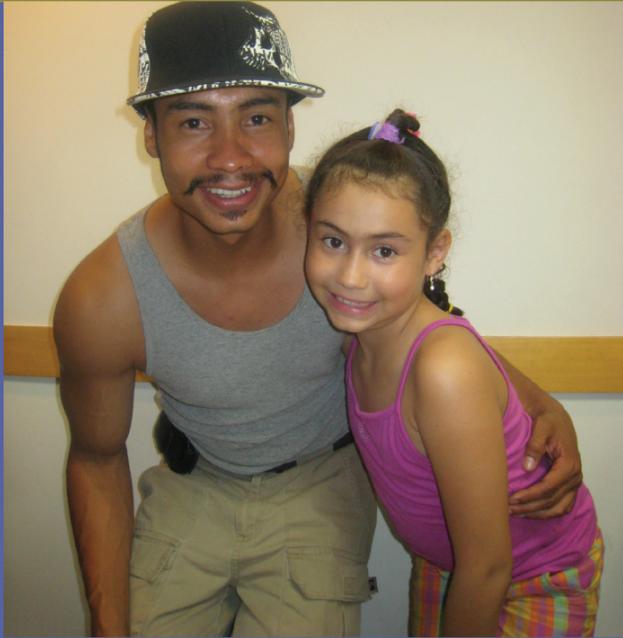


Sector Analysis **Linking Fathers**

Father Involvement in Early Childhood Programs



**“I want my involvement to positively affect the choices my child makes in her future and in the lives of others around her.”**

**— Father**



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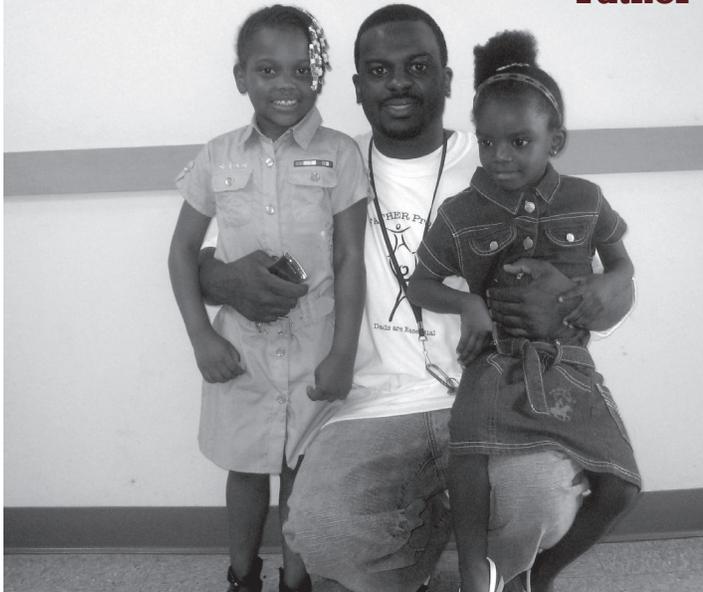


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**“Being involved in my children’s lives impacts BOTH my children’s development and my own.”**

**—Father**



**Early Childhood Programs** — for this project early childhood programs are those educational and child care programs that serve children birth through age five

**Father-Friendly** — physical space, communications and activities that help make fathers welcome and more comfortable in early childhood settings

**“Healthy father involvement is missing in many children’s lives, but when present has many positive benefits for children, families, and communities.”**

**—Professional**

# 1. Introduction

**Early childhood is a critical time for the healthy development of children.** Between the ages of 2 and 7, the human brain grows to 70-90% of its adult size. The quality of nurturing and education which occurs during this early childhood period significantly impacts not only a child's individual capacities, but the child's ability to ultimately contribute to a healthy community.

**The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network** is a statewide network of parents, family practitioners, and family advocates that believes fathers are important and are often an under-utilized asset for the healthy development of children. The research base to support this truth has grown exponentially in the past decade. At the same time, our communities are experiencing an increased level of father-child involvement. Despite this increase there remain many fathers still disengaged from their families for a variety of reasons. Active father involvement is not something today's fathers often had modeled for them in their upbringing. This is especially pronounced in the early childhood years where the preponderance of adult role models are women. This still seems to suggest to men that our society, to some degree, still values maternal nurturing over paternal nurturing, which leaves the father's role in early childhood rather ill-defined. Fathers therefore have less opportunity to learn and practice how to nurture young children and support their learning. Strong father-child relationships are further complicated for fathers who are divorced, separated, never-married, incarcerated, deployed, live a long-distance away, struggling economically, or experiencing a variety of other barriers.

**In this publication, we take a look at families who have been engaged with some form of early childhood education or service in Minnesota.** We cast a broad net here including organized programs such as Early Childhood Family Education and Head Start along with less structured preschool and in-home day care services. By focusing broadly, we assume we will include a wider variety of fathers and their families. Given the pervasiveness of early childhood education and services to families, learning about what is working for dads and what is not working for them will help us understand to continually improve support of fathers and their families. We are interested in what is, as well as what isn't, working for dads and what kinds of barriers fathers now face.

**We also offer some success stories and strategies about early childhood programs found to be highly effective to involve dads.** It is our hope that these stories and strategies can provide motivation for more agencies to involve fathers in productive ways.

This document has been published by the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network. Many thanks to Tom Fitzpatrick, project director and author, for his commitment to finding good news from across Minnesota. Thanks to the McKnight Foundation for funding this project. And thanks to our advisory committee (listed on inside cover) who helped to frame the document, disseminate the survey, and provide key insights into the early childhood services in Minnesota.

