

network notes

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Noncustodial parents get right to speak in court in child protection cases

MFFN worked with several child welfare advocacy groups and two great legislative champions, Rep. Jeff Hayden and Sen. Patricia Torres Ray, to successfully pass several changes to the child protection laws in Minnesota as part of a new vision of child well-being. Our partners on this bill included Lutheran Social Services, the Children's Law Center of Minnesota, Children's Home Society and Family Services, the African American Adoption Agency, and the Minnesota Council of Child Caring Agencies.

The new law, effective August 1, 2010, is specific to child protection cases in juvenile court (not family court). This process usually starts with the filing of a petition alleging that a child is in need of protection or services (commonly called CHIPS). Some of the new provisions relate only to kids in foster care. For noncustodial parents (most of whom are fathers), the law does the following:

- **Clarifies the definition of parent** by attempting to clear up any confusion about who is or is not a legal parent.
- **Gives all parents—including noncustodial parents, if they are legally established as the parent—a right to speak at any court hearing with respect to the child**, including the right to be heard on the disposition (where the child lives, for example), the visitation rights (how often and under what conditions the father can see the child), and on the case plan (what changes the father must make before the child can live with him, for example). Prior to passage of this law, a noncustodial parent could only "speak at the discretion of the court" until a later stage of the case. (Fathers in cases involving the Indian Child Welfare Act have different rights, and are allowed full "party" status from the beginning of the case.)
- **Provides for more options in temporary visitation determinations.** (Child protection statutes still refer to parenting time as "visitation.") The new provision allows the

"Noncustodial parents", continued on page 3. ►

Making connections through research and evaluation

Survey reveals opportunities for father-serving programs to improve services through evaluation and research

A 2010 survey of father-serving programs in Minnesota yielded important findings regarding the use of evaluation and the types of services offered to fathers.

The survey revealed **gaps in understanding and practice in promoting program effectiveness.**

- 25% of respondents did not have written goals and/or objectives for their father-serving program.
- Less than half of all organizations use logic models (45% have a logic model, 40% didn't know what a logic model was). A logic model displays what a program intends to accomplish and what impact it hopes to have. It typically includes resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and goals for a program.
- Respondents demonstrated confusion between outputs and outcomes and confusion about the elements of evaluation.
- Only 50% of respondents indicated that research supports their program model.
- Only 60% self-identified with the statement that they are currently using evaluation.

The survey also revealed important information about the types of services offered to fathers. Responses demonstrate **a need for many programs to connect program design with program evaluation.** For example, 80% of all father-serving organizations offer parent education. This demonstrates an important advancement in the understanding that children and families can gain huge benefits when fathers are actively engaged with their children. However, only 20% of programs stated that they support fathers through co-parenting skills development or mediation. Co-parenting education is a key service that can help unmarried and divorced fathers to remain involved in their children's lives over the

"Making connections", continued on page 2. ►

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 each February, May, August, and November.

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Leading Minnesota's campaign for healthy fatherhood.

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MFFN thanks the following entities for their support in 2010:

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- Southwest Initiative Foundation
- University of Minnesota School of Public Health, Center for Leadership Education in Maternal and Child Public Health
- West Central Initiative

Contribute now

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Making connections

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long haul. Additionally, few programs cited services for fathers such as health care, housing, child care, drug abuse prevention, and supervised visitation. Through the increased use of program evaluations and client assessments, father-serving programs may find a need for some of these client services.

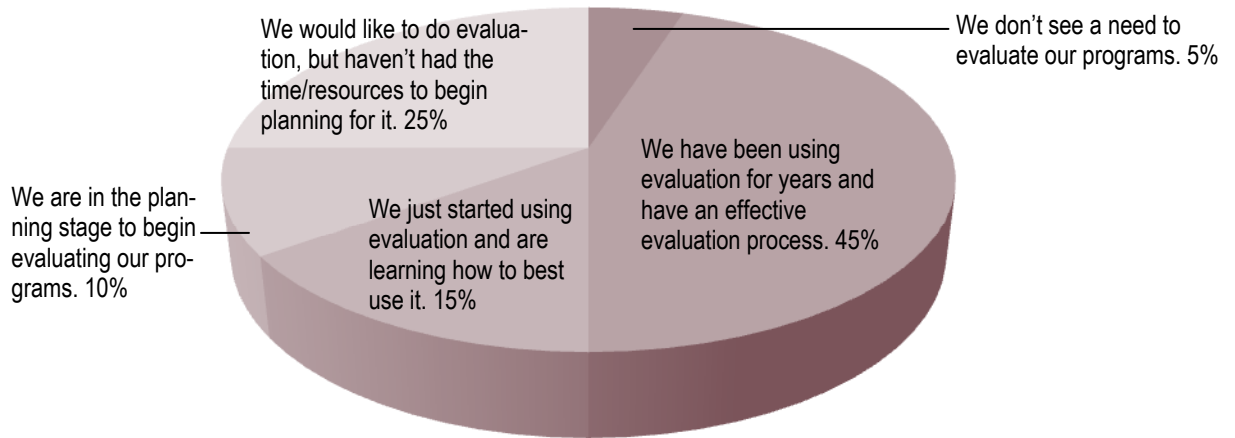
50% of respondents cited an interest in gaining additional support with evaluation. This demonstrates an openness and interest among father-serving program staff to find ways to improve services and to meet the needs of families in the community.

The survey reveals important guidance for the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network (MFFN) to continue efforts to support staff and leaders in father-serving programs. The survey also demonstrates the need for more work on the part of MFFN to **disseminate current research and best-practice data around program design, program delivery, and program evaluation.**

The survey was conducted by Kristen Cici and sponsored by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota.

