

Network Notes

February 2007 ■ Volume 5, Issue 1



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.

Excellence in Fatherhood 2007 Award Recipients Honored

The Excellence in Fatherhood Awards honor individuals, programs and institutions that make outstanding contributions to fatherhood policy and practice in Minnesota. The third annual awards were presented by MFFN on January 23, 2007, at the Fatherhood Summit in St. Cloud.

Advocate of the Year—Outstanding Agency: Minn. Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting, St. Paul

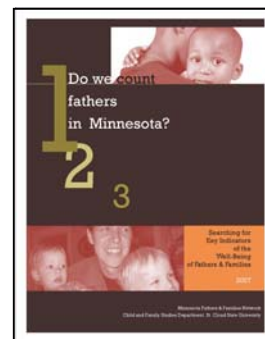
MOAPPP's overall efforts as an organization committed to Minnesota youth who are parenting, contemplating parenting and policy makers make it the premier advocate in this state on the issues of adolescent health, sexual health, pregnancy prevention and teen parenting. Among MOAPPP's state-wide constituents are family serving organizations and professionals, families of diverse composition, legislative leaders, academicians, youth, teens and young adults. MOAPPP represents the state of Minnesota in national dialogues about effective programs that are driven to meet the needs of early parenting, pregnancy prevention and policy.

According to Dwaine Simms, a long-time fatherhood worker and advocate, "Early in my tenure as an advocate for programs that address teen fathers, I was supported by the mentoring of MOAPPP. This mentoring assisted father focused programs 'make their case' before the legislative committees and leaders who made funding decisions. Without this advocacy I am certain that the state's reputation of having been in the forefront of the father movement would not have had the synergy that other states followed and emulated. MOAPPP was at the table in these critical moments and continues to lead in this area with pertinent statistical data,

Continued on page 2, "Statewide honors".

Do we count fathers in Minnesota?

The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network (MFFN), in collaboration with the Child and Family Studies Department at St. Cloud State University, has released a first-of-its-kind report about the health and well-being of fathers and families in Minnesota.



The 80-page report features statistical, demographic, legal, and social information about the state of fatherhood in Minnesota.

According to Dr. Glen Palm, one of the main contributors to the report, "This report provides a wealth of information about fatherhood and family contexts, father involvement with their young children and current services focused on fathers in Minnesota. We hope that this report will be used by policy-makers, fatherhood practitioners, and family service providers to better understand fathers and ways to support and encourage positive father-child relationships."

The report illuminates two intersecting views of fatherhood.

On the one hand, the report shows that Minnesota has a healthy and involved group of men who are engaged with their children, exhibit healthy personal behaviors, and support the development of the next generation of Minnesotans.

Continued on page 3, "Counting fathers".



Celebrating five years
of service to
fatherhood advocates,
educators & family
professionals.
2003—2007

Programs, individuals honored statewide

Continued from page 1.

research and curriculum syntheses, training, public policy and best practice affirmations.”

When advocates from teen parent coalitions, area county family collaboratives, father focus groups, child abuse prevention councils, human ecology professors, schools of social work students, think tank consultants and philanthropic organization officers need information about teen parents, MOAPPP is the proven source for this data. For these reasons and more, MOAPPP is well-qualified to be this year’s Advocate of the Year – Outstanding Agency.

Advocate of the Year—Outstanding Individual: Jeffrey Tibbetts, Fond du Lac Social Services, Cloquet

Jeffrey works with incarcerated men and fathers to assist in their transition back into the community. He assists them to make healthy re-entries after incarceration. Jeffrey works with Native American men, using traditional teachings and ceremonies to guide their readjustments. He is employed as a community advocate for Fond du Lac Social Services, Min No Aya Win Human Services.

Jeffrey has been a critical force in forming the positive development of Native American males from Northern Minnesota, with a particular focus on the Fond du Lac community. He has shown Native American fathers how to become healthy contributors to the community, while encouraging positive father role-models. Throughout his efforts, Jeffrey demonstrates the qualities of an Outstanding Individual Advocate of the Year.

Program of the Year: Young Dads Program, Employment Action Center, Minneapolis/St. Paul

For over 12 years, the Young Dads Program has strengthened the most at-risk Minneapolis fathers so they can support the needs of their children. The goal of the program is to assist young unemployed or underemployed fathers to become engaged financially, physically, and emotionally with their children and to become self-sufficient.