Sincerely,



Michael Jerpbak  
Board President

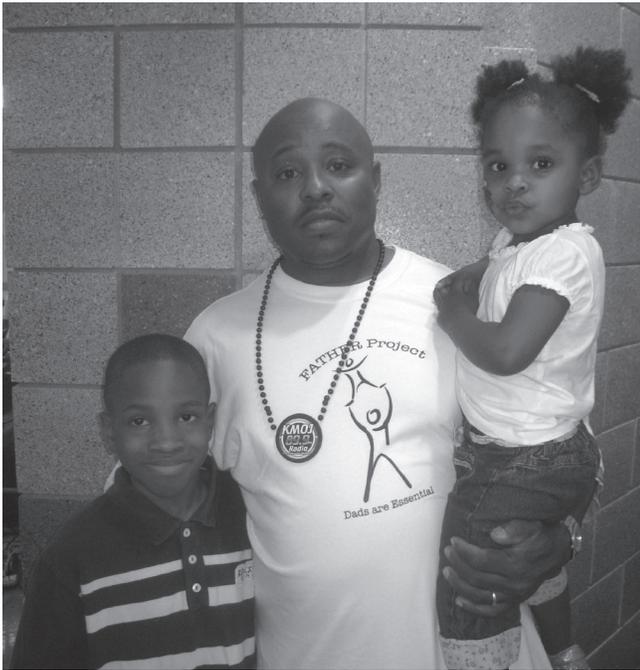


Bob Gustafson  
Executive Director

## 2. Why Fathers Matter

Fathers are more involved than ever before in all aspects of parenting. Yet their involvement is often different from the way mothers are involved — and those differences are very important. In the past, dads were mostly concerned with family safety and financial security. But with each generation the roles of dads have expanded, and research has confirmed that fathers matter a great deal.

### Father Involvement



The evidence is clear that a healthy father-child relationship can produce positive benefits for every member of the family within a variety of family structures.

“Research has shown that fathers, no matter what their income or cultural background, can play a critical role in their children’s education. When fathers are involved, their children learn more, perform better in school, and exhibit healthier behavior. Even when fathers do not share a home with their children, their active involvement can have a lasting and positive impact.”<sup>1</sup>

Research also demonstrates a wide variety of benefits to children, fathers (and father figures), mothers, and communities, including the following:

- Young children with involved fathers display enhanced social skills:<sup>2</sup>
  - » Greater empathy;

- » Higher self-esteem;
- » More self-control and less impulsive behavior.
- Children who grow up with involved fathers demonstrate important problem solving abilities:
  - » Increased curiosity;
  - » Greater tolerance for stress and frustration;
  - » More willingness to try new things.
- Father involvement increases cognitive capabilities for young children:
  - » Higher verbal skills;
  - » Higher scores on assessments of cognitive competence;
  - » Son’s IQ is related to father’s nurturing.
- Men (fathers and father figures) can learn from their children in a number of different areas:<sup>3,4</sup>
  - » Expanded ability for caring and nurturance;
  - » Better understanding of sexism and its impact on children;
  - » Deepened emotions and emotional intensity.
- Negative behaviors decrease among involved fathers:
  - » Less than average contact with the criminal justice system;
  - » Less substance abuse;
  - » Fewer accidental and premature deaths.
- Communities benefit when fathers become more involved with their children. Men who are involved in their children’s lives are more likely to:
  - » Participate in the community;
  - » Serve in civic or community leadership positions;
  - » Attend church more often.
- Mothers benefit in a variety of ways:<sup>5</sup>
  - » Child-mother attachment is more secure when child-father attachment is secure;
  - » Positive mother-child relationships are linked with positive father-child relationships;
  - » Whether or not the parents live together, positive mother-child relationships are linked with positive father-child relationships.

### Sources

<sup>1</sup> US Department of Education, “A Call to Commitment: Father’s Involvement in Children’s Learning.” June 2000

<sup>2</sup> Kyle Pruett, “Fatherhood: Why father care is as essential as mother care for your child,” New York: Free Press, 2000

<sup>3</sup> “The Effects of Father Involvement: A Summary of the Research Evidence,” Father Involvement Initiative Ontario Network, Fall 2002 newsletter

<sup>4</sup> Glen Palm, “Involved Fatherhood: A Second Chance,” Journal of Men’s Studies, November 1993

<sup>5</sup> Adrienne Burgess, Keynote presentation at 4th annual Minnesota Fatherhood Summit, January 2007, St. Cloud, MN

## Father Involvement in Early Childhood Programs

Father involvement in early childhood programs has increased over the last 10-15 years. While there are clear benefits to the involvement of fathers in children's lives, many barriers that prevent their involvement remain. Some of the possible barriers to father involvement in children's education, care and support include the following:<sup>1</sup>

- The attitudes and personal beliefs toward father involvement of mothers, teachers, caretakers, and child care/education program staff and others involved in the child's life who may be considered gateways to father involvement.
- Family and/or cultural beliefs concerning male involvement.
- Societal expectations and views of male involvement in children's lives related to their care and support.
- The fathers' educational level and/or irregular work schedules.
- The fathers' lack of knowledge about child development, parenting, and/or how to become an involved father.

A research brief<sup>2</sup> reported that "early care providers should realize that a father's willingness and comfort when caring for his child on a day-to-day basis can depend in part on the level of encouragement that he receives from his spouse, as well as from other relatives, medical personnel, and the child's teachers."

Another research brief<sup>3</sup> had two interesting findings:

1. "...the biggest barrier to involving fathers in programming is fathers' work schedules, followed by fathers not living with mothers and children, lack of male staff to whom fathers could relate, and disagreements between fathers and mothers."
2. "...steps to engaging fathers in early childhood programming include: creating a culture of inclusion with father friendly environments; assessing needs and motivations to cultivate fathers' buy-in; and providing diverse opportunities for engagement at many levels – individual, family, program, and community."

In a study<sup>4</sup> on staff efforts that lead to greater father involvement, communicating directly with fathers yielded positive results. Sending correspondence to fathers even if they live apart from their children was one of the strongest predictors of father involvement as perceived by early

childhood educators in this study. An important factor in the communications with fathers was leaving a space on the enrollment form for the early childhood program for the father's name, address and telephone numbers.

Inviting fathers to early childhood programs to participate in educational activities can also serve a number of purposes. When fathers are regularly invited to their children's educational activities, it encourages them to be involved, lets them know that their participation is not only welcome but expected, has the potential to strengthen the educational experiences of children, and forges a stronger relationship between the family and school spheres.

When fathers do visit early childhood programs, they can see that the settings are child-centered.<sup>5</sup> There is child-sized furniture and a variety of play and educational materials arranged into different interest areas. While most early childhood spaces include some areas or materials that may be more familiar to fathers they often reflect a feminine perspective in how they are decorated, equipped and arranged. Early childhood programs need to assess their physical space to ensure it is father friendly.

