

# 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

August 2004

## 21st Century Dad

The following excerpt is from a speech by Duncan Fisher, Director of Fathers Direct, at Britain's 2004 National Conference on Working with Fathers.



When our daughter was born seven years ago, I suddenly became aware of the secret world of fatherhood. I found myself, like many men, transformed by this new experience, this new life, entrusted to the two of us. Yet I was stunned to hear so few public voices echoing my feelings about becoming a dad. While I was brimming with excitement, thrilled with the potential of it all, I found myself surrounded by a public silence on fatherhood.

Today, it's changed, but seven years ago, there seemed to be so little celebration of what a man might achieve as a father, for his child, for himself, for the mother of his child. There was no plan, no great hope, no great ambition. Instead, we were apparently meant just to go back to work (if we had work), almost as if nothing had happened. It was very strange.

But then, just after our first daughter was born, a book appeared, *Fatherhood Reclaimed*. It drew together a wealth of analysis and challenged the entire culture that renders fatherhood invisible...

We all of us today bring our own experiences of fatherhood. Experiences of our own fathers, or of ourselves as fathers or of the men who father our children. We may have positive or negative experiences - probably both. We may have memories that hurt. But one thing is for sure. This affair of the heart - this feeling about fatherhood - is no longer a secret one. Men are talking about it. Women are talking about it. Children are talking about it... Most people are now aware of a growing body of research about educational achievement, social behavior and long-term mental health...

With children talking about their own dads, with fathers articulating more and more their hopes, with so many mothers wanting fathers to be more involved in the lives of their children, who would now seriously contest the notion that the father-child connection is a precious relationship that social policy should sustain and support?

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## August Workshop Series Offered Across Minnesota

For the third year in a row, the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network will conduct a series of educational workshops for family services practitioners and fatherhood advocates across the state of Minnesota. This year, the professional seminars will be hosted in collaboration with the **Minnesota Department of Health, Fathers' Adoption Registry**. Other collaborators include the FATHER Project / Central Minnesota Legal Services, Southside Community Health Services, the Minnesota Initiative Foundations and a variety of local social service and family service organizations and agencies.

The regional seminars, titled "The Role of Fathers in Families: Parenting, Paternity and the Adoption Registry," aim to provide an opportunity for networking and training for professionals working in areas of family services, child welfare, parenting

### Minnesota Regional Fatherhood Seminars:

**Owatonna:** Thur. August 5, 9:00 – Noon  
**Duluth:** Tues. August 10, 9:00 – Noon  
**Bemidji:** Wed. August 18, 1:00 – 4:00 pm  
**Brainerd:** Thur. August 19, 9:00 – Noon  
**Hutchinson:** Tues. August 24, 9:00 – Noon

education, fatherhood advocacy, public health and other social service workers. The workshops are free and open to the public.

For details and to RSVP, visit [www.mnfathers.org](http://www.mnfathers.org), email [pmasiarchin@mnfathers.org](mailto:pmasiarchin@mnfathers.org) or call (612) 787-4091.

## Father-Daughter Survey Yields Interesting Findings

Earlier this year, Duluth-based Dads and Daughters commissioned a national poll on father-daughter relationships. The results of the telephone interviews are both interesting and thought provoking. Based on 424 completed interviews, 74% of American fathers identify the relationship with their daughters as either "excellent" or "very good." Over half of fathers who rate this relationship as "excellent" say having a daughter is "one of the most satisfying experiences in my life" compared to only one in three who rates this relationship as no better than "good."

Fathers identify "spending more time" and "improving communication" as key elements to building a better relationship with their daughters. This was especially true of those with daughters 18-25 years old. Interestingly, fathers who rate their relationship with their daughter as "excellent," were less concerned about improving their ability to communicate thoughts and feelings to their daughter.

