

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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Visit us online at
www.mnfathers.org.

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

Network Notes

November 2003

We Are All In This Together

By Glenn Tobey, MFFN Board Member

One day a very troubled fifteen year old young lady caught me in the hallway of a community center and frantically told me how the court was going to haul her away because of her disruptive and abusive behavior toward many people in the community. After listening for a few moments, I realized both parts were true. However, in the midst of this turbulent conversation and her own abused past coming out, she said to me "I wish you could be my father."

The meaning this young lady made about fathering was about the power that safety, comfort, protection and belonging have upon a child. In saying out loud what she said, her behavior for the following two weeks prior to her court appearance (where they did haul her away...) was "of a model teenager" her probation officer said.

Fathers that are caring, available and active in the lives of their children have a positive impact upon the rates of truancy, school attendance, grades/ learning, suicide, mental health and criminal activity, although not necessarily in a scientific or linear fashion.

The fathering connection is often in jeopardy in the world of funders due to a perception these connections are too soft, intangible and not measurable in making a difference. Yet the fathering connection is fundamentally one of the core linking practices to the alleviation of many social issues. The fathering connection is also the linking language between problems and results. Often life gets better overall for children, and the fundamental gains made by children get stronger, when the connection between father and child is close, is closer, is closest. The fathering connection is truly a best practice.

As the Coordinator of the Carlton County Children and Family Service Collaborative, we allocate a small amount of money toward supporting the Fatherhood Program of Carlton County. However, it is during this current time of reduced availability of financial assets that we are developing, promoting and

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connection is a task
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program to shoulder.*

Save the Date! Minnesota Fatherhood Conference

The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network is planning a one-day conference to promote conversations about how to involve fathers in the lives of their children. Attendees will get the latest information on effective programming, father-related research, and legislation affecting fatherhood services in the state of Minnesota. This conference is geared toward family-services and fatherhood-services practitioners and advocates, including state, county, and non-profit agencies serving fathers and families.

Workshop presentations will include a mock law clinic, issues affecting low income parents, advocacy for fathers and adolescent parents, immigrant parent issues, human relationship development, strengthening traditional families, teen parenting issues, and more.

For further details, visit www.mnfathers.org/summit.html or contact Paul Masiarchin (contact information at left).

Minnesota Fatherhood &
Family Services Summit

Friday, January 16, 2004
St. Cloud Civic Center
8:30 am—4:00 pm

200 Attend Family Services Workshops

In an effort to reach out across Minnesota, announce the establishment of the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network, and begin a conversation about father involvement with Minnesota's social services agencies and fatherhood advocates, MFFN hosted nine workshops this fall. The workshops, sponsored in collaboration with the Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (MOAPPP) and the Minnesota Initiative Foundations, were titled "*Building Networks – Supporting Children: Promoting Effective Policies and Services for Fathers and Adolescent Parents*".

Discussions in each region varied based on the background and needs of the attendees. Each workshop provided considerable time for networking. Overall, the participants at the workshops discussed a number of the changes that occurred during the 2003 legislative session, shared what's going on locally and across the state and planned how to make a difference in 2004.

Minnesota legislators and representatives of state agencies attended a number of the workshops along with social services providers from county agencies and nonprofits in the following fields: head start, early childhood family education, corrections, teen pregnancy prevention, welfare, domestic abuse and violence prevention, Minn. Extension programs, literacy promotion, child custody and support, faith-based organizations, transitional living, family law, a wide range of fatherhood programs and more.

A total of 200 fatherhood and family services professionals attended the nine workshops in Little Falls, Fergus Falls, Bemidji, Marshall, Willmar, Mankato, Rochester, Duluth, and St. Paul.

The information gained from these workshops will be helpful as MFFN and MOAPPP develop their Legislative Agendas for 2004. Additionally, these workshops point to a growing interest and need across Minnesota for more specific workshops and training sessions to address the needs of fathers. MFFN will use this information to help develop our Action Plan for 2004.



Online Resources for Fatherhood Professionals

Online, the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network is developing a number of resources for family services practitioners and fatherhood advocates. The Web site, located at www.mnfathers.org, provides free access to a number of reference lists, publications, news articles, and social services agencies.

Initiated in May of this year, the Web site is quickly becoming a valuable asset to Minnesota's fatherhood services providers. The Web site is maintained to help support and connect fatherhood professionals across Minnesota. *Please, let us know what you think about the site!* Listed below are some of the tools available online at www.mnfathers.org:

Fathers' Services Directory: This database provides a comprehensive list of nearly 100 organizations across Minnesota that have specific services or programs that meet the needs of fathers. Searchable by geographic region, this list is a valuable tool for networking and for referring fathers to other service providers. Please contact MFFN if you would like your organization added to this online database.

Calendar for Fatherhood Professionals: Find out what events, training sessions, meetings, and conferences are available for *professionals and advocates* working on issues related to father involvement in Minnesota. Plus, if you know of an event aimed to meet the networking or professional development needs of family services providers, contact MFFN to add the event.

