

network notes

2009 February | Volume 7, Issue 1



Federal funding supports Minnesota fatherhood programs Five programs share progress updates and lessons learned

In the mid-2000s, five programs in Minnesota began receiving federal funds for programming related to fatherhood and/or marriage promotion. The following article shares updates of key successes, challenges, findings and lessons learned by the five programs.

\$1.4 million in annual federal funding was awarded in 2006 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to four Minnesota fathers' programs through the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. Another Minnesota project has received funding through the federal Healthy Marriage Project.

The Father Project, Goodwill/Easter Seals

Goodwill/Easter Seals receives \$500,000 per year through the "Promoting Responsible Fatherhood" grant to enhance and expand the FATHER Project. The FATHER project serves primarily low-income fathers 17 to 35 years of age in Hennepin County and surrounding areas. The goal is to promote responsible parenting and foster economic stability.

One of the main goals of the new funding – to expand the partnerships and services offered at the FATHER Project – has met with good success. By partnering with Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES) the FATHER Project doubled its projected enrollment of Latino fathers in 2008. With the Division of Indian Work, they reached the goal of enrolling 36 Native fathers. FATHER Project manager Guy Bowling credits this success to the full-time staff assigned to work with specific populations, increased marketing and referral efforts, and building trust with partnering organizations. The FATHER Project has also adapted to the needs of individual communities. For example, serving mothers and fathers concurrently was important for Latino families.

Implementing the partnership with Way to Grow to involve fathers in school readiness and child health took longer than expected. A workable partnership relied on training staff on various topics, such as the barriers that dads face in being involved in their children's education. Instead of a traditional classroom instruction model, the FATHER Project turned to activity-based education for fathers. Less frequent and less-structured sessions are being held on-site;

Staff working with Native and Latino fathers, in concert with partner agencies, help the FATHER Project to achieve its goals.

the "play, learn and grow" sessions have proved conducive to educating fathers and their children.

Other partnerships have also gained momentum. Through Parents as Teachers/MELD, staff at the FATHER Project has learned the skills needed to train fathers to facilitate parenting sessions. The partnership with African American

Family Services has helped staff to identify a crisis counseling model that promotes fathers' mental health through a limited number of counseling sessions. Most participants are not suffering from severe mental health issues, but are in need of crisis help.

In 2009, the FATHER Project and their partners are embarking on a strategic planning process, which may include plans for future expansion. In addition, at the encouragement of federal program officers, the FATHER Project is working on a book that will document their recipe for success.

"Federal grantees", 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.

Minnesota's federal grantees

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Men in the Making, Employment Action Center, RESOURCE Inc.

Employment Action Center (EAC), a division of RESOURCE, Inc., receives \$250,000 per year through the "Promoting Responsible Fatherhood" grant to focus on the economic stability of low-income fathers in the Twin Cities, primarily men of color with low educational attainment and limited work experience. The grant focuses on short-term job training (one year or less), financial literacy training, and entrepreneurial training.

Job training, offered primarily through the Minnesota Resource Center, includes custodial classes, welding certification, and home health care provider certification, to name just a few options. As of September 2008, the average starting wage upon completing job training was \$12.03, compared to \$10.50 per hour before. In the second year of the grant's operation, 121 men completed job training and 110 gained employment. Job training is a significant way to help break the cycle of poverty, says Kirkland Johnson, director of the program. By working with specific temp-to-hire companies, EAC successfully places these men into employment, often in spite of criminal histories.

Job training is a significant way to break the cycle of poverty.
- Kirkland Johnson

The financial literacy class teaches participants about credit, budgeting and asset-building. Through Lutheran Social Services, participants can set-up an Individual Development Account (I.D.A.) which matches \$4 to every \$1 contributed by a participant, up to \$100 monthly. Funds may be used to start a business, for school, or for purchasing a home. Over 200 participants have completed the financial literacy class, which is required to start an I.D.A. and 40 percent of eligible participants have started an I.D.A. The class motivates many participants to establish credit or to deal with credit issues for the first time.

