Finally, when faced with these barriers and often a high caseload, I realize I put less effort into engaging fathers in the case process. It was just more difficult.

Engaging fathers in child welfare cases is a complex issue. We need to change many things in child welfare policy and how we educate and train workers. High caseloads and competing demands on workers play a significant role in whether or not “real work” is done with fathers. Societal beliefs and agency culture are just as important to working with fathers. To successfully engage fathers, workers need training to dispel many of the myths related to “absent fathers” believed by not only case managers but society as a whole. While it is easy to jump to conclusions about why a father is not involved with a

child, we must consider whether we have adequately assessed the father’s current situation and his reasons for lack of involvement. Are we using our skills as social workers to earn the respect and trust of the individual? It is our job to create a safe environment for the children as well as the parents. Case managers need adequate training that will give them the skills to build respect and trust between the child welfare system and fathers. Agency staff—from directors to case aides—need to increase the focus on the importance of improving the father-child relationship and the benefits to the child. To better meet the needs of children in child welfare, we must engage fathers and paternal family members early in the case work processes. We need to conduct comprehensive family histories and assessments of all family members—identifying each member’s strengths and needs. Fathers and paternal family members need our support and encouragement in case planning and case implementation. Finally, we must provide and create services that address the individualized needs of fathers and other paternal family members.

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*Donna Hornsby has an MSW in Policy, Planning, and Administration Practice from Virginia Commonwealth University. She prepared this article for us while conducting research related to children involved in the foster care system, with particular focus on the overrepresentation of African American children in the foster care system. Ms. Hornsby joined the staff of the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice as a Child Welfare Specialist in June 2002.*

# A Snapshot:

## Including Fathers in Family-Centered Child Welfare Services

**Engagement.** Caseworkers encourage mothers to identify fathers early in the case. If mothers fail to cooperate, caseworkers use alternative means to identify and locate fathers (interview relatives and family friends, access TANF and child support information, or use the court if necessary). Fathers are engaged in ways relevant to their situation and sensitive to their culture. Caseworkers make every effort to gain the support of mothers and reduce any barriers the mother has established that prevents a father's engagement, sometimes using mediation and negotiation. Establish trust and honesty by clearly explaining the current situation of the case, the father's role, the caseworker's role, agency expectations, and all policies that are relevant to his case. Continually state willingness and desire to establish and/or maintain the father-child relationship.

Family conferencing is effective to bring all adults interested and committed to a child into a planned network of support for safety, permanency, and well-being. To do this means moving beyond typical assumptions about the "right model." Family conferencing is best seen as a comprehensive set of practices for effective family decision making *and* systemic reform. Strong community partnerships in family conferencing sites, effective strategies to getting the right people to the conference, an authentic family-centered decision-making process, and the integration of family conferencing into child welfare agency practice are necessary.

**Assessment.** Comprehensive assessments include all family members; therefore, fathers and paternal family members are an active part in the ongoing assessment process. Initial assessments include the strengths, needs, resources/assets, and supports of the father and the paternal family. Services and/or supports needed by the father are also identified. Assessments explore fathers' and paternal family members' willingness and ability to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child. The assessment process is ongoing, and information is continually gathered and regularly updated.

**Safety planning.** Fathers and paternal family members are actively involved in the development of a safety plan based on information and support of team members. Fathers and paternal family members should be considered as informal service providers in the safety plan, for example, as relative (kinship) placement providers or to supervise visits between child and parent(s).

**Out-of-home placement.** Before placing a child in an unrelated home, fathers' and paternal family members' homes are assessed for placement. Fathers are included in the discussion and in determining the best placement for the child. Foster parents, group home staff, residential treatment staff, hospital staff, and adoptive parents are encouraged and supported to build and maintain partnerships with birth or adoptive fathers. The child welfare agency provides services and supports to establish and maintain father-child relations through telephone and mail contact, visitation, and case planning activities.

**Implementation of service plan.** Fathers are actively involved in setting goals, and they are encouraged to express their opinions, concerns, requests, or questions about the services needed. Services are created and provided to meet the individualized needs of the father and/or paternal family members. Services must be accessible to working fathers. Father support groups address issues related to fatherhood such as empowering men to take an active role in parenting, emotional issues, child development, and developing key skills such as active listening, anger management, positive discipline, and basic parenting techniques. Service providers emphasize the importance of child relationships with both mother and father.

**Permanency planning.** Fathers are involved in all reviews of the service plan and in the development of the child's permanency plan. Caseworkers ensure that fathers have a clear understanding of the permanency plan and emphasize the importance of their role in the development and implementation of the plan. Fathers not only receive court notices regarding permanency hearing, but are also contacted by their caseworker to discuss the hearing and the agency's recommendations to the court. During this discussion caseworkers encourage fathers to attend all hearings.

**Re-evaluation of service plan.** Fathers are included in the sharing of information between other family members, children, support teams, and service providers to ensure that intervention strategies can be modified as needed to support positive outcomes. Fathers help monitor service provision and provide continuous feedback to the team so progress and modifications to services are made.



## A Dad's Story

*Resource Center staff interviewed a father regarding his experience in the child welfare system. In addition to his retelling his story, this dad offers some suggestions for child welfare agencies to strengthen their work with fathers.*

**Dad:** My son is from my first marriage; his mother has legal custody of him, I have visitation rights. I pay child support every two weeks. Because my son was doing poorly in school and his mother didn't have time for him, he came to live with me and my second wife in the city for awhile. If his mother needed something, or if she wanted to talk to him, she would call. But some weeks she didn't call him at all.

**Q:** What brought you to the attention of the child welfare system?

**Dad:** One night I had punished my son; I spanked him. The next day, Friday, at school his teacher asked him how he got a welt on his leg. He told her, "My dad spanked me." Because this was early in the school year, my son's teacher didn't know me yet. In the years before, I knew his teachers and was involved in the PTA. But the teacher called the principal and the school nurse. They called the protective services and child welfare. *Everybody* got involved. But nobody called me; nobody asked me anything, except for the police, who called me at work and suggested that I stop into the station to answer some questions.

Meanwhile, my son was put into foster care until a hearing that was set that Monday. CPS called his mother, but she said she couldn't get a ride to go pick him up. She'll find a ride to court, but can't go pick up her son? So my son spent three

days in foster care, with strangers. This annoyed me.

**Q:** What happened in court?

**Dad:** I tried to approach the social worker and the counselor who was handling the case, but they didn't want to speak to me. "We don't really need to speak to you; we'll speak to the judge."

I told the judge, "Yes, your honor, I spanked him with a belt. It's the first time ever." I gave him the reason. The judge said that this can't be tolerated; a child can't be spanked that way. And it was 11 p.m. when I came home from work; I woke my son from his sleep. The judge thought that was also harsh.

But different assumptions were made. Child protective services, welfare, and everybody was telling me that it looked like he was being abused. How could they assume that without talking to me, my wife, his mother, and finding out what had happened? Instead, they charged me with abuse. I wasn't found guilty, but I had to go through parent counseling courses through the department of social services. They never restricted my visitation rights, or told me that I couldn't see my son.

