

Network Notes

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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 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.

The Minnesota Family Formation Project

Helping unmarried fathers in their current relationships

By Dr. Bill Doherty, Jason L. Wilde, and Laurie
Jenkins-Anderson; University of Minnesota

Prologue

Allen Demming* was depressed. It was the anniversary of his son's death. His sweet boy had been senselessly gunned down while on a trip to the store with his mother. To make matters worse, Allen had bills to pay, was jobless, and his girlfriend was pregnant with the baby due in less than two months. He desperately wanted to provide. He wanted his relationship with his girlfriend to work out. He wanted to settle down and leave behind the street life in which he was raised. But here he was stuck in a depression. And then there were these two people coming over, to interview him and his girlfriend for some research project. They had said the point of the project was to help unmarried couples form stable families—maybe they could help, maybe.

What is the Project?

The researchers were Family Formation Coordinators with the Minnesota Family Formation Project—a federal and state funded demonstration project formed to learn how to help urban unmarried couples who want to stay together and raise their child(ren) and who say that marriage is a potential for their relationship, form stable families. The Project engages couples either near the birth of the child, when many couples aspire to forming a

** Names have been changed; story based on a real occurrence with identifying information changed for the privacy of project participants.*

While reluctant couples should not be pressured to marry and marriage should not be seen as a solution to relationship troubles, a healthy marriage can be a positive option for many unmarried new parents.

Continued on page 2, "Family formation".

We've moved!

The Minnesota Fathers & Families
Network's office is now in Saint Paul.

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International men's health and mental health leader plans Minnesota visit

On September 27–29, 2006, Preston J. Garrison will make a welcome return to the state of Minnesota.

As the current chief executive of the World Federation for Mental Health and the former director of the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families, Mr. Garrison is a strong international supporter for the healthy involvement of fathers in the lives of children, families, and communities.

On September 28, 2006, Mr. Garrison will lead a session at St. John's University as part of the annual Men's Lives Series held on campus. The session will explore men's mental health in the context of local, national, and international communities. The discussion will bear insight on the diverse populations of men living within Minnesota's borders including immigrants, refugees, rural communities, and minority populations. Additionally, Mr. Garrison will highlight the importance of family status, including fatherhood, on men's health and well-being.

A World View of Men's Mental Health
7:00 - 8:30 p.m. • Thursday, Sept. 28, 2006
Pellegre Auditorium, Peter Engel Science
Center, St. John's Univ., Collegeville, Minn.
Free and open to the public; no RSVP
required.

Details: Mr. Garrison's biography, driving directions, and a campus map are online at www.mnfathers.org/mentalhealth2006.html.

Family formation

Continued from page 1.

stable family and marrying when they feel ready, or during the early years of their child's life. The Project features mentoring from successful married couples who understand the challenges that urban couples face. The Project is innovative in that it supports the couple's relationship whereas most services for these fragile families do not become available until after the couple has broken up. The Project also addresses the culture of despair in urban communities, among citizens and professionals alike, about the prospects for lasting unions and stable families among unmarried new parents. For completing a yearly survey interview, participating couples receive a stipend of \$70 per interview.

What are the Project Goals?

The Family Formation Project encourages responsible fathering, promotes economic and psychosocial well-being of children, promotes paternity establishment and child support, and encourages community support for marriage and family formation among unmarried parents. The Project makes progress toward these goals by working directly with couples, matching up each participating couple with a mentor couple (trained and receiving support by the Project), and by mobilizing community stakeholders in support of unmarried new parents, thus promoting a cultural shift away from pessimism and towards hope for these families. Project staff and volunteers work with couples in their homes, directly providing applicable psycho-education and relationship/life-skills training. They also give referrals to other social services such as job skills programs, family and couples education and couples counseling. These referrals are followed up by the Family Formation Coordinators so that the participants do not slip through the social service cracks.

What can you do?