Research on father involvement in early childhood programs emphasizes the importance of men in their children's lives and the benefits to both children and fathers. It also begins to describe some of the factors that support or discourage father involvement in early childhood programs. The practice literature focuses on how professionals can successfully recruit and engage fathers in different programs and community contexts. Both sources of information provide useful strategies for practitioners who are seeking ways to increase father involvement in their programs.

### Sources

<sup>1</sup> US Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, "Father Involvement in Children's Education, Care, and Support", updated December 2010

<sup>2</sup> Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, "Fathers and Father-Figures: Their Important Role in Children's Social and Emotional Development", a What Works brief, November 2006

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Kaye, "Father Involvement", a Research to Practice Brief, for the Child Welfare League of America, January/February 2005

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Green, "Reaching Out to Fathers: An Examination of Staff Efforts That Lead to Greater Father Involvement in Early Childhood Programs", Early Childhood Research & Practice, 2003

<sup>5</sup> Glen Palm & Jay Fagan, "Father involvement in early childhood programs: review of the literature", Early Childhood Development and Care, October-December 2008

### 3. Data from Surveys / A. Background and Demographics

Two surveys were developed by the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network (MFFN) to collect data on father involvement in early childhood programs in Minnesota. One survey was geared for professionals working in the area of early childhood, and that survey was only available online through Survey Monkey. Information about the survey was distributed to all MFFN contacts in Minnesota. In addition, a number of early childhood programs were contacted by advisory committee members. Those completing this survey included administrators, program directors, teachers, college professors, parent educators, librarians, home visitors, and a number of other staff positions from early childhood programs across the state of Minnesota.

children in early childhood programs, and that survey was available both online through Survey Monkey and in hard (paper) copy. Early childhood programs in Minnesota were contacted by MFFN and were encouraged to distribute the surveys to fathers in their programs.

The two surveys asked similar questions. The surveys were made available from March 22, 2011 through April 30, 2011. There were 252 responses to the survey for professionals, and 359 responses to the survey for fathers. Survey responses were received from professionals working in or fathers living in 77 of Minnesota's 87 counties. Responses came from the following types of early childhood programs:

The second survey sought feedback from fathers with

\*\*\*\*\*

#### From survey for professionals

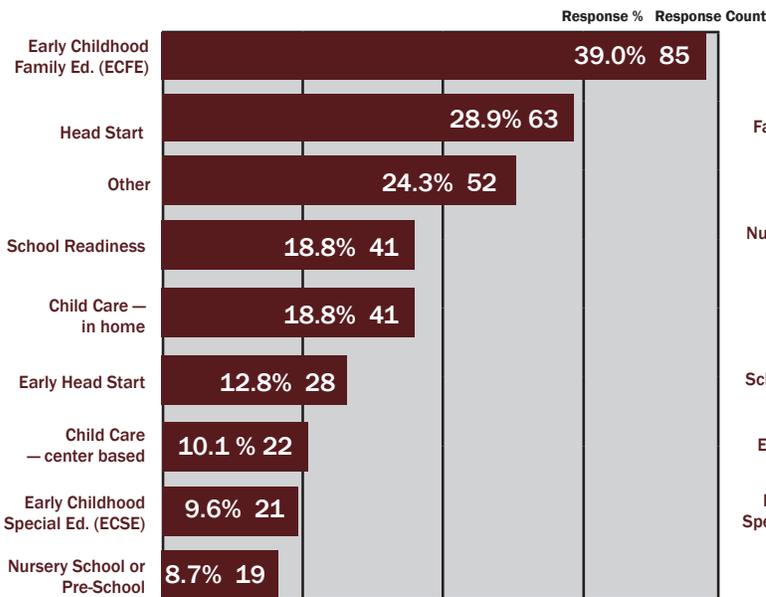
#### TYPES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS:

What type of early childhood program(s) do you represent? (check all that apply)

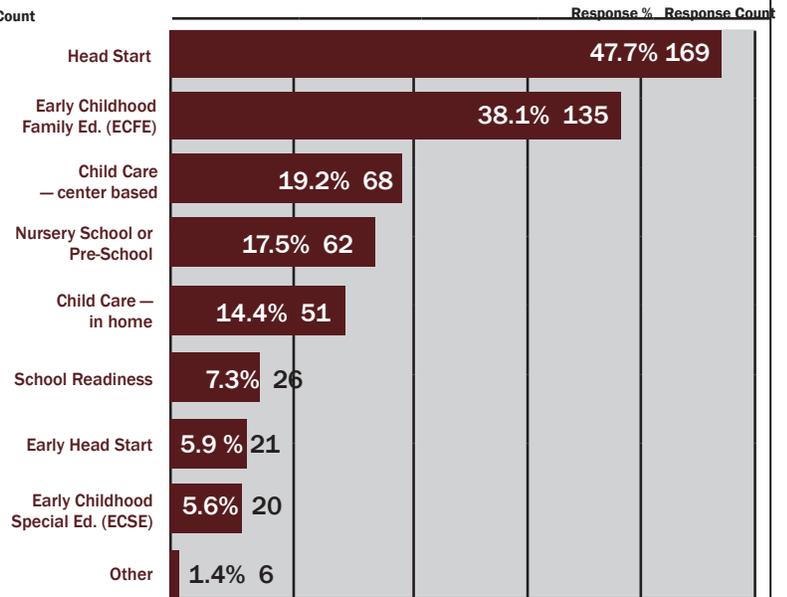
#### From survey for fathers

#### TYPES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS: What

type of early childhood program(s) have you and your children been involved with? (check all that apply)



Answered question: 218, skipped question34



Answered question: 354, skipped question5

#### Some notes from the above survey responses:

- The highest number of respondents from the survey for professionals came from Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) programs.
- The highest number of survey respondents from fathers came from Head Start programs. This could be due to more Head Start programs making paper copies of the survey available to the fathers in their programs, encouraging them to complete the surveys, and mailing completed surveys to MFFN.

- The number of fathers who completed the survey online was 145, while the number of fathers who completed paper copies was 214. The majority of the paper copies were from Head Start and ECFE.
- The third highest response in the survey from professionals was "Other" and the types of other programs listed in their responses included child protection, child support, family literacy, public health, early childhood coalition, home visiting, advocacy, extension, crisis nursery, and mental health.

