

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

Network Notes

May 2004

Speaking of Fatherhood...Using Father-Friendly Language

- Jeffrey Jeanetta-Wark, Counseling Psychologists of Woodbury

Inclusive, gender-specific and meaningful language is important in working more effectively with others. Most of us have adopted the language of (and about) fathering from the society in which we live and work. For example, "father", "dad", "papa", "stepfather", "step-dad", "foster father", "foster dad", and "old man" are common titles. On the other hand, professional vernacular brings out language like "paternity", "biological father", "non-custodial father", even "deadbeat dad". We may interchangeably address, reference, and speak to men in the role of father with differing language. Whatever language we use, it is wise to consider that the intentional use of our language can be a door opener or a door closer in working with men in the role of the father.

Why It Is Wise to Intentionally Cater Our Language

1. Because many men in the role of the father may not be the biological parents of the children they are fathering. It is possible therefore that when they do search for fathering assistance, these men might feel more comfortable and less isolated in programs which more fully acknowledge (through language), the roles they portray in the lives of children and families.

2. Because many men in the role of the father may be geographically, emotionally and psychologically isolated from other fathers their age, and from resources that are created for them specifically. Intentional and effective use of our language can help make it easier for these men to find programs that could assist them in strengthening healthy involvement in the lives of children and families.

Continued on page 3, "Language"

Locate 100 Programs that Serve Minnesota Fathers

Minnesota, once known as the "epicenter of fatherhood" has a strong tradition of social services programs that are geared toward fathers. Now, finding these programs is easier than ever thanks to an online database maintained by the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network.

The "Fathers Services Directory" lists nearly 100 programs in every region of the state that aim to meet the diverse needs of fathers. Some of the programs are limited to specific classes offered on nights or weekends through local schools or community centers. Others are comprehensive organizations that aim to meet a broad array of needs from parenting to family law to employment development.

The searchable database is divided by region. So, whether you're in Bemidji, Rochester, Cloquet, Marshall or anywhere in between, you can find the programs nearest to you. If you know of a program that isn't listed, please be sure to let us know.

The online database can be found at www.mnfathers.org. Click on the link, "Services for Fathers." If you do not have internet access, you may request a hard copy of the list by contacting MFFN (see sidebar for contact information). ❖

Minnesota Fatherhood Summit

SAVE THE DATE

Thursday, January 20, 2005

8:00am—4:00pm

St. Cloud Civic Center

Pre-conference training and
networking will take place 2:00pm—
8:30pm on Wed., January 19, 2005.

Details coming soon!

What Happens to Children When a Parent is Arrested?

One in five children of incarcerated mothers witnessed their mother's arrest. Those who don't witness the arrest will reconstruct it in their minds. Either way, it's traumatizing. And we have few policies or protocols in place to ensure that children's needs are met. Law enforcement officers pay little attention to the needs of the arrestee's children, and arrested mothers get little assistance in making temporary arrangements for their children or planning for their children's long-term care. Research shows that children who experience a parent's incarceration – and all of the behaviors and disruptions associated with the criminal activity – are at increased risk for poor academic treatment, truancy, dropping out of school, gang involvement, early pregnancy, drug abuse, and delinquency.
www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/whathappens.htm

After-School Programs Reduce Teen Pregnancy

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and Child Trends recently released a new publication, *A Good Time: After-School Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*. The document provides detailed descriptions of after-school programs that have been shown through careful research to have a positive impact on adolescent sexual behavior. In addition to providing results from program evaluations, *A Good Time* contains practical information on the costs and availability of program curriculum and lengthy descriptions of what is covered in each curriculum.

This resource, developed as part of an effort funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention titled Putting What Works to Work, joins the expanding base of program evaluation literature from which communities can draw in making their decisions about what programs they might consider using. Copies are available online at www.teenpregnancy.org/works/pdf/goodtime.pdf.

Creating a Father-Friendly Organization Assessing Your Readiness to Serve Dads

-John Titcomb, Otter Tail-Wadena CAC Head Start

When creating a father-friendly organization, it is important to consider the physical environment such as the positive portrayals of men and children in photos, posters, and promotional material and office décor and furniture that create a comfortable setting for men. However, if your organization doesn't have staff or management support and if policies and procedures aren't in place to be uniformly inclusive of fathers and father figures, the work you've done on the physical environment will be lost.

Internally, it is important to consider your staff's preparation to provide services to fathers and father figures and their ability to communicate and interact with them. Externally, it is vital to assess how your organization is viewed in the community with respect to working with fathers and father figures.

