



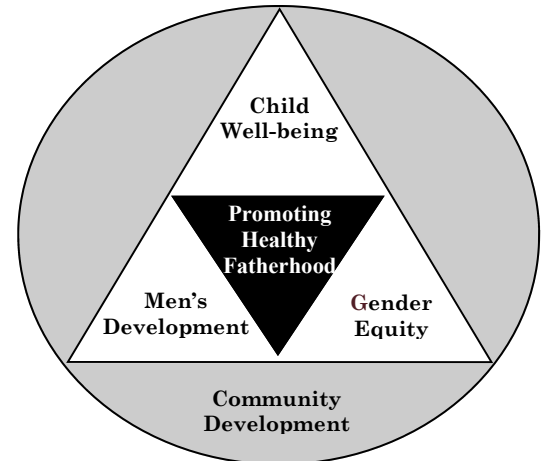
Making the Case for Systemic Changes to Family Policies and Programs

As an intermediary organization, the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network focuses our work on strengthening the broad systems that impact fathers and families. These systems include schools, government agencies, community-based social service organizations, and public policymaking institutions. Our mission is to enhance healthy father-child relationships by promoting initiatives that inform public policy and further develop the field of fatherhood practitioners statewide.

Breaking down silos; strengthening families

The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network seeks to demonstrate that efforts to engage men as fathers will ultimately create benefits for children, women and families as a whole (*see diagram at right*).

Our work aligns with the idea, promoted by the National Human Services Assembly (NHSA), that the client of human services systems is not the child or the adult; the client is the whole family. According to the NHSA, "Only when we rethink long-held frameworks, and even the language we use, can we actually begin to make dramatic advances in supporting youth and families." Similarly, the Center for the Study of Social Policy promotes the concept of "Strengthening Families" which focuses on the benefits of parental involvement in children's lives.



By changing the paradigm for serving families, we are able to capitalize on the assets of families. Through this framework, families become a conduit for educational achievement and community development. Through this work, we begin to see the strengths in all families: rich and poor; married and divorced; cohabiting and long-distance. As explained by Child Trends, "although poor families experience socioeconomic disadvantages, these families may be enriched by the strengths found in their family routines and relationships." Similar assets are found in all families. Our job is to find the strengths – and to build upon them.

And while working with fathers creates benefits for the whole family, it also supports community development. Fatherhood programming works across systems to strengthen the safety net and, at the same time, to lessen its necessity. Our work positively impacts child welfare programs; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); Head Start; child support; and other family services and supports. When fathers contribute to the financial and emotional health of the family, poverty is diminished. In many ways, healthy fathers are anti-poverty agents.

Working at the systems level to make long-term changes

At its core, the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network promotes child-wellbeing, eliminates poverty, and strengthens families. We achieve our mission by focusing on the following three goals:

- **Goal One: Systems and Programs**
Enhance the quality of practice, programs, organizations and systems in areas of father-friendliness, gender-responsiveness, and father-inclusiveness.
- **Goal Two: Public Policy**
Identify and promote policy changes that strengthen fathers and families.
- **Goal Three: Infrastructure and Outreach**
Maintain and further develop a statewide organization through membership and outreach activities.

Sharing the evidence that dads matter for child wellbeing

We can make links, based on research data, which demonstrate how families benefit when fathers and children have healthier relationships. The research data show that children who have healthy father involvement tend to be smarter, healthier, more active, more involved in extracurricular activities, less depressed, less involved in risky/illegal behavior, and less likely to become incarcerated as youths or adults. The data are further detailed in our document, “*Do We Count Fathers in Minnesota?*”



Because MFFN does not have direct access to working with fathers and families, it is impossible to demonstrate a direct cause-effect relationship between our programs and improved outcomes for children and families. Nonetheless, we know that healthy fathers lead to healthy kids. Therefore, we can make a confident link between our promotion of fatherhood and plausible benefits for families and children (*see our Vision Statement, image at left*). As explained by the National Human Services Assembly, human service systems must “re-conceptualize our work...[and] understand that child outcomes *are* family outcomes.”

If we want healthy children, we need to serve the entire family.

MFFN Organizational Logic Model © 2008			
How improved policies & programs for fathers can lead to increases in child wellbeing			
Strategies/Activities	Short-term Outcomes	Intermediate Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes
Train and educate practitioners in fatherhood and family systems and programs Support father-friendly public policies	Increased awareness and understanding of father-friendly and father-inclusive programming and policies among practitioners and policy makers	Increased options for fathers to enroll in father-friendly programs Expanded opportunities for fathers to engage with public institutions that support their needs	Fathers: Increased healthy behaviors and knowledge lead to lower barriers (social, legal, familial) which result in increased time spent with their children Children: Increased wellbeing

Resources about changing systems to strengthen families

Center for the Study of Social Policy. *About Strengthening Families*.

www.strengtheningfamilies.net/index.php/about/category/logic_model/. Washington, DC: (2009).

Child Trends. *The Strengths of Poor Families*. www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2009_5_14_RB_poorfamstrengths.pdf. Washington, DC: (2009).

Minnesota Fathers & Families Network. *Do We Count Fathers in Minnesota? Searching for Key Indicators of the Well-Being of Fathers and Families*. www.mnfathers.org/DoWeCountFathers.html. St. Paul, MN: (2007).

National Human Services Assembly. *Through a New Lens: Toward a Fundamental Reframing of “the Client”*. www.nassembly.org/fspc/documents/ThroughaNewLensFinal_000.pdf. Washington, DC: (2009).