

# Minnesota Fathers & Families Network

Our mission, as a statewide network, is to initiate, promote and support effective programs and to educate on public policy to enhance the responsible involvement of fathers in the lives of children, families and the community.

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A RESOURCE FOR PROGRAMS  
THAT ARE HELPING DADS  
TO HELP THEMSELVES, THEIR KIDS  
AND THEIR COMMUNITIES.

# Network Notes

Introductory Issue: August 2003

## Evolution of the Minnesota Fatherhood “Movement”

- by Glen Palm, President of the Board, MFFN

The Minnesota Fatherhood “movement” has included many different faces and organizations over the last 15 years. It has received national attention and acclaim as a leader in developing services and programs for fathers. Programs have been developed in a variety of locations across the state and in the Twin Cities metro area sponsored by social service, faith-based, early education, corrections and health-care organizations. Over the years I have attended sessions at conferences sponsored by many different groups from child support, early childhood family education, family support, family

*MFFN is an important catalyst for unifying and strengthening the fatherhood “movement” in Minnesota*

literacy and Head Start. One of my first experiences of really networking with others was the Fatherhood Forum in the mid 1980s. I found it both informative and energizing to find out what others in the state were doing and thinking around fatherhood issues.

Minnesota has continued to develop programs for young dads through MELD and various social service and faith-based initiatives. The Resource Center


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## Workshops Offered Throughout Greater Minnesota

As a statewide network, MFFN is committed to meeting the professional development and networking needs of fatherhood and family services professionals across Minnesota. To help meet this goal, MFFN is collaborating with the Minnesota Initiative Funds and the Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (MOAPPP) to host eight regional workshops this fall.

The regional workshops, titled “**Building Networks – Supporting Children: Promoting Effective Policies and Services for Fathers & Adolescent Parents,**” aim to provide an opportunity for networking and professional development for fatherhood, adolescent parent and social services practitioners and advocates.

The 2003 Legislative Session greatly altered the landscape for family-friendly social services across Minnesota. The workshops will help participants to take stock of the changes coming out of the Legislative Session, focus on what works, and make plans for the future of family-friendly services.

The workshops are free and open to the public. To RSVP and to receive detailed information about the locations, please contact Paul Masiarchin (contact information at left) no later than one week prior to the event. 

### Building Networks – Supporting Children

**Little Falls:** Mon. Sept. 22, 1:00-4:00 pm

**Fergus Falls:** Tues. Sept. 23, 9:00-12:00 noon

**Bemidji:** Wed. Sept. 24, 1:00–4:00 pm

**Marshall:** Wed. Oct. 8, 9:00-12:00 noon

**Willmar:** Wed. Oct. 8, 1:30-4:30 pm

**Duluth:** Wed. Nov. 5, 9:00–12:00 noon

**Rochester:** To be determined.

**Mankato:** To be determined.

## Advocacy Tip: Get to know your members of Congress.

Did you know that nonprofit organizations are allowed to allot a certain amount of their time and resources toward public policy advocacy efforts? Formally known as “lobbying”, it’s not illegal—and it’s easier than you may think to make a difference in state and federal legislation.

August is a perfect time for you to get in touch with your *federal congress members* because they are on summer vacation. It’s also a good time to get in touch with *state legislators* who are out of session until 2004. Also, consider contacting *county commissioners*, who have control over many local funding issues.

A good way to introduce your legislator to your work is by scheduling a meeting or inviting him/her to visit your program.

Not sure where to start? Just remember, you are the expert in your work. Think about what’s important to you and your clients. Boil down your message to no more than 2 or 3 topics that you want your congress member to remember. Make sure you have a handout or brochure to support what you discuss.


If you work with dads—bring them along! Testimonials from fathers and families about the value of your program and the importance of your work can speak volumes and can leave a lasting impression.

When you have your meeting, be sure to respect the legislator’s time. Follow up your meeting with a fax or email thanking her/him for taking the time to meet with you.

### Resources:

Visit [www.clpi.org](http://www.clpi.org) for information about charity lobbying.

Visit [www.leg.state.mn.us](http://www.leg.state.mn.us) to find your state representative and senator.

Visit [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) to find your U.S. representative. 

Visit us online at

[www.mnfathers.org](http://www.mnfathers.org).

## 80 Attend Session Led by Reps. Entenza & Walker


On July 16, 80 social services professionals and advocates attended a legislative update sponsored by MFFN, St. Paul Urban League, MOAPPP, and Southside Community Health Services. The *Adolescent Parent Issues Forum* provided attendees an opportunity to learn about changes and budget cuts resulting from the 2003 Legislative Session.

Rep. Matt Entenza (DFL, St. Paul), Rep. Neva Walker (DFL, Minneapolis), and Minh Ta, Public Policy Director at Children's Defense Fund –MN, addressed the

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importance of speaking up for the programs and policies that support adolescent parents. Rep. Walker reminded attendees about the importance of selecting a small number of policy issues, developing your message, and contacting your legislators regularly. Walker said that public policy advocates are much more effective if we keep on top of legislation—and if we keep reminding policymakers that they are being tracked. We “let them off the hook” if we fail to follow-through and if we fail to maintain contact throughout the year.