The Young Dads Program offers a holistic range of services: assistance for establishing paternity, child support, visitation and custody; parenting and life skills education; housing assistance; peer support groups; career assessments; and job placement assistance. In 2006 the program began offering services in St. Paul; the program increased street outreach to disadvantaged young fathers; and the program added financial literacy, micro-enterprise training, career advancement, and mentoring components. Also in 2006, based on connections the program had established with Hennepin County Commissioners, the Young Dads Program succeeded in gaining county support for a housing fund for program participants.

Betsy McMillan, director of the Employment Action Center, explained, “Through the Young Dads Program, fathers are able to reach their goals: they are able to obtain safe and stable housing, which allows many to establish visitation for the first time; they pursue education and employment in order to better provide for their families; many obtain full custody of their children. Throughout a young man’s participation, the Young Dads Program helps fathers to realize their potential and achieve their dreams.” Throughout its program design and implementation, the Young Dads Program and its energetic staff have proven to be deserving of the 2007 Program of the Year Award.

Policymaker of the Year: Minnesota Senator Thomas M. Neville, Northfield

Senator Neville is serving in his sixth term representing his southern Minnesota district. A graduate of Michigan Tech University and the William Mitchell College of Law, Senator Neville’s special legislative concerns include crime and public safety, prisons, child support reform, courts and judicial selection, health care reform, family, cultural and life issues. He is the father of five children.

*Across Minnesota,
fathers are uplifted
by strong programs,
caring individuals,
and insightful
advocates.*

Senator Neville was nominated for this award in recognition of his multi-year efforts to overhaul Minnesota’s child support guidelines and related legislation affecting family law. In 2006, the Senator was successful in passing the first new child support guidelines in Minnesota that take into account the income of both parents: custodial and non-custodial. For mere appearances of fairness, this change was a critical step toward modernizing child support to meet the realities of today’s families. In a display of professionalism and commitment to the legislative process, Senator Neville spent countless hours studying child support guidelines from other states, surveying custodial and non-custodial parents, and talking with state officials, fatherhood program staff, and agencies serving women and children. The outcome is a bill that meets many of the needs of each set of constituents, without placing an overt emphasis on one constituency. For his tireless work to begin the process of revamping Minnesota’s child support system, Senator Thomas Neville is the 2007 Policymaker of the Year.

Father of the Year: Dwaine R. Simms, Twin Cities RISE!, Minneapolis

Through various professional roles, Dwaine has become a strong advocate and spokesman for fathering issues in Minnesota and nationally. Currently, he works as a manager at Twin Cities RISE! Recent jobs have included replication manager for MELD, national coordinator for the Father to Father Initiative, advisor to the University of Minnesota’s Children Youth and Families Consortium, and founding director of the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families.

2007 Excellence in Fatherhood Awardees

Continued from page 2.

According to Velura Peterson, a fatherhood and teen parent advocate in St. Louis County, “The light bulb went on for me back in 1995 when I realized my social service agency, providing direct services to families and children, spent little or no time trying to connect the children to their fathers. I began looking around for the resources and the people doing the work with fathers. There weren’t many, and they were scattered here and there around the state and around the country. But I found this guy: Dwaine Simms. At the time, Minnesota was referred to as the epicenter of the fathering movement in the United States. And Dwaine was one of the fathers at the center of that epicenter.”

Dwaine’s commitment to fathering is not only professional. His dedication to nurturing the relationship between fathers and their children is also reflected in his commitment to his daughter, and as such, he provides an example to all fathers. The day after receiving the Father of the Year award, Dwaine remarked that his daughter approved of the honor. It’s a commitment that is recognized within his family and within the broader community – an excellent choice for Father of the Year.

Individual of the Year: Melissa D. Froehle, Central Minnesota Legal Services / FATHER Project, Minneapolis

Melissa Froehle, a native of North Minneapolis, is the staff attorney for the legal services offered by the FATHER Project, a program of Goodwill – Easter Seals. Melissa graduated with a J.D. from New York University School of Law in 2002. At the same time, she also earned a Master’s Degree in Public Affairs from Princeton University, where she focused her studies on social policy issues affecting low-income families. Melissa conceived of the FATHER Project’s Law Program and secured funding for the first-year operation of the program through a competitive grant process while she was still in law school. Since that time, Melissa has continued to provide education, advice, and legal representation to low-income, non-custodial fathers who are participating in the FATHER Project.