**Q:** What was his mother's response to the allegations of abuse?

**Dad:** Because of the bitterness that she felt against me, she didn't speak up in court. She knew I hadn't abused my son. She would never allow him to be alone with me if I had.

**Q:** Did your son come back to live with you and your wife in the city after this, or did you try to obtain custody?

**Dad:** No. I assumed they wouldn't give custody to me after what had hap-



pened. My son moved back to his mother's house. He still comes to visit me. He spends weekends with me or I go over there, take him to the movies, shopping, and do things with him. And I visit his school, know his teachers, attend the PTA meetings.

**Q:** Has this affected your relationship with your son?

**Dad:** He was angry. He wrote me a letter and told me that he was disappointed in what happened, but that he forgave me and was willing to go on to rebuild our relationship. At first he was frightened. For about six months he didn't want to be alone with me. It took a while for me to build trust. We both worked our way to it.

## Services

**Q:** What services did you receive?

**Dad:** The counseling dealt with learning how to discipline a child without using violence, such as taking away certain privileges, and dealing with conflicts nonviolently. Though it was called "parent counseling" it focused on the issue of striking another individual and conflict resolution. I learned some techniques. Period.

**Q:** Were there many dads involved?

**Dad:** There were very few dads there. The counseling was individual, but twice we got together for group sessions. I only saw one other dad because one of them dropped out.

**Q:** Were you offered any other services?

**Dad:** The court recommended it. I was brought up in the "old school," and I got spankings. But there is no tolerance for that now. The courts don't believe that a parent should strike a child. It's considered assault, and in some counties, it is considered child abuse. I didn't think I needed more services, but I heard about this family counseling program, My Baby's Father, through another project I am involved with and thought that it would help me.

**Q:** Do they have programs for men?

**Dad:** It's a group with men and women, but the counseling deals with issues of the entire family: the father, the mother, the sister, the brother. It's interesting how certain issues can be brought up, discussed, and problems resolved through this group counseling family technique.

## Recommendations

**Q:** As a man that has gone through the system, do you have some recommendations to make to the child welfare system, child protective agencies, and the courts?

**Dad:** The system has a stigma against fathers. The system treats fathers more harshly. No one should automatically assume that because this is a man, that he

is violent, and that he is perpetrating violence against a child. Someone could have come to me, and talked to me to find out what I was feeling and why did this happen, and why did I do this. Find out the facts. Also, a child needs to be thoroughly questioned, you know. "Has this ever happened to you before? Has your father ever done this to you before?" I also think the child should be involved in some type of counseling with the parent as well.

**Q:** With the accused parent?

**Dad:** Yes. When I was going through this counseling, my son wasn't involved in it. It could have helped us both, and for my son to understand what had happened. But he was never called in by anyone. Think about it. CPS comes into the home, takes the child. They tell a child that his parent is unfit. And CPS doesn't come back and do any follow up to find out what is the relationship of the child with the father after four years? Or has the father attempted to make any crossroads back to the child to heal?

**Q:** What else would help?

**Dad:** Well, the child protective service staff should learn more about the effect that this process has on people, the families. I want them to empathize. They need to really listen to people's experience. Otherwise, they become desensitized to the process and they can't

understand something that they are not involved in.

More issues about parenting need to be addressed, too; not just discipline. There are so many variables that go into this thing. Different people, different rules, and all this is confusing. So many things are involved, you just can't put a label on it.

**Q:** You are right, it's complicated for the child.

**Dad:** It's complicated for the adult as well.

*If a man wants to be a father and raise his child, he should be given the same tools and opportunities as a woman. And the stigma is, as long as the mother is around, the man doesn't have a chance for custody. Fathers should not be made to feel like they are the unimportant parent.*

**Q:** Would it help if there were more men involved in the process or other supports for men?

**Dad:** Yes, it might make it easier if the groups where men are going have more men as facilitators, and not only women. Or more information for men. They (DSS) definitely need to have men involved in the process. It seems that women show insensitivity when it comes dealing with men. Women stereotype men: "...a man should only be involved with his sons, to deal with them in sports" and things like that.

A man has to know that it is okay to take a cooking class, go to school functions, get involved with their children. Some men think being involved in such things isn't masculine and that's something that women should do. That's not true.

**Q:** How can we help involve more men in what their children are doing?

**Dad:** That's a big question. It starts with the individual. You can't instill something in someone. An individual has to want to have within themselves, to want to be better, not only himself, but his child. You must already want this and know that this is the right thing to do. So that has to come from the individual. His child is going to mirror and reflect what he sees in the home.

**Q:** What would you tell other fathers in a similar situation? Maybe someone who has a problem in excessively disciplining their children. Or those in your case where you felt the allegations were somewhat unjustified.

**Dad:** You have to be responsible for what you do; things aren't the way that they used to be. You can't take a belt or an extension cord and beat your child until welts are on their body. This is wrong. CPS has a job to do and you need to be patient; seek whatever type of help that you need to make sure that it doesn't happen again. Then, re-establish a bond with your child. Because when these people come into your home, take your children and put them in foster care, and go to court, it tears a family apart. Everybody is affected by this.

**Q:** Suppose I work for the child welfare agency and as a woman, I am starting a program for fathers. I'm used to work-

ing with women. What do I need to know about men in developing this program?

**Dad:** First, a man has the same capabilities that a woman has when raising a child. It means that a man can cook, clean, provide necessities, care for that child, just like a woman can. And in some cases even better. You can't look at a man and say "Aw man, what does he want custody of his kids for? You know he's gotta work, he's gotta..." So what? He can put his child in child care while he works. Just because he works doesn't mean that he can't provide and have a relationship with his children. First thing women say when they see a man, "Why is he trying to raise those children alone? Why doesn't he have to have a woman help him?" Why can't a man do it? The mother may be out there, on crack or heroin or something, or maybe she's dead.

Second, if a man wants to be a father and raise his child, he should be given the same tools and opportunities as a woman. And the stigma is, as long as the mother is around, the man doesn't have a chance for custody. Fathers should not be made to feel like they are the unimportant parent.

You could be a mother and be raising a son, and there are certain things that a mother can't give that boy. And you may be a father raising a daughter. There are certain

things that you can't give that girl. A lot of variables go into this. It's a big, big picture.

**Q:** In my new program for fathers, what activities should I include? I think men just like sports. Should my activities be centered around game night or the fight on TV?

**Dad:** No. Incorporate men in all things, not just sports. Dads and their children can go to the library. "What do you like? I like looking at the stars. I like looking at the moon. Okay, let's go get a book on celestial bodies and get into astronomy." Or he might like fish or something. We can go to the library and get some books on the different fish. You have to bring these things out of a child, and see what they like. You can go to the community center and do things there, like arts and crafts. You can make leather things and jewelry or do wood working.

