



Network Notes

May 2005

Working with volunteer attorneys: How to recruit lawyers to work with fathers and families

The ability to offer accurate and inexpensive legal information is a key component of many successful projects that work with fragile families. Unfortunately, many family service workers, educators, and fatherhood advocates are not able to stay on top of all the complicated laws and policies surrounding family law. Additionally, many agencies are not permitted to offer legal advice to their clients.

Your local legal aid office is also a good place to determine what volunteer attorney resources already exist. You can find your local office on the Minn. Legal Services Coalition website, www.mnlegalservices.org (click on "Quick Reference Directory"). Some counties also offer separate groups such as Hennepin County's "Volunteer Lawyers Network:" www.volunteerlawyersnetwork.org.

Fathers' services organizations often rely on volunteer attorneys to provide answers to questions of child custody, parenting time, paternity establishment, and similar areas of family law. Whether speaking at a Family Law Clinic, offering pro bono one-on-one consultations, or staffing a legal advice phone bank, lawyers can be a valuable resource for educating and empowering low income, unmarried, and divorced parents.

Another important place to find volunteer attorney programs is to inquire through *"Volunteer Attorneys" continued on page 3.*

Dakota County announces Heroes Award

The winner of the Dakota County 2004 Heroes Award was announced at the Dakota County Board meeting earlier this year. This year's winner is the [Child Support Orientation and Family Law Clinic](#).

The purpose of the Child Support Orientation and Free Family Law Clinic is to provide an alternative means of delivering information to parents about the Child Support Program, along with access to free legal consultations with volunteer attorneys, and other community resource information pertaining to families.

Information is available in one place with program representatives available to meet individually with parents to answer questions and address concerns. The target customer group is custodial and/or non-custodial parents in need of child support services.

"Heroes" continued on page 4.

Find Attorneys Who Know Your Community

If you do not know any attorneys, there are a number of places where you can begin your search. One option is to go to colleagues who work with lawyers such as child support staff, Guardians Ad Litem, or other court personnel.

Seek a lawyer who is a strong advocate for children, who understands the importance of involving both fathers and mothers in children's lives, and who recognizes some of the barriers that may prevent positive father-child interactions.

Check to see what services are offered in your area before starting a new volunteer attorney program from scratch. The American Bar Association lists organizations offering pro bono services to clients: www.abanet.org/legalservices/probono/directory.html.

In this issue...

Exploring Family Law

This issue of Network Notes focuses on local efforts to promote a greater understanding of family law including issues of paternity, child support, child custody, parenting time, co-parenting and related issues. Learn about Minnesota programs that address these complicated issues with successful initiatives that benefit children, families, and communities.

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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Comprehensive services for fathers A visit with the FATHER Project in South Minneapolis

By Laura Turner, MFFN Board Member

Earlier this year, MFFN's Coordinator, Paul Masiarchin, and I made a visit to the FATHER Project, a Goodwill/Easter Seals program located at 1600 E. Lake St. in Minneapolis. Our goal was to view for ourselves one of the successful projects for dads and families through a more direct look at the activities offered.

We met with Andrew Freeberg, director of the FATHER Project, at his office in the heart of one of the most diverse and vibrant communities in South Minneapolis. We were quickly impressed with the warm and cordial atmosphere, the diversity of staff and participants, and the pleasant caring rapport evident among staff, and between staff and participants. The office was quite busy, with people coming and going and involved in a number of activities.

The FATHER Project serves young dads who are unemployed / underemployed, many of whom also need to establish paternity or address other child support issues. The project's goal is to assist fathers in overcoming the barriers that prevent them from supporting their children economically and emotionally. FATHER Project staff believe that the positive involvement of both parents is important to the healthy development of children and increases their chances of leading a safe, happy childhood.

The FATHER Project provides service in a number of father related areas. Each participant has the services of an advocate, who can assist the dad in dealing with issues of child support, legal challenges, employment services, parenting classes, and GED / education services.

The office space is used as well for MFIP and adult basic education programming, all of which serves to make the center a good resource for the participants. It was impressive to hear about the partnering on child support by Hennepin County, and on legal issues from Central Minnesota Legal Services (CMLS). In an unusual partnership, FATHER Project provides office space to county and CMLS staff. This collaboration allows FATHER Project to offer more services under one roof and allows staff to refer fathers to legal or county services "down the hall" rather than "across town".