American fathers say that unequal treatment/discrimination and popular culture such as music, TV and fashion trends present the greatest obstacles to girls' happiness. Cultural pressure to be thin, physical or sexual harassment or abuse, and seeing women treated as objects in advertising are also troubling issues to fathers. Fathers of daughters under 17 are most concerned with the elements of popular culture and fathers of daughters over 26 are most concerned with unequal treatment/discrimination.

While one in three fathers fear their daughters will be physically or sexually assaulted, almost half (46%) of fathers whose daughters are under 12 have that fear.

Details: Dads and Daughters is the national advocacy nonprofit for fathers and daughters. Visit them online at [www.dadsanddaughters.org](http://www.dadsanddaughters.org). Complete results of the first-ever national Father-Daughter Survey are available in PowerPoint at [www.dadsanddaughters.org/Poll\\_Results.ppt](http://www.dadsanddaughters.org/Poll_Results.ppt).

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## MFFN Becomes Affiliate of National Organization

The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network has been formally accepted as an affiliate organization of the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (NPNFF). As an affiliate, MFFN has the exclusive right to represent NPNFF in the state of Minnesota, has direct input to the leadership of NPNFF and gains access to a variety of benefits through the national organization. MFFN members may receive occasional news from NPNFF.

The National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families, formed in 1998, grew out of a network of practitioners supported by the Ford Foundation. NPNFF's mission is to strengthen supports for children in fragile families by enhancing the involvement of fathers and by fostering communication, professional development, education, and collaboration among service providers. NPNFF has been an integral factor in the development of the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network, providing fiscal management, organizational development, board training, and additional support over the past two years. Learn more about NPNFF membership and services at [www.npnff.org](http://www.npnff.org).

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## New Fathers' Labor Supply: Does Child Health Matter?

In this report, a part of the National Poverty Center Working Paper Series, the authors estimate the effect of poor child health on the labor supply of new fathers post-welfare reform, using a national sample of mostly unwed parents and their children—a group at high risk of living in poverty. The researchers address the potential endogeneity of child health and find that having a young child in poor health reduces the father's probability of being employed by eight percentage points and that it reduces his work effort by over five hours per week. These results add to a growing body of literature suggesting that young children with serious health problems are likely to receive lower levels of health investment than their healthier peers. For the full report, visit [www.npc.umich.edu/publications](http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications) and click on "Working Paper Series."



## Calendar for Fatherhood Professionals

**Sat., Aug. 14, Festival for Fathers and Families.** North Commons Park, 1801 James Ave. North, Mpls. 14th annual festival offers free food and family entertainment. Attendees can browse the exhibits of organizations that provide services to fathers and families.

**Fri., Sept. 3, 9:00 am, Professionals Who Work With Men - Networking Breakfast.** Elsie's Restaurant, 721 Marshall St. NE, Minneapolis. This informal group generally meets every first Friday to discuss fatherhood and men's services. Open to the public; no RSVP necessary. Directions, call Elsie's (612) 378-9702.

**Thur, Sept. 16, 2:00 – 4:00 pm Dads Plan Team Meeting - Hennepin County Teen Parent Connection** Join this group to plan a coordinated system for serving the fathers of children born to teen mothers in Hennepin County. Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, Board Room, 2117 W. River Road, Mpls. For details, contact MFFN (contact info on page 1).

**Fri–Sat, Oct. 1-2, MnAEYC Fall Conference.** Minneapolis Convention Center. Among other offerings, a group of fatherhood advocates will join MFFN to present a 2-day track of workshops, "Involving Fathers in Early Education and Early Childhood Settings." Visit the MN Association for the Education of Young Children at [www.aeyc-mn.org](http://www.aeyc-mn.org).