Many organizations create assessment teams to begin the process of integrating fathers into the programs. A balanced assessment team will include at least one decision maker, staff at various levels, and mothers, fathers and father figures currently in the program. Fathers need to be surveyed periodically to determine their needs, concerns and interests to make sure the program is meeting the needs of the fathers and father figures, especially if there is high turnover of parents each year as in early childhood programs.

Program staff must be cognizant to not inadvertently prompt a "gender war" in promoting father-friendliness. Staff will want to create a program that is father-friendly while maintaining any attributes that help to make it mother-friendly, as well. The end product of involving fathers is not to have a male dominated organization but to strengthen the family, organization and community by having responsibly involved fathers.

Sometimes, fathers just need a supportive person to invite them into a program. Similarly, staff may just need a supportive co-worker to explain why it's important to serve fathers. Verbal and written encouragement has been documented to boost the confidence of children. This same encouragement can do wonders for the confidence of parents and staff. ❖

Compassion Capital Fund Mini Grants Money Available for Marriage Promotion, At-Risk Youth, Homelessness, Rural Community Services

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Office of Community Services (OCS) has announced the availability of grants, up to \$50,000 each for non-profit and faith-based organizations. OCS will award funds to organizations that address the needs of either at-risk youth; the homeless; or provide marriage education and preparation services to help couples who choose marriage for themselves develop the skills and knowledge to form and sustain healthy marriages; or provide social services to those living in rural communities. Approximately 100 awards, selected on a competitive basis, will be for a 12-month budget period. The closing date for submissions is May 19. The announcement can be found at: www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/grants_ocs.html.

The Administration for Children and Families also maintains a website dedicated to the topic of healthy marriages. The webpage offers links to information about the federal government's involvement in marriage and premarital education, faith-based education, African American healthy marriage, approaches for strengthening healthy marriages, and more. www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/region5/htm_pages/healthy_marriage.htm ❖

Calendar for Fatherhood Professionals

Thur. - Fri. May 6 - 7, MOAPPP Annual Conference (MN Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting) "Building Hope: Building Lives" Earle Brown Heritage Center, Brooklyn Center www.moapp.org.

Thursday, May 6, 2:00 – 4:00 pm Dads Plan Team Meeting - Teen Parent Connection. Help plan a coordinated system for serving the fathers of children born to teen mothers in Hennepin County. Location Park & Recreation Bd., 2117 W. River Rd, Minneapolis. Call (612) 787-4091 or pmasiarchin@mnfathers.org.

Fri., May 7, 9:00 am, Professionals Who Work With Men - Networking Breakfast. Elsie's Restaurant, 721 Marshall St. NE, Minneapolis. This informal group generally meets every first Friday to discuss fatherhood and men's services. Open to the public; no RSVP necessary. Directions, call Elsie's (612) 378-9702.

Friday, May 14, 2004, 9:00 – 3:00 pm Fathers' Adoption Registry: "Integrating Policy with Practice" One day conference sponsored by the Minn. Dept. of Health. Snelling Office Park, St. Paul. RSVP: Helen Bassett, (612) 676-5466 or helen.bassett@state.mn.us.

Thursday, May 27, 2:00 – 4:00 pm Dads Plan Team Meeting - Hennepin County Teen Parent Connection
Location: Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board. Details: See above.

Fri., June 4, 9:00 am, Professionals Who Work With Men - Networking Breakfast. Elsie's, Minneapolis. Details: See above.

Monday, June 7, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm MFFN Quarterly Board Meeting
Brainerd, MN. Call (612) 787-4091 or pmasiarchin@mnfathers.org.

Wed. - Thur., June 9-10, Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) Annual Conference. St. Cloud Civic Center. Contact Kim Todd, (651) 282-5182 or kim.todd@state.mn.us.

Sat., August 14, Festival for Fathers and Families. North Commons Park, Mpls. 14th annual festival offers free food and family entertainment. Attendees can browse the exhibits of organizations that provide services to fathers and families.

"Language" continued from page 1.

3. With language that attracts father-figures to services, the possibility exists for them to feel part of the team, to develop a sense of pride and trust that they will benefit from group experience, from individualized efforts, and community involvement.

Inclusive language needs to be part of each programmatic step we take. For example, the words we choose on the promotional flyers sent into the community should be "father-friendly". We can talk about the importance of father-figures in the lives of their children.* We can give some interesting statistics about the capacity that men have to nurture and effectively raise children, or about the number of father-figures who are sole providers of their children in our state or community. We can enhance the wording with photos of father-figures caring for children, and can describe these men in their roles of raising children.

We can send the message visually that we have an environment that encourages healthy father-figure involvement in the lives of children throughout the life span. We can include in our publicity and in program materials the images of fathers from differing ethnic backgrounds and of various ages.