## B. Importance of Father Involvement

Another survey question dealt with the importance of father involvement. The question on the survey for professionals asked **“How important is it to have fathers involved in your program?”** and 91.6% (230) felt it was very important; 8.0% (20) felt it was somewhat important; while 0.4 % (1) felt it was not important. The question on the survey for fathers asked **“How important is it for fathers to be involved in the lives of their children?”** and 98.6% (351) felt it was **very important**; and 1.4% (5) felt it was somewhat important.

The second part of this question asked: **Why? Please share your thoughts.**

The following are some comments from professionals broken down into three topic areas:



**If the father is engaged in the family and parents share common child rearing principles, the child will be more balanced and ready for school and life challenges.**

**—Professional**

### **Importance of fathers to children/impact on children**

- Research shows children do better in school and life when there's positive father/male involvement.
- Healthy father involvement is missing in many children's lives, but when present has many positive benefits for children, families, and communities.
- Children benefit by having both parents involved. More dads involved in Parent Education enrich all involved--dads, moms, teachers, and kids!
- Fathers are an integral part of children's lives and should be included as much as possible in every aspect of the child's care.
- Healthy male role models are vital to children's healthy development.

### **Fathers as important family members**

- The family unit is important. If the father is engaged in the family and parents share common child rearing principles, the child will be more balanced and ready for school and life challenges.
- Fathers are a core part of a family. Their voice, presence, and viewpoints are vital to success of families.
- Fathers need to hear that parents are their child's first teachers.

### **The importance of gender equality between mothers and fathers**

- Fathers are often forgotten in the role of parenting. Everything tends to focus on the mothers role. Fathers can make a huge positive impact when they are actively involved in their child's life.
- Because dads are the other half of the child's history and makeup. They are also important because children receive care from their dads that they can't necessarily get from their moms; both parents are extremely important. Dads are important also because they help with the building blocks for children's relationships with male figures as they grow.
- Because fathers are just as capable for caring for children's needs as mothers are. It also helps improve the child's self-esteem, which is an invaluable asset to the child.

The following are some comments from fathers broken down into three topic areas:

### **Positive impacts of fathers on children**

- Kids need their dads.
- Children with a good father figure have less identity problems and do better in life.
- It's important to learn how to be a father, so the child learns to trust the father and so society learns that fathers are necessary.
- I think an actively engaged father can lead to higher self-esteem in children, more discipline, speed intellectual development, and most of all, a better sense of family which can lead to more confidence and success in knowing that support is always there.
- Fathers play an important role in all areas of development of their children. It doesn't matter if you are an involved father or an absent father; you have a significant impact on your child. The more involved in actively raising and educating fathers are, the better chance that their children will get a good education, resist peer pressure, stay away from drugs and will seek more positive role models to follow when their father is not available.
- In short, being involved in my children's' lives impacts BOTH my children's' development and my own.

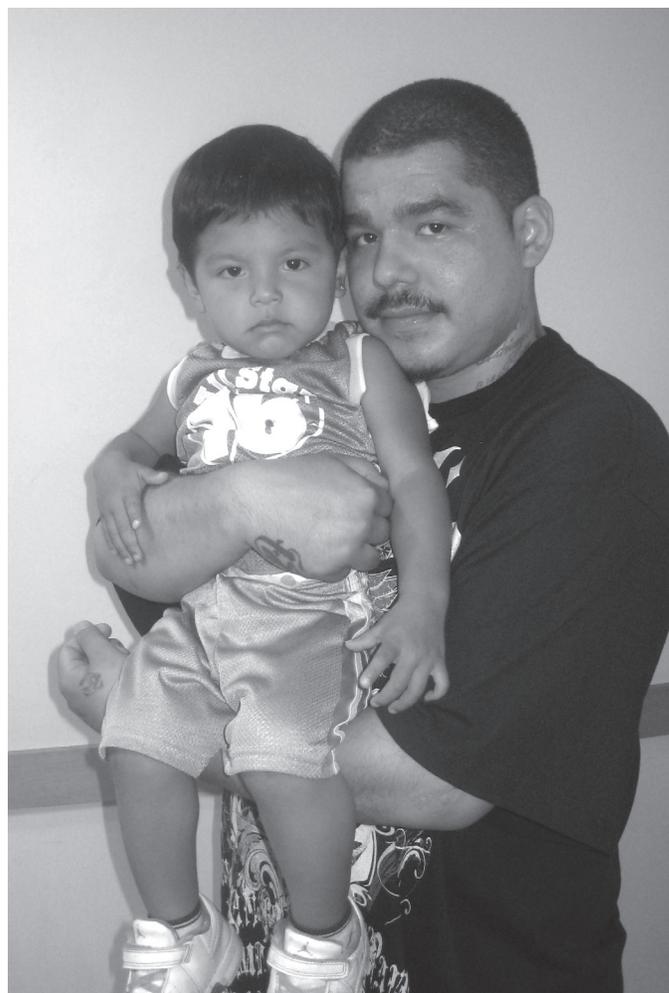
### **Gender equality**

- A child needs a father as much as a child needs a mother.
- Having a male role model around provides an equal part in raising a well adjusted child.
- Fathers set a good example of strength and devotion — kids need a father not just a mother, good things to learn from both parents.
- It is as important for fathers to be involved in their children's lives as for mothers to be, and for the same reasons. It's an unfortunate legacy that we even have to ask this question.
- Children need their fathers because 1/2 of their life force comes from their dad. They need a father to get the strength to have a good life.

### **Men who missed having the father they want to be and are trying to make up for this with their child**

- Everyone needs a father in their lives. I should know because mine wasn't in mine.

- I know and want my involvement to positively effect the choices my child makes in her future and in the lives of others around her.
- When I was a child my father didn't play an active role in parenting. I want to be there for my children and to give them the love and attention that I missed out on as a child.