**Mon-Tues, Oct. 4-5, St. Louis County Health and Human Service Conference** DECC, Duluth. Attend the Mock Family Law Clinic workshop, Tues, 10:30am, organized by MFFN—just one of 80 workshops offered. Info: [www.co-st-louis.mn.us/social\\_services/socialservices.html](http://www.co-st-louis.mn.us/social_services/socialservices.html)

**Wed-Thu, Jan. 19-20, 2005, Minnesota Fatherhood Summit** St. Cloud Civic Center. Pre-conference training and networking will take place on January 19. A full menu of conference speakers and workshops will be offered on January 20. Visit [www.mnfathers.org](http://www.mnfathers.org) for details.

"21st Century" continued from page 1.

The issue we must tackle now is the content of that social policy. And I have to be plain at this point. The social policy remains skeletal. Adrienne Burgess [author of *Fatherhood Reclaimed*], writes:

As a society, we do almost nothing to support fathers in their multi-faceted roles. Whether in the work/family arena, in maternity and children's services (where parent almost invariably means mother), in the childcare debate (where dads are hardly ever mentioned), let alone in separation and divorce - where, because the quality of the father-child relationship is so powerfully affected by the mother-father relationship, relationships between men and their children are often on the rocks long before either parent walks out the door.

We have no targets, no aspirations for mainstreaming fathers' involvement in any sector. Hysteria over the alleged 'epidemic of fatherlessness' erupts periodically - but who notices the one-in-three young adults from "intact" families whose relationships with their fathers rate as "very poor"?

Who looks out for the father-daughter relationship, among the gnashing of teeth about boys growing up without role models? Who challenges the "cult of motherhood" which places such heavy burdens on new mothers - and, later, on employed mothers? Who notices that while girls are encouraged to broaden their employment horizons, and the number of women going into child care dwindles yearly, there are no corresponding strategies to prepare boys for non-traditional occupations?

Adrienne's comments demonstrate the depth of the problems we face in developing an adequate public policy in this field. But we should not be down-hearted. They also throw a light on the huge and exciting potential for change. As many family workers know, making even the first hesitant steps to getting dads involved can yield considerable and deeply rewarding results.

But there is an urgency now to develop a coherent public policy. As more mothers enter the workforce, as more men face a future without full-time lifetime employment to deliver status and identity as breadwinner, as our understanding of the impact on children of their relationships with their fathers grows, engaging in the fatherhood debate at the public policy level becomes not an option but an urgent need - and not over whether or not "fathers matter", but how we can support their relationships with their children. Because involving dads (not just divorced dads but all dads) matters to everyone.

It is a "must" if we are to tackle the gender inequalities that underpin our workaholic culture, deprive women of a fair deal in the workplace, and leave children short-changed. It is a national scandal that a woman who has two children will earn, on average, half a million pounds less in her lifetime than her partner.

Supporting involved fatherhood not only supports mothers as parents and advances their employment opportunities, but it grants to men what they increasingly want as much as women - the chance to combine paid work with close and meaningful relationships with their children.

And it enables children to be cared for, to learn from and to enjoy their fathers as well as their mothers from infancy onwards

*...if we can build an alliance of government, parents and business around children's welfare we have an unstoppable force...*

- and to look towards a future shared role in caring for and supporting their own - and other people's - children...

[I]t is clear that supporting fathers is a key to achieving some of our society's key goals - cutting child poverty, raising educational achievement and reducing crime.

A well-thought out strategy must have three foundations:

- It must unlock the full potential of both mothers and fathers to care for their children
- It must promote equality between women and men at home and at work
- It must improve business efficiency.

All three are necessary because if we can build an alliance of government, parents and business around children's welfare we have an unstoppable force...

- In the workplace, there needs to be a shift towards assuming an individual's right to flexible working, unless a company can show it would damage the business. BT already does this - it does not even ask for an explanation of a request for flexible working, so long as the job gets done.
- New fathers on two weeks paternity leave should receive 90 per cent of their salary...
- Paid parental leave needs to be introduced with "use it or lose it" options for both mothers and fathers, so as actively to encourage both to use it. And women need greater choice by being able to transfer some of their current leave entitlements to their partners, should the parents decide this works best for them.
- For separated families, we not only need to proceed rapidly with changes in the family courts, but we also need to look beyond the separation itself to support separated families who do share care [shared parenting]...