**Q:** Are fathers interested in doing things like that?

**Dad:** Of course, but it's automatically assumed that they're not. It's assumed that they won't be interested, so they are not involved, and they are not asked. Because it's stereotypical of a woman to think that the only thing a man wants to do, or is thinking about, is sports. And that's not good. Sometimes men need some encouragement to do things. I go to PTA meetings and

maybe I am the only man in a room full of women. Schools have parent day, where a parent comes in and explains their occupation, and father and son days, and mother and daughter days. Almost every time it's just the mothers there. Fathers need to be involved, too. I was probably the only man that would go to my son's school and visit with his teacher, and sit in the classroom and eat lunch with him.

**Q:** So, has your view of parenting changed?

**Dad:** Of course. Like I said, my mother and father, they grew up an old-fashioned way. They both worked two jobs to pay for an expensive house. When me and my sister got home from school, they were at work. So we did homework and chatted on the phone to our friends. When our parents got home about 8 or 9 p.m., we were getting ready to go to bed. So we basically raised ourselves. Well, parenting is spending time, quality time with your child. I had my own phone, TV, and stereo in my room, but I never had my parents' one-on-one time. Without that time, you can't build a bond or trust with your child. That bond is really important to your child and to you.

*The ESFT approach is strengths-oriented, solution-focused, skills based and culturally sensitive. The model encourages a systemic perspective of families and helps child welfare workers to focus on solutions, not problems and pathology.*

## My Baby's Father

### A Family Systems Focus on Re-Involvement of Men in Meeting Family Reunification and Permanency Goals

by Ross N. Ford, MSW, LCSW-C

*Editor's note: This article reports on an exciting training program in Baltimore, Maryland. The purpose of the the training program is to teach skills to child welfare workers and others so they can work effectively with fathers whose children are involved with the child welfare system. In particular, it teaches skills in working with inner-city African American men who have, over the course of more than one generation, been marginalized from their families.*

Where are the fathers in the permanency planning and implementation process? Are fathers involved in child placement decisions, family reunification delivery strategies, and expedited termination of parental rights? Do child welfare professionals and policy makers need assistance in including fathers in the family support and child welfare integration process?

Fathers are noticeably missing as active participants in today's post-Adoption and Safe Family Act child welfare arena. Yet, it is a time of renewed opportunities for family-focused planning and interventions, for decisions based on comprehensive assessment, and for collaboration between child welfare and other systems with which the family is involved. Child welfare agencies can be more proactive in identifying and addressing male involvement goals. A popular misperception is that men are not interested in being actively involved in their family. On one

hand, many fathers are resistant, but their lack of or limited involvement is often the result of marginalization. Over time they have been systematically overlooked and excluded from the family. Including the father, on the other hand, provides information, perspective, and clarity that is helpful to the child welfare workers who are involved in making critical reunification and permanency decisions. As we look to improve outcomes for children and families, we need to identify ways of involving fathers in the decisions that affect their children and families.

To support better outcomes for families and children "My Baby's Father," uses a family systems approach and concrete skill development as a way to increase male involvement. The training we use in the program is based on the Enriched Structural Family Therapy (ESFT) model, which is an original family systems approach to strengthening families. ESFT is strengths-oriented, solution-focused, skills based and culturally sensitive. The model encourages a systemic perspective of families and helps child welfare workers to focus on solutions, not problems and pathology.

ESFT incorporates the highly acclaimed Structural Family Therapy (SFT) approach, associated with Salvador Minuchin and Jay Haley, which we modified in our practice with inner-city families over the past twenty-five years. We

combine the basic elements of the structural model with an emphasis on parenting skills, family order, and kinship forms that are specific to at-risk and fragile families. This family systems approach is enhanced by the evolution of the My Baby's Father (MBF) model component.

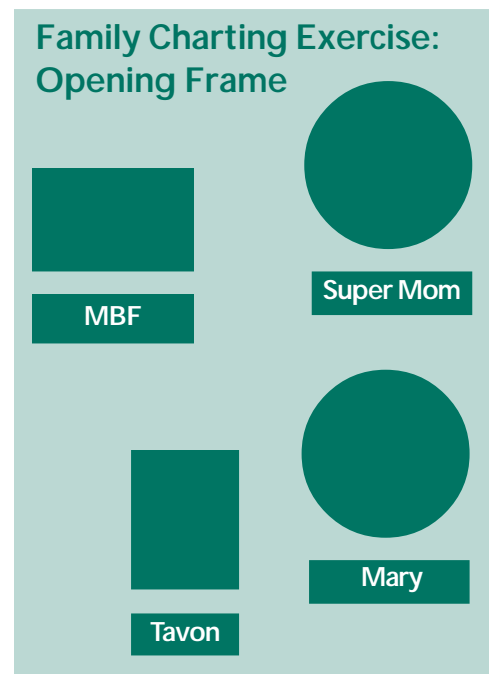
### The MBF Male Involvement Model

The MBF is a highly interactive training model that uses an intergenerational family charting process to focus on the roles and relationships that characterize the dynamics of everyday life in today's families. The model takes its name from a primary, standout metaphor, "my baby's father" that is used widely both to refer to the person with that designation, as well as to describe role expectations of that person. Trainers and participants work together to create the story of the family, its members, communication, roles, and relationships. The story begins with the MBF: Opening Frame, as follows.

Typically the trainer begins: *This is a story about the marginalization of men in the family. The man's role in the family has shifted; and that shift has been supported inadvertently by policies and typical ways of dealing with men in the child welfare system. In our story, there is a person carrying this new role in the family. We call him by a metaphor of identity, My Baby's Father (MBF). This is what the members of the family and the proverbial mom call him.* In our work with families, we ask participants to identify those roles and behaviors that are identified with a good MBF. The MBF's role is easily delineated. Typically, participants define

good MBF as one who brings disposable diapers or necessary items; spends quality time with child and the mother; participates in the child support system; holds a job; and takes baby to spend time with his own parents.

The next key person is Super Mom. She is Mary's mother; but she gets her identity because generally she is called Mama by Mary and by the grandchild (Tavon). The next characterization focuses on the relationship between Mary and Tavon, whose relationship is more like siblings than like mother and child. The training continues with a here-and-now process, generating the story, adding family members, and exploring widely used metaphors—his children's mother (HCM), my baby's daddy (MBD), little man, and others. The training focuses the participants' attention on a comprehensive and sometimes complicated set of transactions that may not be specifically





addressed in textbooks but are always present when working with families in the child welfare system (as highlighted by the typical closing frame below).