**“When I was a child my father didn't play an active role in parenting. I want to be there for my children and to give them the love and attention that I missed out on as a child.”**

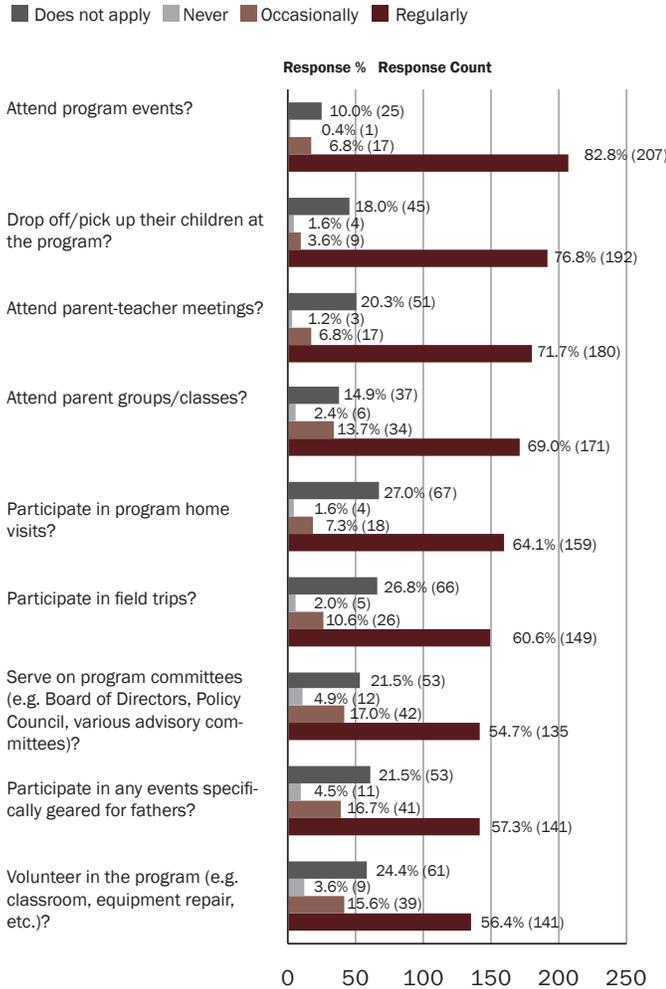
**—Father**

# C. Father Involvement Activities

The next two survey questions relate to father involvement activities in early childhood programs.

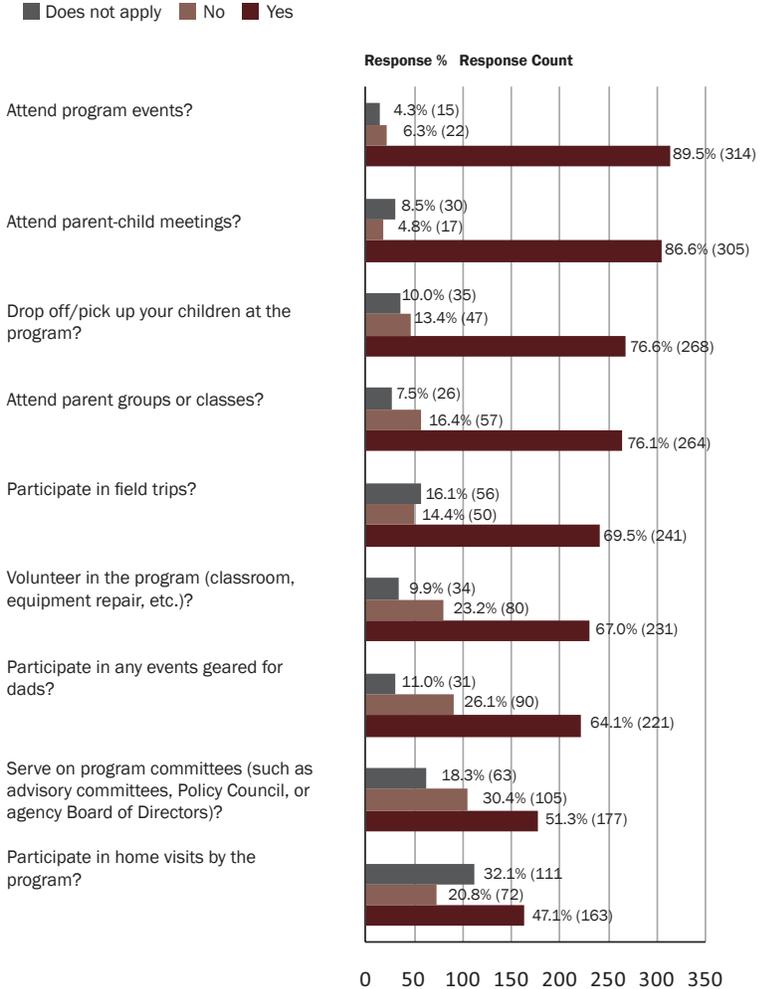
## From survey for professionals

**FATHER INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES: Does your early childhood program invite fathers to:**  
 answered question 252  
 skipped question 0



## From survey for fathers

**FATHER INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES: Does your early childhood program invite you to:**  
 answered question 354  
 skipped question 0



### Some notes from the above survey responses:

- In six of the nine choices, fathers reported being invited to participate at a slightly higher level than the early childhood programs reported regularly inviting the fathers.
- Of the three choices where fathers reported lower levels of invitation, the one that was clearly different was: “participate in home visits by the program”. There are a number of programs that don’t offer home visits (27%) and even more fathers (32%) reported that this was not an option. Early Childhood programs may want to examine how to include fathers in this

- option when it is one of the program options.
- Percentages in the above choices were well under 100% largely due to not being applicable to some specific programs, as noted in the large numbers of “does not apply” responses. However, early childhood programs may want to reflect on why there were a number of “never” responses on the survey for professionals along with “no” responses on the survey for fathers. Are there valid reasons why early childhood programs “never” invite fathers for certain activities and why fathers report not being invited to participate in certain activities?