I could carry on setting new and innovative policies that could make a huge difference to families and which do not necessarily need to cost a lot of money. The key is a comprehensive and integrated policy, based on the three key principles: child welfare, gender equality and business efficiency...

Everywhere across the industrialized and industrializing world, where work is taken out of the home, the issues of gender inequalities and "who looks after the children" are coming into focus. Last month the UN's Commission on the Status of Women, involving 50 countries..., had its annual meeting in New York and considered the issue of fatherhood. After recommending that fathers are included alongside mothers in support programs, the Commission urged governments "to promote understanding of the importance of fathers, mothers, legal guardians and other caregivers, to the well being of children and the promotion of gender equality", through policies, services and the school curriculum.

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## MFFN Board of Directors



MFFN is committed to hearing the voices of fatherhood practitioners from throughout Minnesota. MFFN Board Members represent every region of the state.

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*"Building Quality Programs for Minnesota's Fathers."*

## Minnesota Legislative Update: Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative

The Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, passed by the Minnesota Legislature and signed by Governor Pawlenty in May, develops a community-based collaborative project that will test and evaluate a comprehensive strategy for promoting marriage and responsible fatherhood among unmarried urban parents who are expecting or have recently had a child. The initiative will be directed by Bill Doherty, a University of Minnesota professor, and will target unwed parents in the Twin Cities. The initiative objectives are to:

- 1) encourage stable family formation among unmarried new parents in urban communities;
- 2) promote healthy marriages among unmarried new parents who want to be a couple and indicate that marriage is a goal for their relationship;
- 3) increase paternity establishment and enhance related child support performance indicators;
- 4) promote responsible fathering;
- 5) enhance the well-being of children; and
- 6) encourage and facilitate community support for marriage and family formation among unmarried parents.

This law also expands the requirements for court-ordered parent education classes. More parents may be required to attend classes based on new language which applies more clearly in contested custody and parenting time cases that are not divorces. Additionally, the length of classes is expanded to a minimum of eight hours.

Visit [www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/slaws/2004/c273.html](http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/slaws/2004/c273.html) to read the full text of the new legislation.

## Minnesota Child Support Changes

Starting July 1, 2004, Minnesota began charging monthly fees for child support services to recover some of the costs of operating its child support program. The cost recovery fees supplement the state and federal funding provided to county child support agencies.

Beginning July 1, 2004, custodial parents who applied for services and do not receive public assistance began paying a fee equal to 1 percent of the total amount of child support and maintenance the agency collects. Beginning July 1, 2005, noncustodial parents who applied for child support enforcement services will pay a fee of 1 percent of their monthly court-ordered child support and maintenance obligations. Learn more about these new fees on the Department of Human Services website: [www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/children/documents/pub/dhs\\_id\\_008789.hcsp](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/children/documents/pub/dhs_id_008789.hcsp).

The Minnesota Legislature also changed the law to allow people who applied for child support services to close their case if the custodial parent does not receive public assistance. Learn about the steps for eligible parents to close their cases: [www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/children/documents/pub/dhs\\_id\\_008813.hcsp](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/children/documents/pub/dhs_id_008813.hcsp).

### 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 to share with other human services practitioners and fatherhood advocates, please send your idea to MFFN (see page one for contact information).

### Donate to MFFN

Help us to meet the needs of fatherhood advocates and practitioners across Minnesota. Your gift in any amount is appreciated. Please contact MFFN (see page one) or print

### Subscribe Now

"Network Notes" is published quarterly and mailed to MFFN members each February, May, August, and November. Learn more about becoming a member at [www.mnfathers.org/members.html](http://www.mnfathers.org/members.html) or contact MFFN (see page 1).