### Overcoming barriers to male involvement

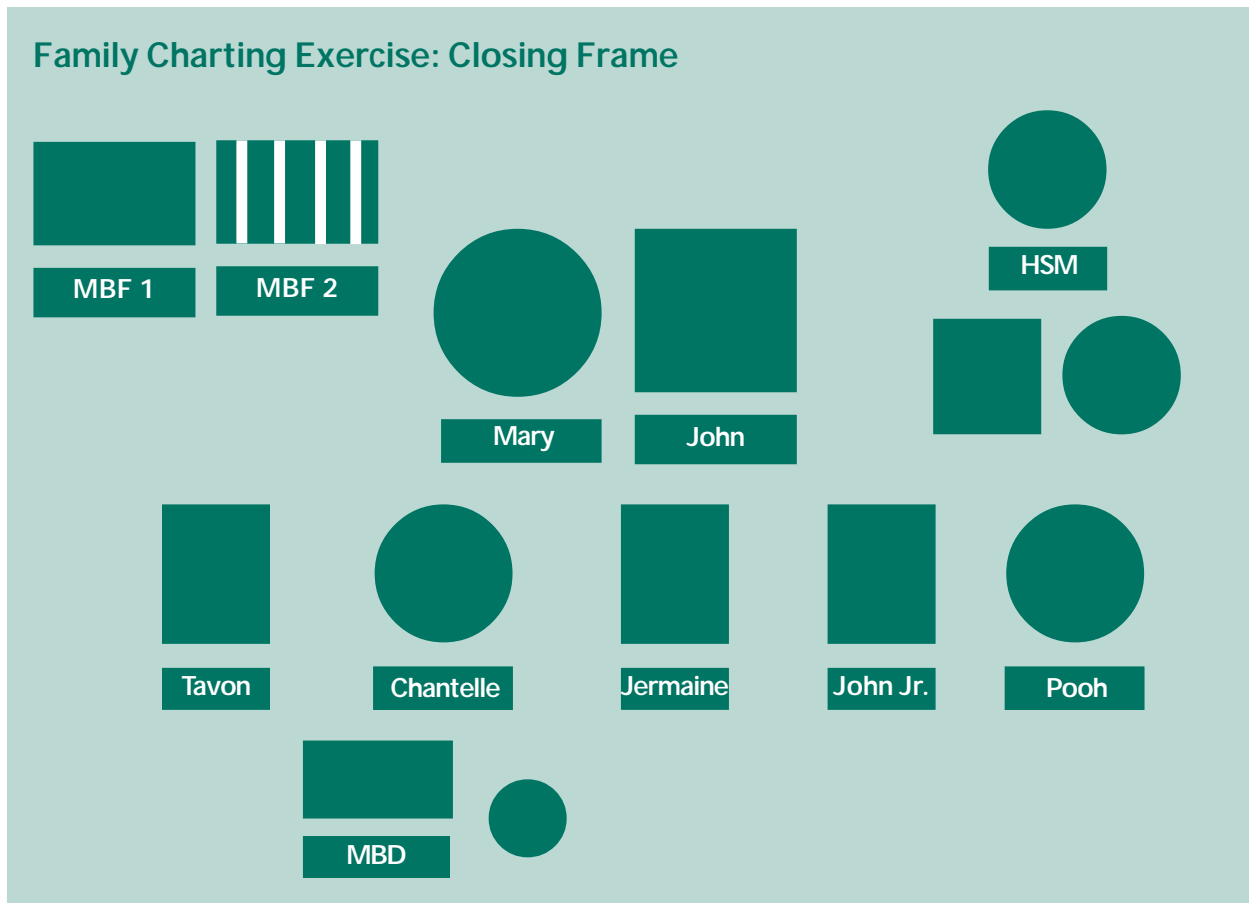
Training in the MBF model gives participants the advantage of “seeing” and “hearing” family dynamics and relationships. Use of the model enhances the ability of participants to get a clear picture of what the family system looks like and to identify the otherwise hard to see influences on the family.

The approach is useful in identifying the support that the family will need to bring about positive changes in the system and individual family members.

Greg M., age 24, came to the attention of the child welfare system when Greg Jr., age 8, came to school with bruises on his legs and was suspected by his teacher to have been physically abused. The father was found guilty of child abuse and the son was removed from the home and placed with the maternal grandmother. The separation of the son from the family signaled the beginning of the total disinte-

gration of the family; mother and father were unable to continue to sustain an ongoing relationship. Seven months later, Greg was incarcerated on a drug-related charge and began a five-year sentence. During this period, Greg filed for divorce from the mother, a crack addict; and upon release, married a woman who stuck by him during his incarceration. He moved in with the new wife and her two small children. He re-established contact with Greg, Jr., who remained in the home of his grandmother.

We met Greg at the weekly family-systems training work-



shop, which we conduct with a community-based organization of ex-offenders who provide workshops and psycho-educational interventions with youth at highest risk for incarceration. While Greg was especially effective in sharing with young people his own story as a deterrent to their involvement in criminal activity and lawlessness, he was resistant to participating in family-based training. He stated that training would have no relevance. We began the first training session with the MBF Family Charting Exercise. During the training, Greg compared himself to the family illustrated in the Family Charting Exercise. He surprised the group by engaging us in a long and detailed discussion on the difference between the way “John,” the father in this family, treated his own child compared to the way he treated “Mary’s” children from previous relationships. From his comments, it was obvious to us that Greg had found himself on the chart. Without having to disclose, he was able to identify with John and articulate his perspectives on the relationship and communication problems that were creating conflict, pain, and distress in both families. Ultimately, Greg utilized the training as a springboard to overcome relationship and communication difficulties in the household with

his new family and to overcome barriers to re-uniting with his son.

### Helping the child welfare system intervene in the marginalization process

The training model helps us to involve Greg and numerous fathers who, like Greg, silently search for ways to be reintegrated into their family systems. The model has become the basis of service delivery in five male involvement initiatives in the Baltimore/Washington area and, most recently, in youth services programs in Namibia, South Africa, and Brazil. We conduct training in the MBF intervention in a range of settings including several local Departments of Social Services in Maryland; community-based consortia; college, university, and public school programs; as well as in several other cities in the United States. We have set up a Family Training Center to make training and support in these family systems models available to child welfare administrators and service providers in various regions throughout the country.

Recent public laws on adoption and safe families require that states continue reasonable efforts to reunify children and their families. For us, reasonable effort should include family systems interventions that give the families the support they need to make

### Essential Components of the MBF Model in Child Welfare

1. The model presents an ideal format for meeting the challenge of supporting male involvement. Training is supported by a clarified framework for assessing strengths and risks as well as developing collaborative intervention plans that are helpful for reunification and other forms of expedited permanency.
2. The model enhances the capacity of agencies to navigate through barriers and meet other goals of family involvement, reunification, worker sensitivity, worker skill development, and case management.
3. The model gives direct case workers safe, appropriate skills that are usable in a team context. It teaches simple interventions that structure, shape, and support the time frames set up for specific outcomes.
4. The model provides sequential steps for intervening within a family system and for helping to realign the system to a state of equilibrium through redefining and redirecting roles and communication patterns within the family.



## Fathers in Training: Empowering Men to Become Better Fathers

Fathers in Training (FIT) is a service to fathers provided by the Virginia Beach Department of Social Services in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The program was established about six years ago to strengthen families by providing an environment in which fathers can acquire the tools to become effective and motivated parents.

“It is the healthier father that is most likely to create a healthier environment for his family,” explains Brian Hawkins, FIT director.

FIT also helps fathers strengthen the bond between their children and significant others. It encourages active fathering and helps families become self-sufficient. Identified by the National Family Preservation Network as a best practice fatherhood program model in the child welfare system, FIT is a three-tiered program with a parent education dimension, employment services, and assistance for fathers involved in the court system.