This one-stop approach to meeting the needs of fathers is a vivid example of what a dedicated group of staff can achieve in collaboration with a broad spectrum of community organizations.

Contact the FATHER Project at (612) 724-3539 or visit online at: www.goodwilleasterseals.org.

Help spread the word about services for fathers!

Create a weblink to www.mnfathers.org.

Or link to our list of 100+ Minnesota fathers programs:
www.mnfathers.org/search/ServProvSearch.php

Serving men in Western Minnesota The Fathers' Resource Program

Fergus Falls, located near the fertile Red River Valley, is surrounded by rolling farmland, wooded hills, and over 1,000 lakes within a one-hour's drive. This city of 13,000, in the heart of Otter Tail County, is home to a treasure for fathers and families – the Fathers' Resource Program.

The Fathers' Resource Program (FRP) works on a variety of initiatives that promote responsible fatherhood for healthy children, education about the importance of fathers in children's lives, and other fathers' services.

A critical service provided by FRP is education about family law including parenting time, paternity, child support and custody. For example, FRP staff are knowledgeable about Minnesota court forms that fathers can use to request modifications to child support payments and parenting time. Fathers may be frustrated to find out that many county staff are unable to offer assistance with "pro se" court forms; however, FRP staff are willing to offer the support that men need to find the forms, follow the legalese instructions, and submit the paperwork with confidence.

The Fathers' Resource Program also offers a variety of educational services across West Central Minnesota. For example, the FRP provides hospital birthing units with tote bags for new fathers. Each tote bag, adorned with the FRP logo and phone number, includes reading materials about responsible fathering, a children's book for dad to read to the newborn, and information about local fathering groups and child development. The FRP also organizes a Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Panel which travels to high school health classes to talk about responsible fathering.

The FRP originally focused its services in Otter Tail County, but now also works in Wadena, Wilkin, Douglas, Becker, Traverse and Clay Counties. And through the program's toll-free phone number, FRP staff offer phone consultations to men across the state, including many fathers who have been incarcerated in the state's correctional facilities.

Publicizing the program's services requires a multi-pronged outreach effort. FRP staff place business cards and brochures in courthouses, court administration buildings, and county offices for child support, social services, and public health. FRP also leaves their materials in local clinics with the forethought that "men who are hurt and cannot work may need to modify their child support."

FRP makes good use of local public access cable television. In Otter Tail County, PEG TV (Public Education and Government) airs messages about FRP's services; later this year PEG will air an informational video at no charge. Additionally, FRP has acquired links on county websites – a sure-fire way to reach county workers and the general public.

Contact the Fathers' Resource Program at (877) 286-3892.

“Volunteer Attorneys” continued from page 1.

the fatherhood organizations in your community; over 100 Minnesota programs are listed at www.mnfathers.org/search/ServProvSearch.php.

If you determine that your community has a need for new services, Minnesota has a number of resources for learning about legal information. One website, www.lawhelpmn.org, is available to help you access legal information. The Family and Juvenile Subtopics page includes information on child support, custody, divorce, domestic violence, guardianship, the Indian Child Welfare Act, parenting time, paternity, rights of grandparents, and much more. Additionally, the site provides information about locations of Legal Aid offices and how to get legal help. This site is a good resource for individual referrals for your clients.

Find Attorneys that Fit Your Program’s Needs

According to Steve Onell, Director of FathersFIRST!, it is important to find a lawyer who is philosophically compatible with your program’s goals. It is important to take time to read about the lawyer’s expertise on his/her resume or firm’s website. When working with new lawyers, Onell cites four steps toward preparing for the first law clinic or pro bono consultation: 1) if possible, rely on the recommendation of a friend or colleague; 2) ask the attorney for a resume and credentials; 3) engage in a brief phone conversation to determine mutual compatibility between the attorney and your programmatic goals; and 4) meet with the lawyer immediately before the first volunteer session.

Transitions Roundtable:**A focus on fatherhood
after incarceration**

**Wednesday, June 29, 2005
8:30 am – 4:30 pm
St. John’s University
Collegeville, Minnesota**

The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network is collaborating with a broad range of social service and government agencies to host a one-day roundtable meeting on Fatherhood after Incarceration. This project is funded by the Otto Bremer Foundation.