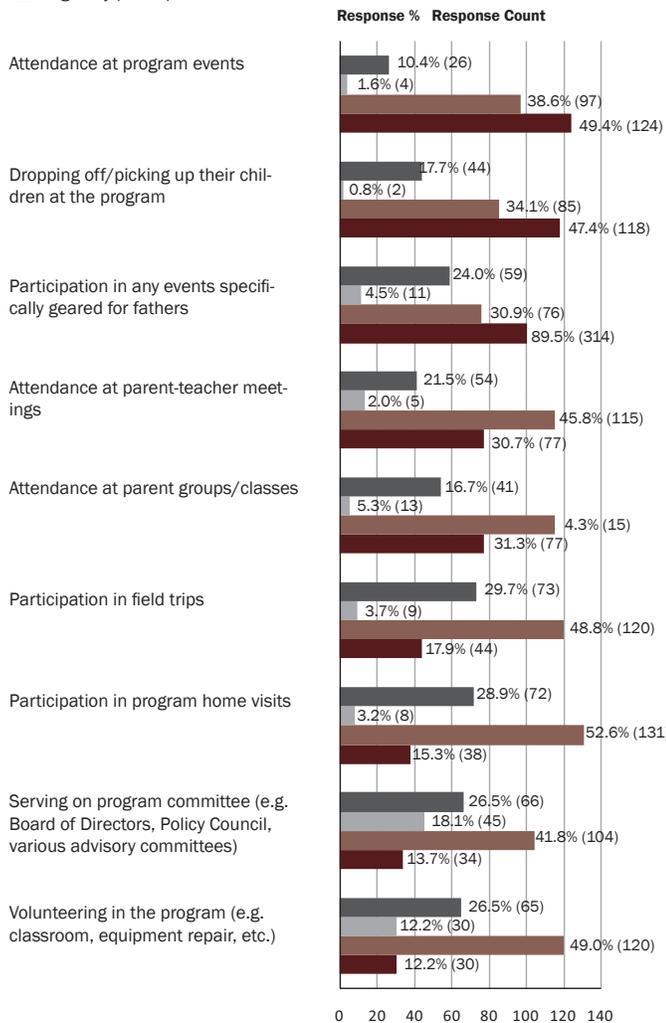
**From survey for professionals**

**LEVEL OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT: What is the level of father involvement in various parent activities in your program?**

answered question 244

skipped question 1

Does not apply Does not participate Occasionally participates Regularly participates



**From survey for fathers**

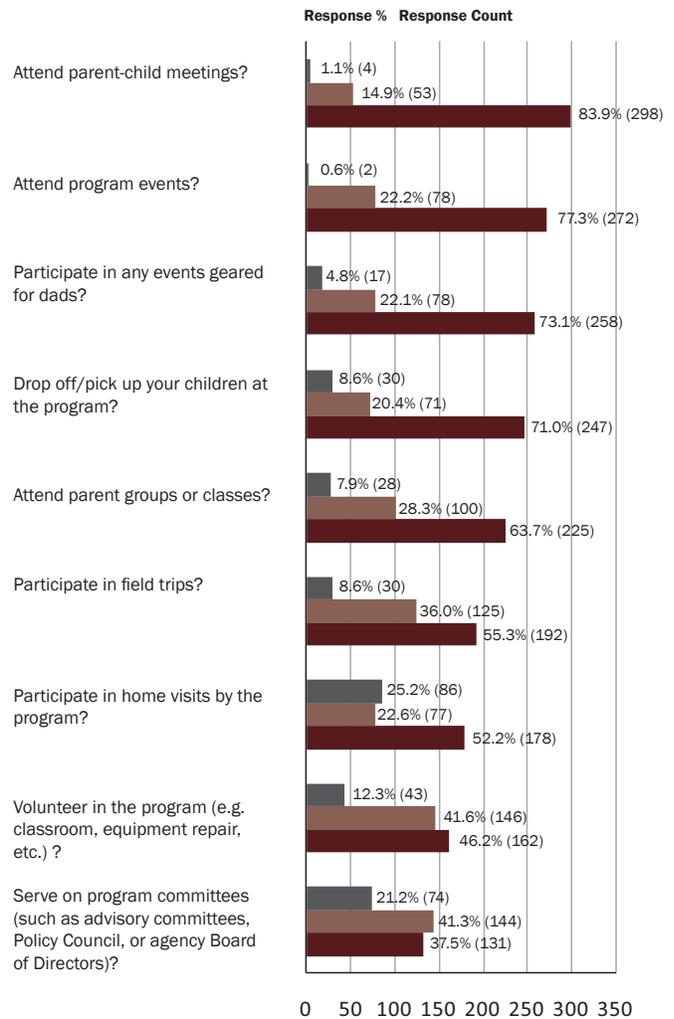
**IMPORTANCE OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES:**

**How important is it for you to: (Fathers)**

answered question 356

skipped question 3

Not important Somewhat important Very important



**Some notes from the above survey responses:**

- Since these two questions are the only questions substantially different in the two surveys, comparisons of data should not be made.
- Early childhood programs report a higher level of involvement for fathers attending program events and events geared for dads than attending parent groups or classes. This could be supported by a large number of comments from fathers throughout the survey who indicated a higher comfort level in attending fun parent/child activities.
- Fathers listed attending parent-child meetings as very important more than any other option (83.9%), but early childhood programs report that only 30.7% of fathers regularly attend parent-teacher meetings, while 45.8% occasionally participate. Many fathers and early childhood programs indicated time conflicts were a factor in fathers' inability to attend meetings and other activities.
- Fathers believe it is very important and somewhat important to drop off/pick up their child at the program.

# D. Program Challenges/Barriers

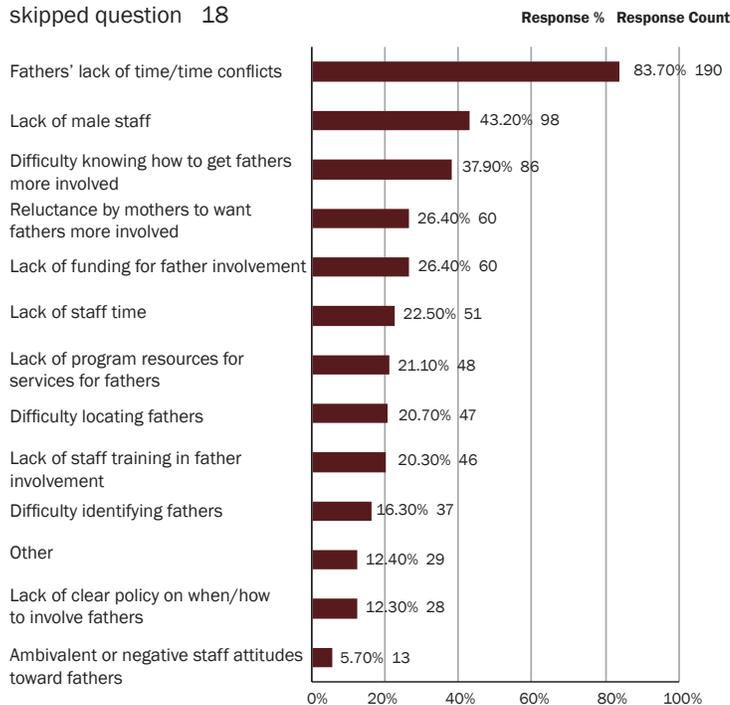
The next question asked both professionals and fathers about challenges/barriers for early childhood programs in involving fathers.