Currently, about half the fathers in this program have a child(ren) involved in child welfare. FIT serves fathers involved in child support, TANF, child abuse and neglect, and court child custody cases. One of the program’s goals is to help nonresi-

dential fathers obtain employment that pays a sufficient salary. This helps motivate fathers to support mothers and children as they leave the agency’s welfare roles. The program also works with fathers who have been founded (investigated and found to have abused or neglected a child) for child abuse or neglect by the agency’s Child Protective Services Unit. About 20 percent of the men in FIT are voluntary involved (there was no finding of abuse or neglect but the family was found to be at-risk and voluntarily agreed to participate in the services) and seek to improve fathering skills. About 30 percent of the fathers involved come directly from the local courts for custody issues, parenting skills, employment, anger management skills, and issues regarding family violence.

Program success is measured in a variety of ways including increases in the amount of time a father spends with his children; the number of fathers claiming paternity for their children; and the amount of regular financial support provided to children. Fathers who complete the program also show increased knowledge of disciplinary techniques and uses of alternative disciplinary meth-

ods and better understanding of child development. Fathers also show increased cooperative co-parenting as well as greater cooperation with service providers.

### The FIT program structure

FIT offers participants support, education, and advocacy by

- ◆ Providing an environment that encourages learning and will address identified barriers to effective fathering such as anger management, conflict resolution, and working with support systems as well as others;
- ◆ Offering employment assistance services to assist fathers in financially contributing to the well-being of their children.
- ◆ Supporting an alumni group of dads who have successfully completed the program and wish to maintain and increase their participation within the community;
- ◆ Helping to ensure the protection of children and families. Domestic violence, effective communication, anger management, and conflict resolution issues are the primary topics of every group meeting due to FIT’s zero tolerance of abuse in the home.



“We have created a safe, but challenging environment for fathers to engage in conversations about the joys and challenges of fatherhood with other fathers,” states Hawkins. The challenges come in different forms:

*Class attendance*—Fathers must be present and be an active participant each week for a minimum of 17 of the 20 weeks of the required program. Not everyone can make that commitment. Participation in and contribution to the group are evaluated.

*Self-examination*—Fathers need to dig deep to examine long held opinions, hurts, grudges, and other emotions to better understand themselves and their relationships with their children. This is difficult and not everyone is willing or has the needed support to do this.

*Participation*—FIT believes that every father wants the best for his child; the program relies on the participation of each father because every father has skills, experience, or knowledge that will add something. “We depend on fathers’ input, we all learn from each other, whether you are a dad making a lot of money or someone making little money, no one person has all the answers,” explains Hawkins. “Therefore, everyone in the program must contribute and express their beliefs openly.”

To accommodate most fathers’ schedules, the two-hour classes meet Wednesday evenings.

The classes, or groups, are divided into four different levels and meet for five weeks. The group progresses through the levels as one unit, increasing their trust, camaraderie, and shared knowledge. Each level focuses on five topic areas: appropriate support networks, anger management, effective communication, conflict resolution, and parenting. As the group moves to the next or more advanced level the information and discussions become more involved and demanding. During the program, weekly tests are given. A pre-test is given before the subject material is covered and a post-test after the material is presented. While these tests are not graded, they become a tool for assessing program and facilitation effectiveness. Each participant is also rated from noncompliant to excellent for his participation.

The group begins at the bronze level in which the foundation for the principles and skills that will be needed for the program are learned. At the silver level, participants learn the importance and strengths of the group, learning from one another, the philosophy, and what is needed for their growth as individuals. The participants at this level also begin to assume responsibility for their actions. Next, at the gold level, the participants work on applying the FIT program concepts within family relationships. Participants are expected to see them-

selves as “catalysts of positive change,” and identify principles on which to base their goals and decisions. The fourth level is the Alumni group. This last “official” group of the training addresses the same educational components, but each participant applies these differently. Successes and struggles are regular topics. After the graduation program, participants are encouraged to remain active and receive continued support in a healthy environment. Conferences or forums are scheduled to provide additional opportunities and skills.

Recently, the *Xchange: A Forum for Fathers* offered dialogues on financial investments, fathering children with special needs, improving parenting when children live in separate homes, understanding child support systems, and a panel discussion led by daughters on the importance their fathers had in their lives. More than 700 fathers participated. “Fathers from all cultures, races, and socio-economic levels joined together with a common goal,” explains Hawkins, “to celebrate the importance of family, community, our children, and fatherhood. Fathers felt connected and supported by one another and empowered as men of their communities.”

Long-term alumni believe that real growth truly takes place after graduation. More than 20 percent of fathers referred to the

program for child abuse or neglect stay involved as alumni.

### What makes FIT work?

Historically, social services and their programs have been places of shame for fathers. “Fathers were always the first ones blamed for problems in their families. It is no wonder that men shy away from us. We first have to make our places father friendly, from the first glance of a receptionist to the programs we offer,” explains Hawkins.

The program is managed and run by fathers, who are also specifically trained social workers. “We want to provide the services that men need; just as we do for mothers,” says Hawkins. Any program, a fatherhood program or other program, cannot be built on the charismatic nature of one or two individuals,” explains Hawkins. “For this program to be successful it has to build into a self-sustaining entity, with many individuals able to step to the plate with support. This is a long-term program; it takes a long time to make the changes that some fathers need to make.” FIT is doing just that, building on success, galvanizing support, and being recognized both inside and outside of the agency.

“Our agency recognizes the importance of this program to children, their fathers, and the community overall. Having that support is essential,” states

Hawkins. The program grew out of employment services that were offered from within the Department of Social Services and has grown. Hawkins says, “We had to convince everyone that this program could help them. To the caseworkers, we said ‘We can reduce your caseload and help you work with the father.’ To the CPS workers, we said ‘We can help you with founded and unfounded cases of abuse and neglect. We can provide parenting skills training.’”

Convincing fathers to be active participants in the program can sometimes be difficult. Striking the right chord with each one and recognizing each man’s needs is important to the success of his family. “We tell some of the men ‘This program is about safety... the safety of your children, your family, *and* you.’” “One Man’s Plan” is a contract that the father completes and indicates his willingness to work with the FIT program “to be a better father.”

Many mothers distrust the program so FIT invites mothers to attend open forums with FIT facilitators and have frequent conferences with case workers.

One of FIT’s greatest assets is the fathers, the alumni, who remain with the program to mentor and help other dads.

“Our job is to empower other fathers, leaders, and agents of change,” Hawkins continues. Hawkins firmly believes that this



program and its services meet a definite need for fathers. By providing fathers with a safe place and opportunity for dialogue and training, dads are able to acquire the skills and relationships that many of them desire.

