

# network notes

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## MFFN recognizes four individuals in 2011 for their excellent work

MFFN honored four professionals at its 8th annual conference, The Minnesota Fatherhood & Family Services Summit, in St. Cloud on January 24, 2011. Those recognized were nominated by others for their commitment and contributions to the fatherhood field. MFFN presented the awards at a banquet with more than 235 conference participants attending.

### Individual of the Year

*Jeannie Meidinger, Child Support Officer in Wadena County*

Jeannie manages several hundred child support cases and is responsible for enforcing the financial obligation that parents have to their children. Jeannie recognized a category of non-custodial parents on who were difficult to serve; the incarcerated parents. Three years ago she took action and arranged a meeting with Wadena County Jail staff and other professionals in local social services, public health, and community corrections. She became aware that many inmates are released from incarceration with significant unmet medical, physical, environmental, or psychiatric needs. As Jeannie discovered and research supports, a multi-disciplinary team of

human services staff is best prepared to address the post-incarceration needs of these inmates. And so, with Jeannie's effort, the Release Advance Planning (RAP) team was born. The focus of Jeannie's work with these parents is in assisting them to get appropriate support orders that are based on their income, circumstances and ability to pay. When appropriate, she initiates an agency review and asks the court to issue a new order or change an existing order consistent with state guidelines. Her approach often results in better participation by the non-custodial parents in the process, improved compliance, and more appropriate orders being issued by the court. Jeannie has been instrumental in the effort Wadena County puts into this program despite its limited resources.

### Visionary of the Year

*Carol Heuberger, Public Health Nurse, Crow Wing County Health Department*

Carol is a public health nurse who is intimately involved in the home visiting and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program in Crow Wing County. Carol is also "mother" of the county's

"Excellence", continued on page 2. ►

## Leadership Circles selected and work underway

With the success last year, MFFN renewed its commitment to developing and advancing leaders among the fatherhood professionals across the state. After a competitive application process, MFFN selected five sites in greater Minnesota to participate in the 2011 Leadership Circles.

MFFN also contracted Project Manager Patrick Krauth, a recently retired manager from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, to oversee the effort this year. Krauth will expand father engagement in social services, education, health, and related fields as he leads the circles. Krauth's experience and familiarity with challenges and opportunities that many direct service providers face will help him guide the circles. He's already scheduled introductory meetings and will provide technical assistance, coaching and training over the next 12 months.



The 2011 Circles are lead by existing initiatives and collaboratives to provide greater community-wide support for healthy fatherhood. The new sites include the communities of Alexandria, Chisago County, Moorhead, Park Rapids and Rochester.

"Circles", continued on page 3. ►

**Leading Minnesota's campaign for healthy fatherhood.**

## Our mission

The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network enhances healthy father-child relationships by promoting initiatives that inform public policy and further develop the field of fatherhood practitioners statewide.

## A voice for fatherhood

MFFN seeks to provide a voice for Minnesota's fatherhood and family services organizations. If you have a best practice or information you would like to share, please contact MFFN. *Network Notes* is published four times a year and is distributed online and in print.

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## Excellence in Fatherhood

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Fatherhood Task Force—a group of professionals that meets voluntarily to advance healthy fatherhood. In 2010, this Fatherhood Task Force Group was selected as one of MFFN's first Leadership Circles sites.

Carol's efforts and vision for healthy father involvement in families has resulted in a variety of local projects and trainings. Her persistent advocacy for fathers as resulted in a number of father friendly changes to county programs and services. Carol's work has resulted in fathers being more incorporated in every step of home-visiting, from what is said to fathers, to what is said to mothers about father involvement, to the types and ways that outreach is conducted to fathers, all of which has greatly benefitted the children in Crow Wing County.

Carol finds evidence that the culture is becoming more father-friendly. She described recent changes in the practices of Crow Wing County Public Health Nurses to engage more fathers as "becoming routine on postpartum home visits to talk a little more in depth about involvement of the baby's father. Our nursing care plan includes an intervention of the live-with parent, usually the mother of baby, signing a release of information so we can talk with the father of baby. We've developed a printed list of reliable fathering websites we can give to moms or dads. When ordering printed parenting literature, we now include printed tips for dads. We have actually opened charts on a few fathers as clients. They have been so grateful for the info we've been able to give them." Carol has been and continues to be a true visionary for fathers in Crow Wing County.