**Details available online in mid-May at
www.mnfathers.org or email
info@mnfathers.org.**

Set Boundaries

It is important to determine and discuss your expectations about attorney-client relationships and the structure of the law clinic. For example, are attorneys going to provide advice, one-on-one, to participants? Or are attorneys simply going to provide general information and referrals to the group as a whole? Chrysalis, an organization in Minneapolis that offers law clinics to its clients, states on its website, “Volunteer lawyers explain legal rights and options, review documents, and provide legal advice. Volunteer lawyers do not sign or draft documents, provide on-going legal representation, or make court appearances for Law Clinic clients.” Establishing your own guidelines will help to clarify expectations before, during, and after the clinic.

Develop Long-term Relationships

Onell, at FathersFIRST!, believes that his success in working with volunteer attorneys stems, in part, from the close relationships he has developed. Outside of the law clinic setting, Onell refers his clients to many of the same lawyers who volunteer for his program. In turn, many of the lawyers refer other clients to FathersFIRST! for counseling and fathering classes. This mutual support goes a long way toward developing trust and respect. Importantly, Onell describes his core group of volunteer lawyers as “not overly zealous or manipulative in their expectations of referrals.” Both FathersFIRST! and Chrysalis offer clients a list of recommended lawyers; in this way the client is empowered to make the final decision about legal representation.

Details: Contact Steve Onell, FathersFIRST! at (612) 384-7078 or sonell@arcstp.org.

MFFN thanks Melissa Froehle, FATHER Project / Central Minn. Legal Services and Steve Onell for contributing to this article.

Congress, marriage and abstinence

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) posted a new publication by Jodie Levin-Epstein. The paper discusses what the federal government has already done to promote abstinence-unless-married programs and marriage, and what it proposes to do with welfare reauthorization. The article discusses the relationship between marriage and pregnancy prevention, including research findings on the influence of childbearing on marriage. Available online at www.clasp.org/publications/have_and_hold.pdf

Online resource for unmarried fathers

The “Unmarried fathers guide to paternity, custody, and parenting time in Minnesota”, updated in January 2005, provides fathers and fatherhood advocates a valuable resource for understanding Minnesota’s laws and the processes for gaining paternity, child custody, parenting time, and more. The document is available online at www.mnfathers.org/resources.html.

MFFN Board of Directors



The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network 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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"Heroes" continued from page 1.

Receiving the 2004 Heroes Award was "quite an honor," according to Theresa Olson, program supervisor in the Dakota County Child Support Office. Olson continued, "It is a project that has grown and changed with the needs as we discovered them in the community. It has taken a few years to get it running as smoothly as it does now." Since 1999, child support volunteers have made presentations at off campus locations. The sessions are offered quarterly in the early evening hours in various county locations including a library and a county office building.

At most of the Law Clinics, child support staff start the program with a fifteen minute PowerPoint presentation on the basics of the program followed by remarks from other county departments and community partners. Current partner agencies include: Father's First, Family Means Consumer Credit Counseling, Minnesota Work Force Center, Dakota County Public Health, Central Minnesota Legal Services and Community Action Council. Many of the parents and concerned relatives who attend are able to obtain help with multiple areas such as: child support, custody, parenting time, budgeting, health and wellness services, and job seeking. Over 150 citizens participated in 2004.

The collaboration is intended to help build trust and understanding among child support customers and program staff. It is also intended to provide better access to family resource information not directly related to the functions of the child support program. Through this initiative, county officials have learned that parents who understand the program and how to get the help they need are more satisfied with county services and have better outcomes. Service integration is a key goal of this project. Prior to the development of the seminar and family law clinic concept, workers could only refer customers to multiple agencies and programs which required the customer to spend more time tracking down resources and information, sometimes without success.

The success of the Law Clinics is supported by a network of over twenty community agencies that either post notices or use telephone referral lines to get the word out. Dakota County Public Health has participated by both sending a representative to talk with parents and sending brochures on everything from free immunization clinics to car seats. Work Force representatives have been available to share information about the resource room, resumes and job listings. Child Support workers in all specialty areas send personalized invitations to encourage parents who have several concerns or issues to attend. The free legal advice and access to a legal aid attorney who assists clients with completing pro-se paper work for court actions is very valuable because child support workers are not allowed to perform these functions even though they are much needed.

The Child Support Orientation and Free Family Law Clinic is a valuable tool for all of the collaborating agencies. The benefits for custodial and non-custodial parents make the project a success and an example for others to follow.

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 and mail the online form, available at www.mnfathers.org/documents/DonationsForm.pdf.

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.htm or contact MFFN (see page 1).

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