Completion of financial literacy is necessary before starting the 20-week entrepreneurial training class where participants learn to develop and run a small business. Upon completion, eligible participants can apply for small business loans.

Many of the men are ineligible for loans because they owe past child support, taxes, or other debt. While these obstacles were not unanticipated, they have led to more "upfront" work with participants, such as completing an application process, doing a credit check, and filing a child support motion. To date, one participant has started a cleaning business using his I.D.A. EAC aims to help 5 people establish a business by the end of the grant.

Fathers also participate in parenting classes, supportive services, and volunteer or political activities. An outward focus on the community helps the men stay engaged in the program while building character and self-esteem.

Family Strengthening Project, Council on Crime and Justice

The Council on Crime and Justice (CCJ) receives \$400,000 annually through the "Promoting Responsible Fatherhood" grant to focus on incarcerated fathers and their families, in its Family Strengthening Project (FSP). The project's design is based largely upon the Children of Incarcerated Parents study completed by CCJ in January 2006. Project services begin with a detailed family assessment at the time of intake into prison, providing a unique early intervention option for offenders. Services extend to the incarcerated father and also to his family in the community. Services include a family wellness assessment, couples counseling, classes in marriage/relationships, parenting and finances, re-entry planning and employment placement. The FSP works with a wide range of partners including

To date there have been no reported incidents of domestic violence for the reunited families.

the Minnesota Department of Corrections, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Goodwill Easter Seals and Auriton Solutions. The project provides both pre- and post-release case advocacy and support to participants and their community partner, simultaneously. Another unique feature of the project is the length: many families enroll in the project within weeks of the father's incarceration, receive

services for up to 2 years during incarceration and 1 year post-release.

Recent funders

MFFN thanks the following donors who have made contributions in 2008–2009:

Bush Foundation
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Minnesota's fatherhood grants

◀ "Fatherhood grants", continued from page 2.

To date, 24 incarcerated FSP participants have been released. Of the 24 participants released, none have committed a new offense, 5 were re-incarcerated for technical violations of their release stipulations, 20 are in committed relationships and/or living together with their partner, 9 are employed and several others are seeking employment or participating in skills training programs. There have been no reported incidents of domestic violence for the reunited families.

FSP has garnered national attention and recognition. In September 2008, Macro International Inc. selected FSP as a best practices site based on their exemplary work with the Department of Corrections. In December 2008, they were one of two agencies selected by James Bell Associates as a designated Office of Family Assistance promising practices site. As a result, FSP is currently working to create an intensive report outlining the program's implementation and successes which will be disseminated to federal policy makers and the new Presidential administration. In addition, FSP continues to work with RTI International in North Carolina on an in-depth national evaluation impact study, only one of 5 agencies selected as an impact site.

Center for Fathering, Urban Ventures Foundation

The Center for Fathering at Urban Ventures receives \$250,000 annually through the "Promoting Responsible Fatherhood" grant to supplement its work with low-income African American and Latino men. The program design has gone through major revisions since receiving federal funding and now serves fathers ages eighteen and older throughout the greater metropolitan area. The Center focuses primarily on parenting education and skill-building. They tend to work with older men, over 30 years of age. Many fathers in the program have served prison time and many are in early recovery from drug or alcohol addiction.

The cornerstone of the program is an eight-week parenting class. Program director Pricilla Brown describes it as "getting them information that is real in their everyday life, not simply a lecture,

"Grant update", continued on page 4 . ▶

MFFN recognizes fatherhood professionals for leadership

In January 2009, the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network presented our fifth annual Excellence in Fatherhood Awards to leaders who promote healthy fatherhood. Details about each award winner can be read online at www.mnfathers.org/Awardees2009.pdf.



The award for Outstanding Individual Achievement is presented to Magistrate Steven J. Running, Duluth, by Rebecca Ahlstrand, MFFN Board Member.



One of the awards for Member of the Year is presented to Jon Harper, Adventures in Fathering, Crystal, by Jan Hayne, MFFN Board Member.



The second award for Member of the Year is presented to Nancy Norbie, Kandiyohi County, Willmar, by Dwaine Simms, MFFN Board Member.