Gender Specific Language includes words and phrasing that cater to a more typical male thinking process. Often, words like "support", "help", and "need" send a message that may not fit with male identity. Typically, males don't like to think they need anything from anyone, and needing help or support may cause them to feel vulnerable or threaten their sense of masculinity. Instead, we can choose words like "enable", "manage", "become", "accomplish", "resources", "opportunities", "strengths", "skills", "capacities."

Meaningful Language to a father-figure can be words and actions that reinforce the concept that his children need him and that he can be a caring and present father-figure to his children. No one parent knows it all and there is no parent user's manual that comes with children. The learning process never stops, yet each man brings his own personal gifts to parenting. It is wise to remind the father-figures of their unique gifts, their personal assets and their capacities (instead of their deficits). We can encourage from wherever they are in the parenting process. We can remind them and highlight their capacity to be the nurturing father-figures their children need. Gradually, their skills will rise to meet their own needs and those of their children.

Person-First Language is another strategy for using language well. It is mindfully using language with respect for all people while focusing on their abilities, not their limitations. The idea is that we focus on the person instead of the challenge they have. For example, instead of saying "He is learning disabled", we would say "He is a person with a learning disability". Instead of saying "He is an HIV / AIDS victim", we would say "He is a person living with HIV / AIDS." Other examples are the following: instead of saying "She is a welfare mom", we would say "She is a woman who receives welfare support."

Person-First Language allows people to have their dignity during challenging times and it reminds us that people are not "cases"; they are people with whom we are collaborating for the sake of change. They are people before they are the problems which impact their lives.

Using inclusive, gender-specific, and person-first language with father-figures is a way that we show intentional and compassionate action for those we wish to assist. Through these actions we stand a better chance of attracting, engaging and empowering father-figures to use resources that can ultimately enhance their connections to children and families. ♦

Jeffry Jeanetta-Wark, M.A., LICSW is a clinical social worker / psychotherapist in private practice. He combines effective clinical work for individuals and families, with community-based education through presentations, trainings and workshops. Jeffry is a national presenter, a curriculum trainer and an advocate related to fathers and families. He and his wife, Wendy, are the proud parents of two young boys, Niccolo and Angelo. (Jeanetta-Wark (C) Copyrighted Material 2004.)

* For specific facts about the importance of fathers, see MFFN's "InfoSheet: Positive Father Involvement", at www.mnfathers.org/resources.html.

MFFN Board of Directors

MFFN 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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"Building Quality Programs for Minnesota's Fathers."

Now Available: Fatherhood Public Policy Documents

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) has released a number of documents in 2004 related to fatherhood public policy. To view these documents online, visit www.clasp.org and click on "Child Support and Low Income Fathers".

No Minor Matter: Developing a Coherent Policy on Paternity Establishment for Children Born to Underage Parents by Paula Roberts. For the roughly 150,000 babies born each year to unwed minors, paternity establishment is a complicated issue. Paternity establishment provides children with crucial financial and emotional support and access to larger extended families. At the same time, it can cause problems for minor parents: immature youngsters might enter an ill-advised marriage; a young man might sign an acknowledgment for a child who is not his genetic offspring; or a young woman who is a victim of incest or statutory rape might be better off if paternity is not established. The potential rights, limitations, and obligations of the minor parents, their babies, and the grandparents all need to be considered in developing thoughtful approaches to this issue. This policy brief (which is based on a longer report) offers recommendations to states for developing consistent laws and policies to address paternity establishment among minor parents. Mar 2004

Child Support, Fatherhood, and Marriage Provisions in Welfare Reauthorization Bills. These documents summarize provisions in recent Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) reauthorization legislation. Titles include, "Child Support Provisions in TANF Reauthorization Bills", "Child Support Assignment and Distribution Provisions in TANF Reauthorization Bills", "Fatherhood and Marriage Funding Provisions in TANF Reauthorization Bills" and "Marriage-Related Provisions in Welfare Reauthorization Proposals: A Summary" Feb. and March 2004

State Policy Regarding Pass-Through and Disregard of Current Month's Child Support Collected for Families Receiving TANF-funded Cash Assistance by Paula Roberts and Michelle Jordan. This chart lists all 50 states' and the District of Columbia's child support pass-through and income disregard policies as of December 2003. Feb 2004

Joint Child Custody Bill Introduced in Minn. House

Child custody presumption in favor of joint physical custody provided

On March 10, bill H.F. 2893, was introduced in the Minnesota House of Representatives. This bill, providing a presumption in favor of joint physical custody, was introduced by 6 DFL legislators including Tim Mahoney, Matt Entenza, Michael Nelson, Anthony Sertich, Tom Rukavina, and Loren Solberg. There is no equivalent bill in the Senate at this point. Track this bill's progress by typing "2893" on this internet page: www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/legis.asp.

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.

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