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*I have been in six prisons and one common denominator I have seen are men who say they want to take care of their children. They mean it when they say it. Then when they get out, the children are the last things on our minds. A lot of us just don't know what a father is. We don't even know what a man is!*

—Philadelphia Inquirer, May 2001

## Fathers in Prison

*Stephen is 32 years old. He was sentenced to twenty years for a series of burglaries and has been incarcerated for the last eight years. He states, "After being here for eight years and sleeping in the same cell every night, if you are strong enough, you begin to face the truth within your life. You begin to understand your motivations in life and eventually you begin to really feel the consequences of those motivations. You begin to see how you have hurt yourself, your victims, your family, and especially your children. I lay in my cell and I listen to the noise and the silence. I think about my two kids every night. I think about how I was always too busy running the streets to spend time with them. I think about how I have deeply hurt them by committing crimes and coming to prison. But most of all I think about how I can become a better father to them and not necessarily make up for lost time, but be a loving and positive role model.*

—from *Teaching Parenting Skills to Incarcerated Fathers* by Carl Mazza

Everyday, more than 500,000 fathers are in prison; half of these men have children under the age of 18. It is estimated at 1.5 million children have a parent in prison. In addition to the stress of separation, erratic living arrangements, and the like, as a group these children are less likely to succeed in school, and more likely to be involved in substance abuse, gangs, and delinquency. They are five times as likely to end up in prison themselves. The prison population is increasing due to longer prison terms and more sentences for non-violent crimes; therefore, more children will be at risk to troubling behaviors and need an array of human services. Incarceration has an impact on child welfare. Most children in foster care have had an incarcerated parent, although many children who have an incarcerated parent live with their mothers or other family members.

The criminal justice system and the child welfare system share much of the same population. Many inmates themselves were, at one time, part of the child welfare

system. The typical male grew up in a single parent home; one in seven was raised by relatives, and 17 percent spent time in out-of-home care. Most male offenders have limited education and poor employment skills. At time of arrest, 90 percent had an income below \$25,000 and 69 percent had an income below poverty level. Indeed, this is a population that is most in need.

But, fathers are good for their children, and research shows, children are good for their fathers. Reaching out to these fathers while they are in prison, connecting them with their children, helping them examine their roles as men and fathers, and providing meaningful support for them can strengthen and build families in the child welfare system. At the same time, providing fathers with motivation, support, and skills can lessen the likelihood of their re-entry into the criminal justice system. And, as research shows, this decreases the likelihood of their children, especially their sons, spending time in prison.

The child welfare system has overlooked incarcerated fathers. Imprisoned fathers are often considered as uninvolved, inaccessible, and unlikely role models for children. Most are not involved in decision making, case planning, or service delivery. Most states and child welfare agencies do not have written, up-to-date policies regarding child welfare practice with incarcerated parents, or if they do, they focus on incarcerated mothers. Workers receive little guidance, training, or support in including incarcerated fathers. Yet, child welfare workers are legally mandated to facilitate parent-child visits. Child welfare workers, and children, face many obstacles in

visiting a father in prison: the lack of communication, difficulties in scheduling visits, the time-consuming nature of visits, and visiting procedures that are uncomfortable or humiliating. Prisons are not child friendly and few rules or regulations facilitate father/child visits. Even communication between fathers and their children (mail, phone, visits) are all highly regulated, often insensitive, expensive, and, due to various literacy rates, limited. Furthermore, if a child's mother refuses or objects to a child visiting a father in prison, the father may not get to see his child at all. Indeed, a father serving a long sentence may never spend any time outside of prison with

his young children. How can his role of father be strengthened to make a difference for his child?

A small but growing number of states and statewide efforts to support fatherhood within the criminal justice and child welfare system, as well as community-based programs targeted to recently released or paroled fathers, reflect an increased recognition in the importance of incarcerated fathers' role in the lives of their children and their well-being. Collaboration between criminal justice and child welfare systems to develop family-oriented policies and programs for incarcerated parents is beginning. We include some examples of programs, as well as resources, that illustrate

### Fathers in Prison: Changing Child Welfare Policy

- ◆ Child welfare and correctional leaders should establish national standards covering parents and their children and adopt these standards as a part of the accreditation process for correctional institutions and child welfare agencies.
- ◆ State-level departments of child welfare and federal-level child welfare agencies should provide leadership in developing model policies and administrative regulations to guide child welfare proactively when children are involved in the child welfare system and their parents are in correctional institutions.
- ◆ Family advocates and child welfare and criminal justice professionals should promote the development of a national research, knowledge-building, and knowledge-dissemination agenda focusing on prisoners and their families and children.
- ◆ Social service organizations and practitioners should provide leadership for the development of public policies and service programs that help parents in prison maintain ties with their children and address family needs related to correctional supervision.

*From Seymour, Cynthia and Creasia Finney Hairston, Eds., (2001). "The Forgotten Parent: Understanding the Forces that Influence Incarcerated Fathers' Relationships with Their Children," Children with Parents in Prison, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.*



how programs to support fathers are emerging.

### Programs for fathers

- ◆ **The Alliance of Concerned Men (Abridging)** in Washington, DC, provides parenting lessons to fathers in prison, and brings their children to see them.
- ◆ **PATCH (Papas And Their Children)**, run in Texas by the Bexar County Adult Detention Center and Detention Ministries, encourages inmates to attend parenting and life skills classes—sessions intended to help reduce recidivism. For each one-hour class attended, a father is entitled to a one-hour “contact” visit with his child (sitting in a room with his child, instead of speaking through a glass window).
- ◆ **FATHERS (Fathers As Teachers: Helping, Encouraging, Reading, Supporting)** program focuses on literacy and parenting skills for fathers in jail, while helping the children with schoolwork.
- ◆ **Long Distance Dads, Incarcerated Fathers Program**, is an educational and support program developed in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. Many community-based fatherhood programs are facili-

tating weekly support groups for fathers in their county prisons. Once they return to the community, fathers are able to seek assistance with job training, education, counseling, and support from the fatherhood program. (Visit [www.fcnetwork.org/fatherhood/turner.html](http://www.fcnetwork.org/fatherhood/turner.html))

- ◆ **Georgia Fatherhood Program** works with fathers who are incarcerated for a long term. The goal is to help them stay connected to their children if the custodial parent/guardian and child are in agreement.

For a listing of nearly a dozen other state programs, see [www.fcnetwork.org](http://www.fcnetwork.org).

### Programs for children

There are several programs for children whose parents are incarcerated. Programs for children range from support groups, community outreach programs, and tutor/mentor programs that are designed to bridge the gap between children and parents who are imprisoned.

- ◆ **Angel Tree**, a multi-state Christian organization, gives gifts to children of imprisoned parents.
- ◆ **FORUM** provides youth with development and leadership skills.

- ◆ **Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners** is operated by the Child Welfare League of America in collaboration with the Department of Justice and the National Institute of Corrections. [www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/frccpabout.htm](http://www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/frccpabout.htm)

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## Fatherhood or Father-in-the-Hood?

Washington, D.C. has seven community collaboratives across the city whose mission is, in part, to provide neighborhood families who are at risk of coming into the child welfare system with community-based services and supports. The collaboratives work intensively in partnership with the city's public Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA).

Raymond Coates-EL is a family support worker at the North Capitol Collaborative. Based on his personal experiences, he recognized the need to help fathers in this collaborative connect and strengthen their ties to their children. When he was paroled from prison, he had a hard time reestablishing a relationship with his son who lived with his son's mother. Mr. Coates-EL had no one to help him.