The Project is now actively recruiting three groups: 1) participant couples: unmarried couples who are parents of at least one young child; 2) mentor couples: seasoned, married couples who are passionate about marriage and want to strengthen marriage in the community by being there for participant couples; and, 3) project stakeholders: partner organizations—from social service agencies to churches—anyone who has an interest in marriage and in helping urban couples to succeed. If you think your organization could help refer participant couples or mentor couples or help in some other way—or if you and your partner would like to be a mentor or participant couple—please call the Project: (612) 625-5771, or email: ljanders@umn.edu (project coordinator, Laurie Jenkins Anderson). They would love to talk further with you. Visit the project web site for details: <http://fsos.che.umn.edu/projects/mnffp.html>.

The Family Formation Project is actively recruiting participant couples, mentor couples, and partner organizations that can help refer couples to the Project.

The Minnesota Family Formation Project is officially known as the "Minnesota Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood

Underlying values: The Minnesota Family Formation Project

Because marriage promotion is a politicized topic in today's environment, the Project team has found it helpful to be clear about the values and beliefs underlying the project.

Advantage of two parent families: although all families with children deserve the support they need, research demonstrates that a healthy, two-parent, married family is the best environment for children.

Healthy marriage as a positive goal: while reluctant couples should not be pressured to marry and marriage should not be seen as a solution to relationship troubles, a healthy marriage can be a positive option for many unmarried new parents. The project and all of the partners must be realistic and respectful, but not neutral, about the value of healthy marriage.

Safety first: there will be ongoing vigilance about violence and abuse in the couples in the project.

Flexibility: all participants—couples and the professionals alike—will be called upon to learn and adapt as the project matures, and professionals in particular must be willing to operate outside of the traditional practice of one-way service delivery.

Diversity: Appropriate intervention strategies will vary according to the circumstances of couples and the characteristics of cultures and communities.

Productive citizenship: participants are members of communities in which everyone can make a difference.

Initiative". The Minnesota Department of Human Services contracted with the University of Minnesota to conduct the demonstration project. Dr. William J. Doherty, in the University's Family Social Science Department, is the Project Director. A number of community organizations are supporters of the project including American Indian OIC, Minnesota Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, Early Childhood Family Education, Goodwill / Easter Seals FATHER Project, African American Men Project, and Tubman Family Alliance.

Epilogue

After the interview, Allen's girlfriend left for work but the Family Formation Coordinators knew Allen needed some help right now. They stayed and talked with Allen about his grief—that it was normal—and supported him as he shared memories and pictures of his deceased son. They then addressed his predicament of having bills to pay and no job and helped him see that he could work with his creditors. They supported him as he called one creditor and worked out an acceptable payment plan. His depression started to lift. By the end of his phone call, Allen was feeling hopeful and declared that he was going to the library to look up job postings—his desire to provide for his coming child and to be there for his girlfriend was back in the forefront. While Allen and his girlfriend still have issues to face, The Family Formation Project is glad to be a part of helping them towards relationship success.

16th annual Festival for Fathers and Families attracts 1,000 attendees to north Minneapolis

For the sixteenth consecutive year, a loose coalition of metro-Twin Cities non-profits, corporations, and government agencies combined their efforts to host the Minnesota Festival for Fathers and Families. With nearly 1,000 registered attendees, the 2006 festival was the largest in many years.



Unlike many community celebrations that charge entrance fees and steep prices for food and entertainment, the Festival for Fathers and Families is 100% free. Every attendee received a free lunch ticket, entrance into a prize drawing, and access to exhibit tables of family service resources, a moon bounce, giant slide and rock climbing wall, a petting zoo, pony rides, hair cuts for youth, live dance and music performances, cotton candy, popcorn, and more! Additionally, every father or father-figure received a baseball cap and t-shirt at the registration table.

An annual highlight of the festival is a public recognition ceremony for “father of the year”. This year, twelve men were honored by a social service organization for their dedication to their children and their communities. Each father received a framed certificate.

Visit www.mnfathers.org/festival.html for a complete list of collaborating organizations and major donors.

Reframing child abuse and neglect: Resource guide for advocates

For the past several years there has been much interest in how advocates can communicate more effectively and reframe the issue of child abuse and neglect prevention. In early 2003, Prevent Child Abuse America contracted with the FrameWorks Institute and its partners Cultural Logic and Public Knowledge to explore the concept of reframing the issue of child abuse and neglect prevention. The result is a new resource designed to help advocates to understand and prevent child abuse.