The full 14-page report of the survey is online at www.mnfathers.org.

The role of evaluation in organizations: percent of respondents that agreed with each statement



Partner's Corner—NEW!

MFFN values the many organizations and agencies that we partner with throughout the year. In this corner of our newsletter we highlight our partner's work in our common goal to increase healthy father involvement.

Helping Young Fathers

by Sue Fust, Adolescent Parent Program Manager, MOAPPP

While many adolescent men are responsible and loving fathers to their children, research informs us that the younger a man is when he fathers a child, the less likely it is that he will remain involved in that child's life. The level and type of involvement a father has with his children may have profound



and long term consequences for the young men, their children, and the mothers of those children. The rea-

sons for a young man remaining involved or not are many and complex and vary among individuals, but in all cases, the young man's developmental stage plays a role in his ability to make decisions that impact his own and his child's future. Using a developmental perspective from which to view young men can help us understand their behavior and is an important tool to use when trying to change the negative stereotypes society as a whole holds about teen fathers.

As part of the commitment of the Minnesota Or-

Noncustodial parents

◀ Continued from page 1.

court the discretion to order the agency to set up a temporary visitation plan. Previously, judges were prohibited from ordering the child protection agency to determine a temporary visitation plan for a noncustodial parent, if that parent had limited or no contact with the child prior to the court order for the child to go into foster care, until the agency conducted a full investigation of the noncustodial parent's ability to care for the child at home. While the previous provision may have seemed reasonable in some situations, it may not have always been in the child's best interest to delay any type of visitation (even supervised) that long.

- **Allows county workers to contact a putative father who registered late on the Minnesota Fathers' Adoption Registry (later than 30 days after the birth of a child), while a CHIPS petition is pending.** This provision was inserted to clarify what happens when the agency learns of a putative father who registered late on the Minnesota Fathers' Adoption Registry (MFAR). MFAR was created primarily to protect and balance the rights of putative fathers, children, birth mothers and adoptive families in the context of infant adoptions. However, MFAR has increasingly become a source of locating fathers in child protection cases. In fact, it is now mandated as part of the agency's "diligent efforts" requirement for identifying and locating all parents. Searching MFAR prior to a permanency related adoption is mandatory—this new provision does not change that. This provision makes clear that it is *permissible*, in a CHIPS proceeding, for the county agency to contact a putative father who registered late on MFAR for the purposes of seeking the putative father (and potentially his relatives) as a possible placement option for the child.

Other provisions in the law: allow juvenile courts to maintain jurisdiction up to age 21 for foster care youth when in the youth's best interest; clarify that state wards are eligible for services up to age 21; clarify the right of children in foster care to have an in-court/appearance hearing for review of child protection matters; remove barriers for homeless youth and youth in out-of-home care to get their driver's licenses; exempt certain assets held by youth in care past age 17 from recovery by

government agencies; and provide information to a requesting adoption agency as to whether there were prior background checks conducted for an individual for the purposes of adoption licensing.

Partner's Corner: MOAPPP

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ganization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (MOAPPP) to support teen parents, MOAPPP has begun a new initiative that focuses on helping young fathers mature into productive citizens, develop healthy relationships with their children and stay involved in their children's lives. This initiative, funded in large part by the McKnight, St. Paul and Mardag Foundations, has the following goals:

- To encourage programs working with teen mothers to include services for fathers;
- To encourage programs working with fathers to be cognizant of the needs of teen fathers;
- To encourage Minnesota policy-makers to develop policies that meet the needs of young fathers in order to benefit children and families and to help young men succeed.

To that end, MOAPPP has partnered with the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network to convene the Minnesota Young Fathers Action Collaborative (MYFAC). This group, composed of members throughout Minnesota, has been meeting quarterly to develop materials, trainings and support for professionals that will change the way they think about young men and will positively impact and increase service delivery for young fathers.

In addition, MOAPPP has been working with MFFN, the University of Minnesota Extension, Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota and the Minnesota Prevention Resource Center to provide information and training on co-parenting issues and skill development. This relatively new area of research and work with families has become a 'hot topic,' and yet little attention has been paid to adolescent mothers' and fathers' abilities to learn co-parenting skills that might enable them to work together effectively and with their own parents in raising healthy children. This partnership, focuses on delivering trainings and maintaining a web site www.wecanparenttogether.org

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Leading Minnesota's campaign for healthy fatherhood.

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Fathers to the Forefront

Evolution of the Fatherhood Field

Wednesday, June 16, 2010 / 10:30am-2:30pm
McKnight Foundation
710 South Second St. / Minneapolis

Join us for a panel presentation about changes taking place in family courts, corrections, child welfare, and child support. Plus, learn how fathering programs are evolving to meet the needs of fathers and their families.

Free; RSVP required; space is limited. Lunch will be served.
Please RSVP by June 11.

Also, join the McKnight Foundation's celebration of fatherhood from 2:30-3:30 with the premier of a short film about healthy fatherhood.

Fatherhood Tour

Innovations in Services for Fathers in Minnesota

Tuesday, June 29, 2010 / 8:30am-12:30pm
Tour begins & ends near the Capitol at
161 Saint Anthony Ave., Saint Paul.
(Kelly Inn Hotel Lobby)

Take a guided tour of three innovative agencies that are meeting the needs of fathers in Ramsey County. Stops will include Ramsey County Child Support, Children's Safety Centers, and the Early Head Start program of Community Action Partnership for Washington & Ramsey Counties in conjunction with Early Childhood Family Education of St. Paul.

RSVP required; \$20 includes lunch and transportation during the tour. **Please RSVP by June 18.**

Find out more! Full details at www.mnfathers.org. **RSVP** to mfroehle@mnfathers.org or call Melissa at (651) 222-7432.