Our website

Visit the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network's website to get **recent news and research** about healthy fatherhood.

Find out about **programs for fathers** across the state.

Learn about our work in areas of **public policy and advocacy**.

Download past issues of **Network Notes** and all of our 2-page **InfoSheets**.

Check it out at www.mnfathers.org.

Update on federal grantees

◀ “Grant update”, continued from page 3.

allowing them to make it real and fit into their lives what works for them for parenting.” While the original design was for a 36-week parenting curriculum, they found an eight-week class was more achievable. Brown says that the men say “I can commit to that [timeframe]” and then they stay around longer. The program’s largest challenges have been recruitment and retention; therefore, they take extra care to celebrate completion of the class. Upon completion, each participant receives

The Center for Fathering celebrates fathers’ achievements on a regular basis.

a certificate, a small monetary incentive, a t-shirt with the program logo, a picture with Ms. Brown or Jack Strawder (parent educator with the project) and gets to tell “my story,” detailing the personal benefits of the program.

Brown is optimistic that the Center will reach its goal of serving 200 men a year in the current grant year. They currently see an average of 45 men a night at the Tuesday night parenting group, 30 men on Thursday nights, and 15 men in their Latino parenting group. They are also serving about 10-15 women in the program. Some of the partnerships have changed since the original grant design. Currently their main partners are MAD DADS, Micah House (drug treatment center), Pillsbury United Communities (Latino parenting group), and Harriet Tubman/Chrysalis (referrals for anger management along with the Domestic Abuse Project). The Center does outreach through MAD DADS as well as the People’s Exchange Program at Urban Ventures, which provides food, clothing and household furnishings. The Center is also receiving more and more referrals from child protection and probation. In the immediate future they plan to continue their outreach and focus on parenting.

The Family Formation Project, University of Minnesota

The Family Formation Project (FFP) was formed as a community based project to learn what it takes to promote marriage and responsible fatherhood among unmarried parents. Unlike the previously described programs, the FFP receives a separate stream of federal funding. The FFP has recruited 97 couples and works directly with them doing in-

home relationship coaching, connecting them to other community resources, providing mentoring through volunteer married couples, and holding group gatherings. The FFP is wrapping up its work with couples, concluding in April 2009. Evaluation results are expected in fall 2009. Three preliminary lessons learned include the importance of the coaching relationship, the need for other resources, and the power of social support.

First, the close one-on-one coaching relationship has been very significant. Couples have become open about problem areas they face and obtained relationship education tailored for their situation, helping them traverse difficult times (18 couples have married; 7 are engaged). Where couples have broken up (18 total), the coach has tried to help the couples reach agreeable co-parenting relationships, keeping both father and mother active in their child’s life. Second, most of the couples needed more than relationship coaching—many were bogged down in housing or financial crises and could not focus on relationship building. A social worker was hired to help connect these couples to community resources. Third, most of the couples were socially isolated, lacking couple-friends and not knowing what a good relationship—let alone a marriage—looked like.

Married mentor couples were sought for each participating couple. Some good mentoring relationships were established, but recruiting enough mentor couples proved difficult and connecting busy mentors with couples whose lives are sometimes chaotic was a major challenge. The FFP then began holding regular all-project “Couple Connection” gatherings for couples that featured

Mentoring by married couples, in a group setting, has been a successful strategy for supporting unmarried families.

panels of mentor couples along with food, socializing, a presentation on topics the couples chose, and focused discussion. These gatherings have been very useful as participant couples gain support from one another and from mentors while learning about topics such as communication, intimacy, and parenting together. A formal evaluation of the project will take place later this spring and summer.

Our vision

healthy community = healthy fathers = healthy families

Fatherhood program updates

◀ "Fatherhood update", continued from page 4.