## From survey for professionals

**PROGRAM CHALLENGES:** Please identify the challenges/barriers that limit early childhood programs in their work to involve fathers (check all that apply).

answered question 227

skipped question 18



Some examples of comments listed under "Other":

- Father's lack of knowledge about the importance of father involvement.
- Many fathers are uncomfortable if they are the only man in the group.
- Image in the community or among their peers that parenting classes are for women.
- Lack of pictures and other symbols of fathers' presence, lack of active invitations for fathers, lack of staff knowledge regarding culture of fatherhood, lack of recognition when fathers do come.
- There is a lack of intentionality toward father involvement, thus the default mother responsibility for children seems to be most prevalent.

## Some notes from the above survey responses:

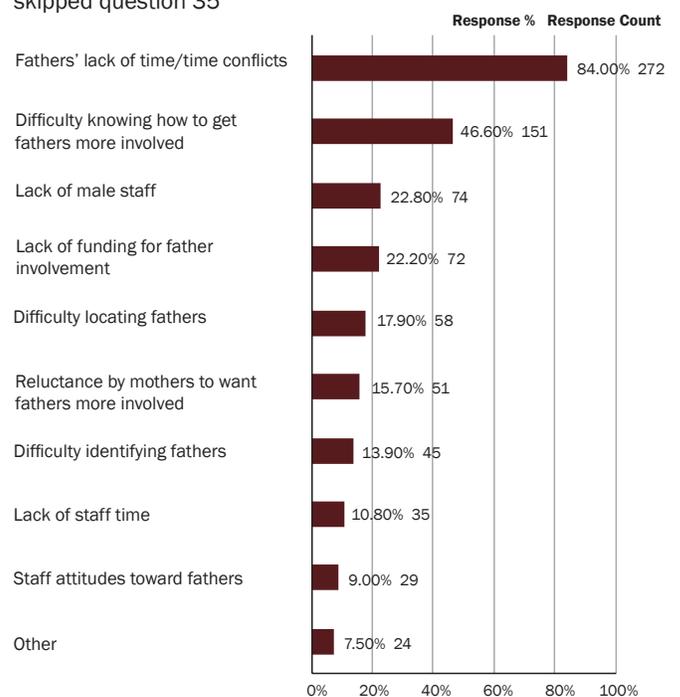
- Clearly the number one challenge in both surveys was fathers' lack of time/time conflicts.
- The second and third top choices were reversed in the two surveys. Professionals felt lack of male staff was the second top challenge, but it was third among fathers. Several advisory committee members felt that fathers have seen such a high percentage of female staff members in early childhood programs (and many have never seen a male staff) that they didn't think about lack of male staff as a challenge in responding to the survey question.

## From survey for fathers

**PROGRAM CHALLENGES:** What do you think are the challenges for early childhood programs in getting fathers more involved? (check all that apply) (Fathers)

answered question 324

skipped question 35



Some examples of comments listed under "Other":

- Lack of understanding by fathers (as to) how important their role & participation is to the family/child.
- It's not always the lack of dads/males as it is the predominance of moms/females in the whole program - it is a very female style and not always open to more stereotypical male ideas/styles.
- Cultural bias towards mothers being the primary involved parent.
- Early childhood programs are predominantly attended by the mothers. This can be an intimidating and uncomfortable situation for many fathers.
- Low priority, there seems to be an assumption among service providers that working with the mother is good enough, the father is only a periphery bonus-but not necessary.

- The second top challenge for fathers (the third for professionals) was difficulty knowing how to get fathers more involved, and there were comments from fathers about their lack of comfort in early childhood settings.
- More professionals (26.4%) felt that reluctance by mothers to want fathers more involved was a bigger challenge than fathers (15.7%) indicated. More fathers felt that staff attitudes toward fathers (9.0%) was a challenge than professionals responding to ambivalent or negative staff attitudes toward fathers (5.7%). These responses indicate that the attitudes of females (both mothers and female staff) are a factor in increasing/decreasing father involvement.

## E. Successful Stories and Strategies

A total of 108 professionals and 71 fathers responded to the survey question on describing “success stories” about father involvement in early childhood programs. A number of those individuals were contacted and interviewed for additional information that has been included in these successful stories and strategies that address the top program challenges/barriers listed in the previous section.

The success stories bear the following titles:

1. Working Around Fathers’ Time Conflicts
2. Connecting Better With Dads
3. Developing Programs That Attract Dads
4. Increasing The Roles Of Male Staff Members



### 1. Working Around Fathers’ Time Conflicts

In both surveys, the overwhelming top choice in challenges for early childhood programs in getting fathers more involved was “fathers’ lack of time/time conflicts” as indicated in over 80% of survey responses. Despite a growing number of Minnesota mothers in the work force, it still appears that many more Minnesota fathers are working during the operating hours of many early childhood programs. Many fathers are interested in becoming more involved with their children in these programs, and many programs have found ways to increase the level of father involvement by doing what a Metro area child care

provider suggests “what I find helpful is just being open and flexible.”

Several examples of this flexibility were found in the following survey responses:

- A West Metro area child care center plans one-on-one family/teacher meetings around father schedules.
- A Metro area preschool has parent conference time slots during daytime and evening hours, and also provides childcare.
- A Head Start program in northern Minnesota schedules some of their parent training sessions at the same time that parents come to pick up their children, so more dads have been able to participate in the trainings.

A number of programs survey dads (and moms and other caregivers) not only about possible topics for meetings and events, but also on the days and times when they would be most available. A Metro area child care provider provides families with a yearly calendar so that parents, and especially dads, can know well in advance of special events so that they can make adjustments to their work schedule, if possible.