### Individual of the Year

*Bruce A. Peterson, Judge for the Hennepin County District Court, Fourth Judicial District of Minnesota* Judge Peterson has long been an advocate of strong families and a champion for good parenting and good parenting relationships. He currently serves the citizens of the Fourth Judicial District in the Civil and Criminal divisions. Previously he served as Presiding Judge in Family Court in Hennepin County. He has been a voice for change and is dedicated to improving the court system and processes for the benefit of children, families, and community. He is one of the visionaries behind the Co-Parenting Court model—the first of its kind in the country to apply the "problem solving" court model to unmarried parents in family court. Judge Peterson helps parents who aren't together or who are separating to communicate and work together

to benefit their children. He frames his courtroom activities and action in a positive way and fosters an environment of hope and promise. Although the Co-Parenting Court project is relatively new, early results indicate that the orders and program are having a positive impact on parents and their co-parenting abilities and skills.

He's been instrumental in bringing awareness to the needs and issues that surround non-marital births, parents who parent apart, and children who bridge two homes and often navigate multiple families. Judge Peterson's work, commitment and beliefs are helping to make Minnesota better one family at a time.



**Judge Peterson, one of four 2011 Excellence Award winners, with Michael Jerpbak, MFFN Board President**

### Member of the Year

*Joe Kelly, MFFN Board Member, Communications Specialist and Fathering Educator with the Emily Program*— an organization that specializes in treating eating disorders

Joe has a long history in the fatherhood movement. He is a nationally known author and speaker on fatherhood issues, is an expert on dad and daughter relationships, and most currently is working with the Emily Program to bring awareness to the impact that fathers have and the role they can play in their children's recovery. Joe is also an active blogger about fatherhood on his website [dadman.com](http://dadman.com). Joe has dedicated enormous amounts of time and talents to MFFN. He is an MFFN Board Member and Past President. He volunteered to travel across the state in 2010 as a presenter as part of MFFN's Leadership Circles. This past fall he filmed a focus group of young dads in Duluth with the Fathers and Children Together program. Joe brings his passion, drive and commitment to excellence in all his various capacities for MFFN and to increasing the healthy involvement of fathers everywhere.

The Excellence in Fatherhood Awards, created in 2005, honor individuals, agencies, policy makers, programs and other institutions that make outstanding contributions to fatherhood policy and practice in Minnesota. A list of past Excellence in Fatherhood awardees is available at [www.mnfathers.org/awards.html](http://www.mnfathers.org/awards.html). MFFN will solicit nominations for 2012 this fall—watch the web site for more information.

## Recent funders

MFFN thanks the following entities for their support in 2010 and support for the Summit:

Bush Foundation  
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Southwest Initiative Foundation  
United Way of Ottertail County  
University of Minnesota School of Public Health, Center for Leadership Education in Maternal and Child Public Health  
U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement  
West Central Initiative

## Contribute now

MFFN is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. Donate online at [www.mnfathers.org](http://www.mnfathers.org) or call for details at (651) 222-7432. Thank you.

## Leadership Circles Selected

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Krauth is excited to be involved in this work with MFFN. He says that the leadership circles are a great opportunity to engage more organizations across Minnesota in becoming more father aware, father inclusive, and father engaged. "This is all about community capacity building and collaboration and developing leaders to benefit the fathers and families being served."

Each site has lead agencies that may partner with other organizations. The lead agencies and groups participating in 2011 include:

- Alexandria: WINGS Family Support Services, Building Connections (ECI), Douglas County CACP, Douglas County Public Health, and Douglas County Social Services. Contacts are Dorie Twist Family Supportive Services, Inc.; Linda Saari, Douglas County CACP Coordinator, and April Larson, Building Connections.
- Chisago County: Chisago County Children's Collaborative, Chisago County Health and Human Services, and Citizen Review Panel. Contacts are Al Budde, Child Support Supervisor and Ted Alliegro, Co-Chair, Citizen Review Panel.
- Moorhead: Clay County Collaborative/Moorhead Early Childhood Alliance. Contacts are Dawn Tommerdahll, Clay County Collaborative, and Barry Nelson, Metro Youth Partnership.
- Park Rapids: St. Joseph's Area Health Services and Mahube Community Council. Contacts are Raeann Mayer, St. Joseph's Area Health Services and Barb Martin, Mahube Community Council.
- Rochester: Rochester Fatherhood Network. Contacts are Michael Jerpbak, Crossroads College and Gil Domally, Family Service Rochester.