Links to State and National Web Sites: An extensive list of Web sites is now available to help fatherhood practitioners get information about research, publications and tools that support effective fatherhood programming. The page is divided into Minnesota-based resources and national resources.

What Are Your Professional Development Needs?

Please complete the brief online survey to help MFFN better understand the needs of fatherhood and family services practitioners and advocates. The survey is on www.mnfathers.org, then click "Join Us."

Fatherhood Advocacy Information: This page lists a number of important links to other organizations that are advocating for legislation and funding that support fathers, adolescent parents, and families. Plus, this page has information about MFFN events related to public policy. Watch this page for upcoming information about MFFN's policy stances on pertinent legislative issues affecting fathers and families.

Resource Bank: Recent Publications and News Articles: Still under development, this page will become Minnesota's Fatherhood Services Resource Bank. Download or order recommended publications and resources that will help you to meet the needs of fathers throughout Minnesota.

The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network is working to create an exhaustive list of all of the resources, publications, agencies, and events that are useful to professionals working in the areas of responsible father involvement and family services. If you know of a Web site, and event, or an electronic document that we should post on our page, please let us know. We hope you will consider this your one-stop shop for Minnesota fatherhood practitioners and advocates.

Remember to visit us on a regular basis at www.mnfathers.org.



"Building Quality Programs for Minnesota's Fathers."

Link to Our Website

Please help MFFN reach out to fatherhood and family services practitioners. Consider creating a link on your website to www.mnfathers.org. As we work to build the infrastructure of our own website, we hope you will consider sharing the site with other fatherhood professionals and advocates.

Thank you.

MFFN Board of Directors

MFFN is committed to hearing the voices of fatherhood practitioners from every region of Minnesota.

Paula Baker, Bemidji Area Schools, **Bemidji**

Rebecca Ahlstrand, Carlton County Child Support, **Carlton**

Nathan Knutson, Dept. of Corrections, **Moose Lake**

Velura Peterson, Social Services, **Virginia**

Glenn Tobey, Carlton County Children and Family Service Collab., **Cloquet**

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R. Clarence Jones, SPUL and Southside Community Health Services, **St. Paul**

Jack Sharp, Division of Indian Work, **Minneapolis**

Laura Turner, Minn. Dept. of Employment & Economic Develop., **St. Paul**

Minnesota Review: Books 4 Babies Values Father Involvement

In the August issue of *Network Notes*, we asked for submissions from across Minnesota about “best practices” in fathers’ programs. Linda Suer, Family Literacy Coordinator at Cloquet Community Education says, we “do not technically have a Fathers’ Program. However, we are making a concerted effort to include more fathers in one of the programs that I coordinate, Books 4 Babies.

“Books 4 Babies is a home visiting program in Carlton County, Minnesota that was developed in Cloquet in response to a need to provide at-risk families with information to parents concerning their role **now** in the **future** learning success of their child(ren). Families of newborns in Carlton County (now offered universally to any family with a newborn/young child) can be matched with a community volunteer who may do up to five visits to each family. A new child’s book is given to the family at each visit with a discussion of how to use the book with the child. Discussions are held concerning what kinds of activities they can do with the child without spending money. In addition, one of the visits is a tour of a local library and information about other resources for families is shared.

Reading with Dad Booklist

The Minnesota Humanities

Commission recommends over 50

picture books that are geared toward fathers with children of various ages. A

free copy of the booklist is available at

www.minnesotahumanities.org under

“Family Literacy Initiatives.”

“Most often, the visits are conducted with the mothers despite including the father’s name on the information. (We are available to do visits in the evening.) Many mothers share that the father doesn’t participate in sharing of books with the baby.

“In an effort to include more fathers in this essential parenting experience, we have added books just for the dads to use with their child(ren). We currently are offering ‘Papa Papa’ by Jean Marzollo and ‘What Daddies Do Best’ by Laura Numberoff. Fathers have expressed such joy at having a special book. One father’s comment was, ‘It’s wonderful that finally someone thinks we are important, too!’”

Details: Linda Suer, Cloquet Community Education, Books 4 Babies, 509 Carlton Avenue, Cloquet, MN 55720. Phone: (218) 879-1261 ext. 2103.

Do you know of a “best practice” to share? Send a brief description to Paul Masiarchin (contact information provided on page 1). Thank you. ❖

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implementing strategies whereby the fathering connection is a task for all of us to share, not just for one program to shoulder.

We are helping every organization to use the fathering connection as a filter through which they have discussions or make decisions, especially when it does not seem directly related. This practice is expanding their consciousness and developing greater programmatic and organizational capacities. Consequently, more people now believe they own the strategy of bringing fathers together with their children, than when they believed it was someone else’s task or of another program or service. This expansion and integration has produced substantial change, broader community support, and the realization we are all in this together. ❖

Is your program father-friendly?

Even if your mission statement doesn’t identify fathers as a key client, meeting their needs can help to meet the needs of children and families.

The Washington State Fathers Network has developed a program self-assessment to measure your openness to fathers. View the

brief questionnaire online at

www.mnfathers.org/resources.html.