



President Obama's fatherhood agenda Expectations remain high among father-serving agencies

During the recent presidential nomination process, Senator Obama made a number of high profile speeches on themes that touched the hearts of many Americans.

On Father's Day 2008, the Senator remarked in Chicago, "Of all the rocks upon which we build our lives, we are reminded today that family is the most important. And we are called to recognize and honor how critical every father is to that foundation. They are teachers and coaches. They are mentors and role models. They are examples of success and the men who constantly push us toward it."

Obama continued, "But if we are honest with ourselves, we'll admit that what too many fathers also are is missing -- missing from too many lives and too many homes. They have abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men. And the foundations of our families are weaker because of it."

"But now," Obama declared, "my life revolves around my two little girls...And what I've realized is that life doesn't count for much unless you're willing to do your small part to leave our children -- all of our children -- a better world. Even if it's difficult. Even if the work seems great. Even if we don't get very far in our lifetime."

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-Barack Obama

Hopeful signs for support of fatherhood

Now, as President, Mr. Obama is being watched closely by father-serving agencies across the nation. There are hopeful signs that the

President will continue to highlight the importance of fatherhood for America's families, children, and communities.

In February 2009, the President committed to focusing on fatherhood within the White House Office on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Among the Office's four key priorities, "The Office will strive to support fathers who stand by their families, which involves working to get young men off the streets and into well-paying jobs, and encouraging responsible fatherhood."

Upon creating the Office, Obama stated, "There is a force for good greater than government. It is an expression of faith, this yearning to give back, this hungering for a purpose larger than

"Obama and fatherhood", continued on page 2 . ►

Marriage impacts reentry Study links ex-offender success to partner relationship status

Past research has suggested that married people commit fewer crimes. However, until now, little research has examined whether married ex-offenders also commit fewer crimes.

Returning Home, a study of male offenders in three U.S. cities, explores men's attitudes and behaviors pre-release, immediately post-release, and 8-months after release from prison. 650 men completed all three questionnaires conducted by the Urban Institute.

Researchers found that "former prisoners who were married or living as married had half the odds of self-reporting a new crime and/or drug use as did those in casual, unmarried relation-

"Marriage and reentry", 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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Marriage and reentry

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ships.” Men who were married or living as married had a 12 percent lower rate of committing a new crime, relative to unmarried ex-offenders. Similarly, men who were married or living as married had a 2 percent lower rate of illegal drug use / intoxication.

Among unmarried men with partners, *those who were fathers of children under 18* showed an increased likelihood of illegal drug use or intoxication. On the other hand, among unmarried men with partners, *those who were not fathers* experienced decreases in drug use and intoxication.

Researchers did not provide a hypothesis for this disturbing association between fatherhood, unmarried partnership, and drug use. The research raises the question whether unmarried couples experience higher rates of conflict when children are present; whether fathers feel greater stress due to pressures of providing economically for a family; or whether some other factor is impacting the incidence of illegal drug use and intoxication.

The research indicated that the *quality* of a partner relationship was associated with various factors for married and unmarried couples. For example, increases in partnership quality had significant associations with a lower probability of drug use or in-

toxication. Conversely, increases in partnership quality had significant associations with decreases in employment. The study’s authors openly wonder whether this association shows that “respondents

Increases in partner relationship quality were associated with a lower probability of drug use or intoxication.

spent more time with their partners than they did looking for a job.”

Importantly, the researchers weighted the differences that may exist between individuals who self-select into marriage and those who do not. In past research, critics have argued that the benefits of marriage are overstated because the individuals who self-select to get married are more pro-social than other individuals. In this study, the authors did not find much difference between married and unmarried ex-offenders, “a finding that contradicts literature suggesting that more pro-social individuals self-select into pro-social institutions such as marriage or partnerships.”

Researchers believe that “the findings suggest that in-prison programs that strengthen the quality of married relationships may improve recidivism and substance use outcomes after release.”

Details: A summary of the research is available online: The Impact of Marital Relationship Status on Social Outcomes for Returning Prisoners, February 2009, Urban Institute, www.urban.org.

Obama and fatherhood

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our own, that reveals itself not simply in places of worship, but in senior centers and shelters, schools and hospitals, and any place an American decides.” Father-serving agencies are hopeful that new funding will accompany the new commitment of creating a father-inclusive Office.

In March 2009, President Obama signed another executive order — this time to establish the White House Council on Women and Girls. The order showed an understanding of the interconnections between women’s success and men’s opportunities. It stated, “These issues do not concern just women. When jobs do not offer family leave, that affects men who wish to help care for their families. When women earn less than men for the same work, that affects families who have to work harder to make ends meet. When our

daughters do not have the same educational and career opportunities as our sons, that affects entire communities, our economy, and our future as a Nation.”