At the time of his release from prison, his parole officer asked him a lot of questions like, "Where are you going to live?" "Do you have a job?" and "How are you going to find a job?" But, Mr. Coates-EL said, "The parole officer didn't ask me if I have any children. And, in some ways, my son was one of my potential lifelines. My son could be a reason for me to be successful."

Later, as a family support worker, he became aware of how few men were a part of the lives of their children who were involved with the child welfare system. He didn't think that was good for the children, or for the men themselves, for that matter.

He thought the situation was only going to get worse. For example, during 2002, approximately 2,500 ex-felon men

returned to the District of Columbia from prison, and many—if not most—are fathers. Would they reconnect with their children? If not, how could the collaborative help these men do so in positive ways?

Mr. Coates-EL proposed to the North Capitol Collaborative and the CFSA an outreach program to fathers whose children are (or are at risk of becoming) involved in the child welfare system and took on an additional job responsibility as the Coordinator for the program "Daddy's Here."

### Characteristics and components

The program, which began in 2000, is for fathers, most of whom do not live with their children. So far, 271 men have participated (with an estimated 65 percent repeat rate in the support groups noted below). Only three of the men who participated lived with their children. Mr. Coates-EL recruited participants through outreach with homeless men and those who resided in halfway houses where men live as they adjust from prison to community life.

The most important component is the educational and support groups. The group focuses on fathers' involvement in the lives of their children. To do this, participants define the meaning of maleness, being a man, and being a father—fatherhood versus "father-in-the-hood." They talk about difficulties they are having in handling their children and share their successes. They discuss the barriers they

have to showing love and affection. They also develop practical plans for reaching out to their children, such as buying school supplies.

The support groups also focus on other life needs—such as job linkages. Daddy's Here works with several job training programs and job referral programs, including Jubilee Jobs, Jobs DC, and Strive.

Initially, the support groups used discussion and sharing, but recently, Mr. Coates-EL and his colleagues have developed a culturally competent curriculum that they use to cover important topics. For example, one focus of the curriculum is the images of fatherhood. Mr. Coates-EL asked, "Do you want to be the man on the corner in expensive shoes hustling? If so, your kid is learning the art of hustling from you. That's one image of fatherhood your kid can learn. Do you want to be the man who simply buys a pair of tennis shoes for your kid, or do you want to be involved in teaching him some important things about life?"

The groups meet at two different neighborhood sites in the District of Columbia. The program is working with local agencies to establish a new, open, and neutral meeting place and space for individual consultation.

Daddy's Here also establishes direct links between the North Capitol Collaborative, the fathers, and other agencies and programs including Child Support Enforcement, the D.C. Department of Employment Services, and the Court Services and Offenders Services Agency (parole and probation). These connections are important because these agencies serve

the same population, and, through these relationships, Mr. Coates-EL and other North Capitol Collaborative staff can advocate for their clients.

### Planning for the future

What's next? "We've been very successful so far. We've already learned a lot in a short time," Mr. Coates-EL explains, "But we've learned that if we're going to be even more helpful to our men, we need to be able to provide them with case management services."

Many of the men are at the fringes of being reintegrated into their community; it is often difficult to keep track of them and maintain their involvement in an organized and productive way.

"These men really need case management to help them access necessary services, for example, employment, counseling, and wrap-around services," Mr. Coates-EL continued. "We use a team approach; the client and the facilitator identify his strengths and needs. Then the team focuses on the identified need, such as employment, or mental health issues, and wraps services and supports around the client to help him achieve his goals."

Mr. Coates-EL is planning a retreat with participants and community stakeholders to evaluate the program: what's working and what is not, how to shape services to meet the changing needs of the target population, and the program's growth needs. Clearly his program in the Collaborative cannot meet all the needs of the city. In fact, in May 2002, D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams announced plans to create a citywide Father Initiative with initial funding of \$1,000,000.

## A Father Finds His Way

When he heard the news he was a father again, Andre Galette was a drug-dealing street hustler sitting in a prison cell, wondering if he was the one getting hustled.

It was the spring of 1995 and Galette was serving a two-year sentence at the Suffolk County House of Correction. He stared at the baby picture that arrived in the mail. And he stared again. It was from a woman who claimed she had his baby. “I met her through dealing (drugs),” he recalls. “She sent a picture of a newborn and she said, ‘This is your son.’ I didn’t even know she was pregnant. It blew my mind. I went around with the picture and said, ‘Does he look like me?’”

Correction officers and inmates, who rarely agree on anything, offered a unanimous decision. “They said, ‘You couldn’t deny that in court.’ And he does look just like me, a handsome fella.”

Galette explodes in a belly laugh that the neighbors in his two-bedroom apartment in Roxbury could surely hear. Then he gets up because he’s got laundry and food shopping to do, and he has to get to the corner before the bus delivers his five-year-old son, Darien, from day care.

“It’s not easy being a single dad,” he says. “I now have a lot more respect for single moms.”

This is a story of pain and loss, of addiction and rehabilitation. But mostly this is a story of love.

Andre Galette, 39, was born and raised in Brooklyn. “I was always on the other side, the black sheep of the family. Nobody in my house drank or smoked.”

Galette started smoking marijuana at 15. “In order to survive I started selling it, then crack came out and it was better money.

“Everything was brought to you. You never stopped and took a look at where you were going. It was too wild, nonstop until you passed out, girls all around, everything you wanted was coming from crack. It’s amazing how a little thing like that can take over your life. I was totally out of it.”

In 1985, he moved to Massachusetts. But the drugs ruined his first marriage and he was in and out of jail for drug possession. He barely knew his first son, now 11. “It was all my fault. I had a beautiful wife. I was a zombie.”

But old habits are hard to break. When Galette got out of jail in 1996, he went back to the projects and his life of drugs. “It

Editor’s Note: This *Boston Globe* news story shows how many individuals and services supported this man’s decision to be an active father for his young son: the prison system provided substance abuse programs; the child’s mother encouraged his relationship; the Department of Social Services provided parenting and anger management courses; the school welcomed and encouraged his involvement, and the employer adjusted his work schedule to accommodate his son’s school schedule. His neighborhood found him a “hero.” Yet, tucked away into this article are the societal misconceptions, including those within social services, that black men are unlikely to succeed in rearing a child.

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was like I was missing something up here,” he says pointing to his brain. “I went right back to what I left, and you go back to that area, there’s nothing to go back to but use. It was like I never left. At first I thought it was great. But then I knew it was over when I got a flashback of me laying in the cell, counting time. I thought, I’m better than that.”

Then a chance meeting changed his life. “I was driving my friend’s car without a license. I was goin’ to get high and a guy was stuck in a van with his hood lifted up, and I knew the guy. I pulled over to give him a boost and who is in the van? Darien’s mother. She says, ‘Oh my God, c’mon let me take you to see something.’”

They went to her apartment two blocks away.

“He (Darien) was something like a year old and he just ran to me like a speeding bullet, and just jumped on me and held me so tight. And I left with him that day. That was one of the best feelings I felt in my whole life. The way he charged me and hugged me and didn’t want me to let him go. I felt his heart beating against mine. It was like he went right inside of me. That was one helluva feeling.”