Postscript: Controversy and Concern at the Federal Level

Federal funding for the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood grants has not been without controversy. In 2007, Legal Momentum and the National Organization for Women filed complaints against the federal government. They claim that the funding violates Title IX, the law that prevents sex discrimination in federally funded education programs, because it is focused on serving fathers in education and job training programs. The complaint is still pending and can be viewed here: www.legalmomentum.org/assets/pdfs/regiicomplaint.pdf. HHS officials have responded to the claims by saying that while fathers are the target group, fatherhood grant recipients have been told their programs should be open to women, too.

In September 2008, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report focused on the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. GAO recommended that HHS employ a risk-based approach to monitoring grantees and conducting grantee site visits, and that it should create clear, consistent guidance and policy for monitoring grantees. This was based on findings that there were inconsistencies in grant monitoring and site visits, in what activities were being allowed under the grants, and in whether or not grantees could adjust their program goals, for example. HSS said they are in the process of developing a risk-based approach to monitoring but disagreed that they lacked clear, consistent monitoring guidance. The report can be found at: www.gao.gov/new.items/d081002.pdf.

Details: For more information on Minnesota's grantees contact:

- Goodwill/Easter Seals, Guy Bowling, Manager, (612) 724-3539
- RESOURCE Inc., Kirkland Johnson, Program Director, (612) 752-8836
- Council on Crime and Justice, Andy Sagvold, Assistant Director, (612) 353-3000
- Urban Ventures, Priscilla Brown, MAMFT, Program Director, (612) 455-4679
- University of Minnesota, Laurie Jenkins Anderson, M.Ed., Project Coordinator, (612) 625-5771



Young Minnesotans create images of healthy fatherhood

In January 2009, attendees of the Minnesota Fatherhood Summit selected winning entries of drawings created by young Minnesotans. The artwork, submitted for MFFN's first-ever Youth Art Contest, will be used in upcoming MFFN publications. All winning entries may be viewed online at www.mnfathers.org.

The Daddy Book: For program participants and new dads

This excellent resource and activity book, designed for new fathers, has detailed information about child development, father-child activities, and much more. The book includes spaces for fathers to jot down milestones in the baby's first year, reflections on being a new dad, and age-appropriate games and activities for dads and infants.



The 73-page book is free to download online: www.mnfathers.org/08daddybook.pdf. Alternately, you may order bulk quantities of spiral-bound print copies from MFFN (contribution of \$2.50 if you pick them up at the MFFN office in St. Paul; \$4.50 by mail). For further details, please contact us at (651) 222-7432 or info@mnfathers.org.

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Join in MFFN's Public Policy efforts

- 1) **Receive our email** devoted exclusively to public policy related to fathers and the fatherhood field in Minnesota. Email mfroehle@mnfathers.org to join this separate list serve. In keeping with our practice not to inundate your mailbox, we will send out policy emails not more than once a week or every two weeks.
- 2) **Keep informed on bills at the state Legislature** through our on-line bill-tracking document, under the policy link on our home-page, www.mnfathers.org.
- 3) **Speak out!** There are many opportunities to have your voice heard on the issues. In this year of major budget crises, legislators are especially eager to hear from their constituents. We will keep you apprised of these opportunities through our policy email.
- 4) **Join an MFFN work group** on the following issues: (1) ensuring the notice provisions of Minnesota's voluntary Recognition of Parentage (ROP) are being met and birth records are being updated to reflect paternity; (2) supporting changes to the administration of driver's license suspensions (for child support non-payment) and modifications of child support; (3) identifying and eliminating legal/policy barriers to father involvement in schools.

Other ideas include:

- 1) **Attend a legislative committee hearing** or meet with your legislator or local policy-maker. Bring fathers you work with to these meetings to tell their story.
- 2) **Write a letter** to your legislator or local policy maker, letter to the editor, or editorial piece.
- 3) **Join the leadership** of a group related to families (e.g. early childhood initiative, P.T.A., etc.).
- 4) **Set up a letter writing campaign** on an issue related to fatherhood.

The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits shares tips on how to effectively engage with your legislators. Get details online: www.mncn.org/policy_contacting_lawmakers.htm.

For further information or assistance, please contact Melissa Froehle, MFFN's Policy and Program Director, at mfroehle@mnfathers.org or (651) 222-7432.