The trainings provided during the Leadership Circles are open beyond the agencies that are participating. The planning and first two training sessions will take place in all five communities in March and April. The trainings are open to professionals who live or work in the selected communities. Check future MFFN e-mail messages and the MFFN web site, [mnfathers.org](http://mnfathers.org), for more news about training opportunities through the Leadership Circles.

The first Leadership Circle sites in 2010 included Brainerd, Fergus Falls, and Grand Rapids. Success stories from their projects are online at: [www.mnfathers.org/SuccessStories2010.pdf](http://www.mnfathers.org/SuccessStories2010.pdf).

For more information about the Leadership Circles, e-mail Patrick Krauth, MFFN Leadership Circle Project Director, at [pkrauth@mnfathers.org](mailto:pkrauth@mnfathers.org).

## Under the microscope: father engagement in early childhood programs

For its second sector analysis, MFFN is taking an in-depth look at early childhood programs and the ways in which different public sectors are engaging fathers. The analysis should help to confront the challenges experienced in engaging fathers and to provide examples of success that can inspire others. Early childhood programs include services such as education through school districts' Early Childhood Family Education, Head Start, public health home visiting among others.

Tom Fitzpatrick, Project Director, continues his research and investigation with this new topic by linking research with data

collected from direct service providers and professionals involved in early childhood programs throughout Minnesota.

Fitzpatrick and others involved in the project will examine the challenges faced by those who give and receive services, assess needs, analyze trends, and highlight best practices and successes. The sector analysis should be completed over the next few months and a report issued by year-end.

Last year MFFN's first sector analysis closely scanned father involvement in Minnesota's child welfare system. In January, MFFN published a 24-page report, *Linking Fathers: Child Welfare Analysis*, which is available online at [www.mnfathers.org](http://www.mnfathers.org). It provides a detailed snapshot of the families and professionals involved in Minnesota's child welfare system, their circumstances, and their experiences. MFFN's hope is that these stories, and future sector analysis publications, can provide motivation for more agencies to recognize fathers and involve fathers in productive ways.

Funding for the sector analyses projects is provided by the McKnight Foundation. For more information, contact Tom Fitzpatrick at [info@mnfathers.org](mailto:info@mnfathers.org).



## MFFN 2011 Board of Directors

- Rebecca Ahlstrand, Carlton County Human Services, Carlton
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Leading Minnesota's campaign for healthy fatherhood.

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## Strong Presence and Forward Focus in 2011

Over the past few months, the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network has been working to launch new projects and continue collaborative efforts to expand and improve fatherhood services and policies across Minnesota while transforming its organizational structure. Here's a brief overview of some of activities and new initiatives.



**Search for New Executive Director:** In December MFFN's long-time executive director, Paul Masiarchin, left MFFN to take on new and exciting responsibilities at the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits. Soon after, the Program and Policy Director, Melissa Froehle, was offered a supervisory role with the Ramsey County Attorney's Office of Child Support. The MFFN Board of Directors hired Interim Director Curt Peterson to lead the organization through its transition and search to identify and hire a new executive director. The board will review candidates and conduct interviews with the goal of having a new director in place by April 1.

**8th Annual Fatherhood Summit:** In January 2011, MFFN hosted its 8th conference. This event picked up where we left off—continuing the focus on co-parenting and integrating more information on pre-conception, birth to three, and early intervention. More than 235 participants and 19 exhibitors attended. Keynoters provided new and insightful information. Feedback has been positive. More than half of the attendees answered the evaluation survey and :

- 99% said they'd recommend the conference to a colleague
- 99% said they'd return in future years

Pencil in MFFN on your calendars—tentative dates for the 2012 conference are January 23-24, again at St. Cloud's Kelly Inn. Suggestions for conference theme, topics, and workshops are always welcome. Send your ideas to [info@mnfathers.org](mailto:info@mnfathers.org).

### MFFN Former Executive Director Receives National Award

Paul Masiarchin, MFFN's first and former executive director, was recognized and honored as the "National Leader of the Year" by the Fathers and Families Coalition at their national conference in San Francisco. Paul received this award because of his work in Minnesota to help develop public policies that benefit fathers and their families. The essence behind the award is continuing a legacy of love, leadership, faith, and commitment to family. Neil Tift accepted the award on behalf of Paul.