In other areas, as well, the new Administration is focusing on themes of strengthening families. For example, the White House Task Force on Middle Class Working Families is committed to improving the balance between work and family life. The President has also proposed providing home visits to low-income, first-time parents by trained professionals. Finally, as Senator, Barack Obama was a co-sponsor in 2007 of a federal fatherhood bill that Sen. Evan Bayh of Indiana and Rep. Danny Davis of Illinois plan to reintroduce in conjunction with Father’s Day 2009. (See page 3 for further explanation of this legislation.)

With President Obama in the White House, fatherhood may be one bi-partisan issue that gains traction in the coming year.

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New York fatherhood funding offers lessons for other states

Across the U.S., funding for fatherhood programs is filled with uncertainty. As programs cut budgets, services for fathers are often left in precarious situations. Support from philanthropic foundations and from the federal government has helped to stabilize some programs. Yet, most state funding directed to healthy fatherhood is limited, at best.

Since 2006, New York has been offering communities two streams of funding to support fatherhood programming. Initial assessments are shedding a light on successful strategies and lessons learned.

New York's "Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative" offers two distinct strategies for working with low-income noncustodial parents (mostly fathers). The first strategy, as authorized by the state's legislature, funds five pilot sites to engage parents in intensive employment and other supportive services. The second strategy offers a refundable earned income tax credit (EITC) for noncustodial parents who pay their entire child support obligation in a given year.

The program aims to increase noncustodial parents' financial and emotional involvement with their children.

Program participants are mostly unemployed or under-employed upon enrollment (87%). Sixty percent have an arrest record and 79 percent have a high school degree or lower levels of education. One success of the New York fathers initiative has

Other states could learn a good deal from New York about how to fund services for noncustodial parents.

been its ability to recruit participants. As of mid-2008, the sites had enrolled over 2,000 people, far above the projected enrollment. This success is attributed, in part, to referrals coming from state courts, a one-stop career center, and multiple service provider agencies. Additionally, the programs offer enrollees incentives such as bus tokens and transportation assistance.

The initiative increases vital connections between the service providers and areas of family law. Each site has increased collaboration with the state courts and child support offices. Many of the sites help fathers to regain a driver's license or to find an attorney.

Another success comes from the variety of services offered. Each site offers comprehensive case management to program enrollees. The key supportive services are parenting and child support-related services. The funding also allows programs to provide job-readiness training, interviewing skills, job referral programs, vocational skills training, financial literacy education, and more. The sites are able to cater services in order to meet the individual needs of their client populations.

Of the participants who were unemployed upon enrolling in the program, initial measures show 38 percent are now employed (and many more are still engaged in the program).

Of the participants who had orders to pay child support, 42 percent paid a total of \$229,036 in June 2008. The median payment was \$219.

These program successes demonstrate the value of intensive fatherhood programming. Other states could learn a good deal from New York about how to fund services for noncustodial parents.

Details: A review of New York's fatherhood initiative is available on the Urban Institute website, www.urban.org (March 2009).

A model for federal funding?

Federal legislation, proposed by Sen. Bayh and Sen. Obama in 2007, includes the same two-pronged strategy utilized in New York — supportive services and earned income tax credits. The legislation has been included in President Obama's agenda for strengthening families.

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.

Father's Day in DC!

This June, the United States celebrates its 100th Father's Day. A national celebration of fatherhood will take place at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, on **Saturday, June 20, 2009**. Fathers are invited to bring their children, join the rally, and take a pledge of responsible fathering. Details here: www.npclstrongfamilies.com



Leading Minnesota's campaign for healthy fatherhood.



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We Can Parent Together **Tools for Engaging Fathers, Mothers, and Others**

When parents are consistent and support each other in the task of parenting, children benefit. This workshop presents the basics and benefits of co-parenting and offers strategies and best practices to utilize in supporting any family working to raise children in a healthy, safe environment. Specific focus will be given to the unique challenges of divorcing and never-married parents, adolescent parents or those with substance-abuse/dependence-related concerns.

Objectives:

- Understand the co-parenting relationship and how it differs from the couple relationship.
- Learn how to implement strategies and tools to help parents improve their co-parenting relationship.
- Learn how to talk about the importance of fathers and how to support mothers in engaging fathers.
- Learn techniques for supporting adolescent parents.
- Understand challenges that parents may face around their co-parent's substance-abuse and dependence.
- Understand how all the strategies presented can help prevent child abuse and neglect before it happens.

The 2009 Fall Regional Workshops are being presented by Minnesota Fathers & Families Network; Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota; the Minnesota Prevention Resource Center; the Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention, and Parenting; University of Minnesota Extension; and the Department of Human Services Children's Trust Fund.

All sessions will take place from 10:00 am–3:00 pm.

Thur. Sept. 24	Fergus Falls
Fri. Sept. 25	Bemidji
Wed. Sept. 30	Minneapolis/St. Paul
Wed. Oct. 14	Duluth
Thurs. Oct. 22	Owatonna
Tuesday Oct 27	Minneapolis/St. Paul
Fri. Oct. 30	Little Falls
Thur. Nov. 5	Redwood Falls

Watch www.mnfathers.org for details about registration and exact locations.

**Join our statewide training workshops
this fall!**