Minh Ta reviewed legislation from the 2003 session that will affect families and children. Mr. Ta indicated that the state is providing counties with funding similar to block grants that pits programs for the disabled and seniors against adolescent parents. In a call-to-action, he indicated that we need to contact county commissioners to ask them to maintain programs for parents and families.

The forum concluded with attendees brainstorming concerns about issues or policies related to fathering, MFIP, and education. Based on these lists, attendees devised action steps for themselves, their organizations, and the field of practitioners working in areas related to adolescent parenting. 


## Share Your Best Practices for Fathers’ Programming

Across Minnesota, organizations are taking advantage of beautiful summer weather to plan educational and entertaining activities for children, fathers, mothers and communities.

How has your organization recruited fathers to join your activities? What successes have you had in your community? What worked well—and just as importantly, what did you learn from your mistakes?

Please consider sharing what made your recent events stand out. Your “lessons learned” can help colleagues across Minnesota to avoid the pitfalls of having to start from scratch. MFFN will publish a few of these examples online to encourage the development of more statewide networking. These ideas can become a valuable resource for developing better activities for fathers and families.

*MFFN seeks your “lessons learned” about how to develop effective events and programs for fathers and families.*

Please send a brief description, no more than 200 words, to MFFN (contact information is listed on page 1). Together, we can develop a stronger field of fatherhood practitioners and advocates. 

## Survey of Nonprofit Staffing Changes

The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits is collecting information on staffing changes in the nonprofit sector as a result of state and local fiscal decisions and other economic pressures. Every nonprofit organization in Minnesota that has had to lay-off staff, leave positions unfilled, reduce hours, or institute a salary freeze should consider completing the survey at <http://www.mncn.org/survey.htm>. For details contact Christina Macklin at 651-642-1904 x233 or [cmacklin@mncn.org](mailto:cmacklin@mncn.org).

## MFFN Seeks Intern

The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network seeks a part-time volunteer intern to assist with the management of the Network. This is an unpaid part-time position located in Northeast Minneapolis. This is a perfect position for a college student seeking to fulfill community service hours or for a parent seeking to learn more about father involvement in the lives of children. Part of the work may be completed outside of the MFFN office.

**Responsibilities:** The intern will assist with development of marketing materials, writing of articles for monthly newsletters, management of a comprehensive database, development of workshops and conferences, and/or other tasks depending on his/her interests and abilities.

**Qualifications:** College coursework in social services, education and/or fathering preferred; strong written and oral communication skills; ability to work independently with little supervision; knowledge of Microsoft Word, Access, and Publisher programs preferred.

**Apply:** Please submit a brief letter of interest, resume, and references to MFFN. (Mail and email addresses are listed on page one.) Direct questions to Paul Masiarchin at (612) 787-4091.

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for Fathers & Families has expanded to a number of different sites. Fathers of young children have been served through ECFE, Way to Grow and Head Start Initiatives. The Father-to-Father initiative of the 1990s also had Minnesota roots and was a way to include more fathers as mentors to new fathers and young fathers.

There have also been some attempts to organize fatherhood "practitioners" by the Minnesota Council on Family Relations and an informal network of practitioners has met together for a number of years in the Twin Cities area. The National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (NPNFF) was established in 1998 with strong representation and leadership from Minnesota practitioners. This rich tradition of fatherhood programs and initiatives in Minnesota has created a strong foundation for the next step in the evolution of the Minnesota fatherhood movement.

The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network (MFFN) has been established during the last year as an important catalyst for unifying and strengthening the fatherhood "movement" in Minnesota. MFFN has been launched with major support from the McKnight Foundation and the support of the Minnesota Initiative Foundations from around the state. NPNFF also has helped to guide and support the new network through initial stages of organizational development. The selection of a Board with representatives from across the state and the hiring of a State Coordinator in March were significant steps in forming a new organization to support involved and responsible fatherhood across Minnesota.

The vision for MFFN over the coming months and years is to create a unified voice of advocacy for fathers and families by raising important issues around responsible and involved fatherhood. We hope that this will challenge Minnesota political leaders at all levels to recognize and understand the importance of fathers in their public policy decisions. We also want to both challenge and inspire fathers across the state to step up and be the caring, involved, and responsible fathers that their children need and deserve. A second goal is to develop a strong network of support for fatherhood programs and programs that work with fathers especially during times when financial support for such programs and initiatives may be questioned. A third focus is on creating professional development and networking opportunities for those who work with fathers and families. Competent practitioners are the heart of effective fatherhood programs. MFFN wants to support practitioners through professional development workshops, information on research and practice, and new opportunities for networking.

I just finished re-reading Kyle Pruett's book *Fatherhood* and was again impressed by the many positive influences that fathers can have on their children. The image of fathers as "the single greatest untapped resource in the lives of American children" is a very powerful image. This positive image can guide our work over the coming months and years as we look for new ways to tap into this "natural resource" that in many cases has been underutilized and in other cases totally ignored. Tapping into this resource of fathers at all levels can bring important benefits for children and strengthen Minnesota families and communities.

MFFN looks forward to finding new and more effective ways to mine this resource in Minnesota. We invite you to join us in this important venture. ❖

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