Darien started spending the weekend with his father, but during the week, Galette slipped, got involved with drugs again, and was sent back to jail for the last time in 1997. For reason it refuses to divulge, DSS eventually took custody of Darien from his mother.

“My last trip, I noticed they had recovery units,” Galette says. “People I used to use with had stopped using. They were telling me I didn’t have to live like that no more, and to hang with the winners. And

they looked good. I took their advice and started going to Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous.”

When he was released in late 1997, “I stopped using and went to detox.” When he got out he contacted DSS and asked for Darien back. Officials encouraged him to complete a battery of social programs including parenting and anger management. DSS said it required two-bedroom housing, and a steady job. “I told them, ‘No problem. I’ll get on it.’”

He did more, according to Keith Williams, who runs the Family Nurturing Center, a 13-week, DSS-supported program in Dorchester, and the Nurturing Father’s Program for single fathers. Galette completed both with flying colors, Williams says.

“He’s a great guy, a hard-working father, and one of the few fathers who go the extra mile for their son,” says Williams.

Two years ago, Galette landed a job in the paint department at the Home Depot in Dorchester, where he was honored as employee of the month in October 1999. They also adjusted his schedule so he could get Darien off to day care, and meet him at the bus stop.

A visit to Darien’s day-care center is a lovefest for Galette. Upstairs, the teacher offers him lunch, downstairs the principal wants him to taste the homemade yams, and in between, one mother wants to take him home for dinner. A single father in a world of single mothers. “Life is good,” he says.

Galette says he’s doing his best to spend as much time as possible with his older son, Patrick. “I wish I could do



## The National Family Preservation Network's Fatherhood Training Curriculum

### Principles, Policies & Practices to Engage Fathers in their Children's Lives

In response to the lack of resources to engage and involve fathers in their children's lives, the National Family Preservation Network is now offering its *Fatherhood Training Curriculum* with principles, policies, and practices to engage fathers.

This curriculum shows that everyone working in the child welfare agency, from administrators and supervisors to frontline workers and clerical staff, plays an important role in making the agency father inclusive. In addition to program changes, even facilities can be redesigned with pictures, magazines, meeting areas, and hours of operation that accommodate interests directed to fathers.

A two-year study on fatherhood conducted by the National Family Preservation Network has concluded that in every state the child welfare system must work on bridging the gap between a historical "mother-and-child-only" focus and one that now includes the father. The system must be expanded to accommodate the important role an involved father can play in creating a healthy family. Utilizing a research-based review of literature, contacts with child welfare and fatherhood programs in many states, and discussions with focus groups, the

Network uncovered no written policies, resources, or training curricula in the child welfare system to engage and involve fathers in their children's lives.

The *Fatherhood Training Curriculum* includes:

- ◆ A summary of research on fatherhood and key issues
- ◆ Current child welfare practices regarding fathers
- ◆ Methods to establish father inclusive policies
- ◆ Means of understanding and communicating with fathers
- ◆ Principles of practice including three case examples
- ◆ Evaluation tools

The *Fatherhood Training Curriculum* has been field-tested in four sites across the country including: El Paso County, Colorado; Sarasota, Florida; San Antonio, Texas; and Indianapolis, Indiana. Site responses are being used to develop further resources including a specialized training guide for child welfare agencies.


The National Family Preservation Network announced that their work on fatherhood has resulted in a three-year, \$435,000 grant from the Stuart Foundation. The grant will be used to implement fatherhood principles, policies and practices

based on the curriculum at two child welfare agencies in California and Washington. Agency staff will receive training and learn skills for engaging and involving fathers in their children's lives. A research component and training materials on best practices will be developed during the three-year project.

Summaries of the fatherhood findings have been produced in two revealing position papers, including: *Fatherhood in the Child Welfare System* and *An Assessment of Child Welfare Practices Regarding Fathers*. The funding for these important fatherhood studies was provided by The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and The Annie E. Casey Foundation. For further review, both documents are available at [www.nfnp.org](http://www.nfnp.org).

The *Fatherhood Training Curriculum* is \$50. Ordering information, on-site training, and a more detailed review of the curriculum can be obtained by calling Priscilla Martens, Executive Director, National Family Preservation Network, toll-free at 1-888-498-9047; e-mail her at [director@nfnp.org](mailto:director@nfnp.org) or visit [www.nfnp.org](http://www.nfnp.org).

## Resources—Building a Five-Foot Bookshelf

Best Practice/Next Practice *hopes to help readers sort through the many resources that are related to family-centered practice. As a part of this process, we are building a “five-foot bookshelf” of important resources, old and new, by reviewing new books, videos, and other resources, and recommending older, “classics.” The*  *symbol indicates “highly recommended—add it to your list.”*

 **Roberts, Dorothy. *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 250 pp. ISBN 0-455070582.**

Occasionally, a book comes along that taps into an especially important topic, one that synthesizes a wide array of information and creates an urgency that cannot be ignored. Books like this send a rumble like an earthquake through the child welfare system and, going beyond reporting, can initiate change. *Shattered Bonds*, an analysis of the devastating effects of child welfare on black families, is such a book.

Roberts presents a painstaking analysis of the child welfare system with a focus on the over-representation of black families in the system. The portrait she paints is serious and severe. Contrary to the self-professed intentions of the system, child welfare has little to do with the welfare of children. Roberts claims that it is a system of child protection that seeks to protect children from a society that refuses to promote the genuine welfare of children. The system is punitive and disrespectful of families and children. It is focused on identifying allegedly abusive parents and then removing their children to substitute care, often without sound evidence or rationale.

The result of this, she finds, is that more than a half a million children are in substitute care, often for very poor reasons. In her analysis, decision making in child welfare is so idiosyncratic as to be almost random. One researcher describes placement as a lottery. One factor, however, that does correlate strongly with the tendency to place children is their Medicaid eligibility. Children of the poor are disproportionately reported, investigated, and committed to the child welfare system. Given the fact that a third of black children live in poverty and the compounding legacy of institutional racism that exists within the system, black children comprise 42 percent of our country's foster care population.

Once in the system, families' problems become compounded. After a family is found to be neglectful, the child welfare system turns towards proving the legitimacy of the complaint against a family and justifying the casework decision concerning the family. Families find themselves open to additional charges and complex service requirements that make it

often difficult to get children out of the system.

This is a rich and complex book, especially as Roberts looks into the combined effects of recent policy initiatives, such as the intersection of welfare reform and child welfare reform, and probes for the long-term effects and implications of this social condition on community well-being. Roberts' study comes full circle in a way that supports the urgency of our current project at the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice—building momentum for family-centered systemic reform through the Child and Family Services Review. Roberts calls for reforms that include authentic family participation in child welfare services, as well as greater accountability to communities on the part of the state for child welfare services. These are core strategies currently pursued as family-centered systemic reform. This book has much to offer anyone who is concerned about the current state of child welfare in the United States and wants to promote meaningful change.