Reframing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Practical Toolkit has been produced by Prevent Child Abuse America under a subcontract with the FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community Based Child Abuse Prevention. FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) is a service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau.

Access the toolkit at www.friendsnrc.org under “What’s New”.

The toolkit shares the theory behind the FrameWorks Institute’s strategic frame analysis, key findings and recommendations from the research, as well as some of the obstacles advocates face in communicating about child abuse and neglect prevention.

The toolkit contains practical information, materials and guidelines on how to best implement this research to increase public understanding of child abuse prevention.

Manual focuses on importance of fathers for child welfare

The Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently released a guide for child welfare workers to help fathers have a positive impact on their children’s lives. “The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children” (2006) is the first guide for professionals that focuses specifically on how they can more effectively engage fathers whose children come to the attention of the child welfare system.

To carry out their responsibilities of protecting children at risk of maltreatment, Child Protective Services (CPS) caseworkers must effectively engage families that often both present and face great challenges. These can include substance abuse, mental health problems, economic stress, unemployment, separation and divorce, inadequate housing, crime, and incarceration. Figuring out how best to work with and engage these families, always with the safety of and permanency for the child as the goal, is not easy. This manual also speaks to both the opportunities and challenges presented by one participant in the family sagas that CPS caseworkers deal with everyday: the father.

“Fathers play a crucial role in the healthy development of their children,” said HHS Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, Wade F. Horn, Ph.D. “This manual gives fathers practical advice about their responsibilities to their children as providers, protectors and mentors.”

The guide includes advice about these topics and more:

- Tips for dads: caring for new moms
- How to handle a crying baby
- Ten ways to be a better dad
- Twenty long distance activities for dads living at a distance
- How to work with special needs children

The document is available online at the Child Welfare Information Gateway:
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/

MFFN joins statewide coalition of children’s advocates

The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network has joined the **Minnesota Children’s Platform Coalition**. The purpose of the collaboration is to provide a unified voice on behalf of all children and youth in order to strengthen the public’s will to endorse policies and investments which will meet the needs of all children and help them to reach their full potential. Learn more about the Coalition’s efforts to put children first; visit www.everychildmatters.org.

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Fatherhood research roundup: Recent documents examine aspects of fatherhood

The family environment and adolescent well-being: Exposure to positive and negative influences: This national report, issued in June 2006, includes information about how parents shape the lives of their children — with a focus on adolescent development. The report seeks to identify where disparities exist and where needs for intervention are greatest. The report includes a brief discussion on the implications for parenting and for policy. Download the full report from Child Trends and the National Adolescent Health Information Center: www.childtrends.org/Files/FamilyEnvironmentRB.pdf.

Fertility, contraception, and fatherhood: Data from the National Survey of Family Growth. In May 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a comprehensive report on fertility, contraception, and fatherhood indicators among men 15-44 years of age in the United States. The data are from the National Survey of Family Growth conducted in 2002. It's the latest survey of this type, and—for the first time—this large-scale, nationwide survey includes men. Whenever appropriate, the findings for men and women are contrasted. Men's and women's reproductive experiences vary significantly, and often sharply, by characteristics such as education, income, ethnicity and race. For example, the survey shows that, among non-Hispanic black fathers, 25 percent fathered their first child before they were 20 years old; 19 percent of Hispanic fathers also became fathers as teenagers, and 11 percent of non-Hispanic white men became fathers while they were teens. Also, men who did not live with both parents at age 14 were more likely to have had sexual intercourse during the teenage years (19 or younger) compared with those who lived with both parents at age 14. The report is available online: www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_23/sr23_026.pdf.

New research brief on parent/child communication: Over two decades of research suggests that parents can play a critical role in their children's decisions about sex. A new Science Says research brief from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy explores parent-child communication about sex and related issues. Among the key findings, two thirds of teens say they have had some discussion with their parents about sex and related issues, but what parents discuss with teen girls differ from what they discuss with teen boys. Also, younger teens are more likely than older teens to say that they have discussed sex and related issues with a parent. To view the Science Says, visit the National Campaign's website at www.teenpregnancy.org/works/pdf/Science_Says_25_Parent_Child_Communication.pdf.

Support for MFFN is provided in part by:
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