Melissa is an ambitious supporter of fathers, especially low-income men and young fathers. She has voluntarily expanded her work statewide to include the development of legal educational materials specific to issues facing low-income fathers as well as seminars for legal advocates and community groups. Melissa has volunteered numerous days of her time to travel with the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network during the Fall Fatherhood Seminar Series of 2004 and 2006. Additionally, she has joined MFFN and other organizations at professional conferences, family law clinics, and other venues where she has shared details about family law and its affects on unmarried or divorced fathers. For these reasons and more, Melissa is a deserving recipient of the 2007 Individual of the Year Award.

Counting fathers

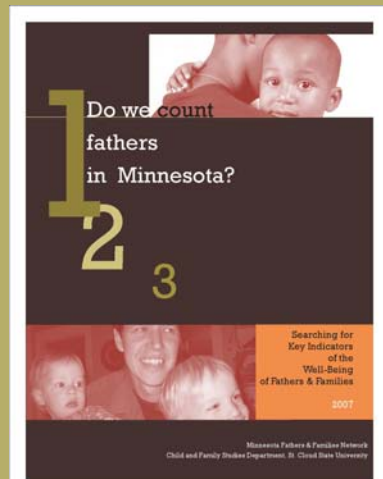
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On the other hand, the report demonstrates a void of knowledge about numerous groups of fathers. These “fathers in the shadows” are uncounted or discounted in social, educational, and legal arenas. Whether due to the fathers’ own choice – or due to societal coercion, neglect, and oversight – various groups of fathers are left uncounted.

The report includes a strong “call to action” for policymakers, social services, and the general public. Together, the recommendations point the way for helping more men to become healthy role-models for their children and to engage positively in the early childhood development of their children.

Copies of the report are available free-of-charge for members of the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network (see details, below). Other interested individuals may request copies by sending \$5.00 (for shipping and handling; checks payable to “MFFN”) to the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network. An electronic version of the report will be available later in 2007, online at www.mnfathers.org.

Have you received
your copy of this
first-ever report
about the health and
well-being of
Minnesota’s
fathers?



Members of the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network have been mailed copies of the new 80-page report, “Do we count fathers in Minnesota?” Attendees of the Minn. Fatherhood Summit received copies at the conference (if you didn’t pick up your copy, send your publication voucher to MFFN to receive a courtesy copy).

If you aren’t a member of MFFN — join now by completing the form on page 4. For just \$20.00 you’ll receive a year’s subscription to our newsletter, a copy of the new report, voting benefits, member discounts, and more! For further details, call (651) 222-7432 or visit www.mnfathers.org/members.html.

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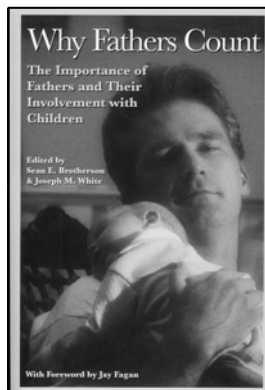
Fatherhood research roundup

Recent documents examine aspects of fatherhood

Why fathers count: The importance of fathers and their involvement with children

Continuing with the theme of “counting fathers”, Men’s Studies Press has published a new 400-page book documenting the many ways that fathers influence and impact the healthy development of children: *Why Fathers Count: The importance of fathers and their involvement with children.*

The sections of the book include family relationships, family interaction, domains of development, contexts of influence, contexts of involvement, contexts of support and “where fathers count most”. Four of the contributing authors are leaders of Minnesota’s fatherhood movement: J. Neil Tift, Glen Palm, William D. Allen, and Bryan G. Nelson.



According to Jay Fagan, “There are many reasons why this book is desperately needed. One of the most important may be that it is designed to reach a broad audience from the general public to the practitioners, from parents to policymakers, and from social service providers to academics.” Furthermore, according to editor and author Sean E. Brotherson, “It is important to understand what factors influence father-child relationships because research has shown their quality directly affects children’s well-being in a variety of areas.” Finally, Joseph H. Pleck states, “*Why Fathers Count...* makes the most comprehensive case available today for the importance of fathering.”

Why Fathers Count, published in 2007, provides a compelling compliment to MFFN’s new report, *Do we count fathers in Minnesota?* The Minnesota-specific publication covers hundreds of statistics and facts about fatherhood and provides an impetus for a stronger public policy focus on fathers. At the same time, the nationally-focused publication provides much of the context about why fathers are important for healthy development of children, families, and communities.

Why Fathers Count is available through Men’s Studies Press at www.mensstudies.com or www.WhyFathersCount.com.

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