Many early childhood programs across the state have increased the number of evening and Saturday classes and activities to reach more dads (and moms) who work during the typical Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm, work week. While some ECFE programs offer father-child classes during the day, more are being offered in the early evening hours. A variety of programs are offering Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) events and as a member of an Early Childhood Coalition from southwestern Minnesota notes “by design most are conducted in the evening” and “that having a meal also helps.” Head Start programs routinely provide regularly scheduled “Family Nights” that have begun attracting more fathers. All types of early childhood programs are offering more special events in the evening and have been successful in getting more fathers involved.

Scheduling classes and special events on weekends, mainly Saturdays, are also becoming more popular. One father “really enjoyed going to the Mavericks’ (college football) game in Mankato with Head Start.” Several programs in Minnesota sponsored ice fishing events on Saturdays that were well attended. Early morning programs for fathers, such as “Donuts with Dads” and “Pancakes with Pops” have also proved successful.

Another way early childhood programs have learned to deal with fathers' time conflicts is to develop take home projects. A Head Start staff from northern Minnesota "encourages fathers to participate in a take home project with their child. They complete it at their own time and I will check it the following week at the next home visit. I found the fathers completed the activity much quicker when I told them I would be taking a picture of the project and their child at the next home visit." A Head Start staff from southern Minnesota echoes the theme by stating "We plan father involvement activities that can be done in the home so they work with their schedule."

A professional from greater Minnesota sums it up with "We try to schedule things when the father is available."

## 2. Connecting Better With Dads

Another top challenge for early childhood programs in getting fathers more involved was "difficulty knowing how to get fathers more involved." That challenge will be dealt with in the following two success stories: this one on connecting better with dads and the next on developing programs that attract dads. Connecting better with dads will emphasize recruiting strategies to get fathers more involved in early childhood programs.

While flyers and other printed informational pieces are still used a great deal, many programs have learned that building trust, developing relationships and making personal contacts are the most successful methods in getting fathers more involved. A Head Start program from southern Minnesota shared that "a barrier that we have tried to overcome is father participation at parent meetings. One tried and tested idea that brought in good results was having a couple of fathers come in early at pick up times before the planned meetings & have them hand out meeting reminders and personally invite other parents."

Other early childhood programs, especially ECFE programs, utilize mothers in recruiting fathers. One Metro area parent educator still has moms sign up their husbands for ECFE classes, but over the years has also seen more dads register on their own more. Some programs have also helped children develop personal written (and colored) invitations for special events that have been mailed to the fathers.

A professional from a statewide program provided the following: "We have two fathers on our Parent Advisory

Board; this is out of six members. I believe involvement happened because they were invited in personal conversations, rather than invited through flyers, or posters, or general announcements to a group. Furthermore, in the course of the invitation, I pointed to the qualities I appreciated in them that I felt would add to the larger group - it's important for anyone, moms or dads, to be recognized as individuals rather than a gendered body. They have remained actively engaged in their position, and I believe it is, in part, due to the fact they are asked what they want/need from the board, and I respond to that. I think this helps them to feel heard, and thus, valued." A Metro area child preschool director intentionally stands in the hall during normal children drop off and pick up times so she can have more personal contacts with parents, especially dads, and hopefully make them more comfortable so they will become more involved.



Creating a comfortable atmosphere for fathers is also important. A father from northern Minnesota stated that "the parent educators in our ECFE program have been very inclusive to the fathers in our program and have made it quite comfortable to be in some otherwise interesting situations. I have been made comfortable in many situations by the laid back atmosphere of our program such as I am a member of the citywide and local advisory board and I honestly didn't think about it being a sort of

shift from the ordinary until I read this (survey question).” A Metro area dad had similar feelings when he wrote “at first I wasn't too sure about going to ECFE. I figured it was probably going to be another guy bashing thing and I didn't need any of that. Once I got there and sat through a couple classes, I felt quite comfortable. I was welcomed in and treated with respect by everyone. Myself and every Father in our class is treated as an equal participant in the upbringing of our children. I actually look forward to going to class.”

An ECFE parent educator from southwestern Minnesota shared this story. “We offer ECFE classes at night and during the day to try to provide options that can work with a father's employment. We worked with a young man who was the only father in a daytime ECFE class and was also deaf. We worked with an interpreter via the computer for parent time. During parent/child time the other parents (all moms) were very supportive of him and he faithfully attended classes with his son. We could see his comfort level and confidence grow. He has begun volunteering at the school in the ECSE program.”

Another Metro area father added “Staff treated me like a contributing parent, encouraging my involvement and input. Many mothers told me they appreciated my parenting views and contributions to discussions during ECFE classes.” A Head Start staff from northern Minnesota summed it up by stating “once dads are comfortable and realize we value their presence, they are more likely to attend.” And yet another Metro area dad felt “the most successful programming I have been to has been provided by a staff of teachers that did not appear to be afraid of or cautious of the fathers. There was a lack of hesitancy to talk to us as parents, just as they do with the mothers. It is very comfortable to be in an environment where the staff truly believes that fathers should be included. It is very easy to tell when it is a forced situation and the staff gives lip service to dads and won't even talk to them when they are trying to be involved.”

Word of mouth is also an important factor, as many survey respondents commented on how word of mouth has been “key” in their programs attracting more dads. A Metro area dad shared that feeling when he stated that “I ran into a father participating in ECFE and he talked about how good the program was and encouraged me to join the next semester. I may not have joined without meeting him.” A member of an early childhood coalition in southwestern Minnesota echoed that feeling with “if some dads

come, other dads will follow.” Then she said it another way with “people go where people go.”

### 3. Developing Programs That Attract Dads

A number of early childhood programs across Minnesota have been very creative in designing programs that attract fathers. Some programs offer father/child specific types of classes/activities, while others offer family events that by design are more father friendly. There are a large number of examples that could be replicated by other programs looking to increase their level of father involvement.

#### ECFE (Early Childhood Family Education) Classes

##### ECFE

The Early Childhood Family Education concept was developed and refined via a series of pilot programs funded by the Minnesota Legislature through grants coordinated by the Minnesota Council of Quality Education from 1974-1984. In 1984, the Minnesota Legislature made it possible for any school district with a Community Education Program to establish an ECFE Program. Recognizing that parents are a child's first and most significant teachers, ECFE offers a variety of classes and resources for parents and children birth through kindergarten age. ECFE programs are offered in every county in Minnesota. For more information, visit [www.ecfe.info/](http://www.ecfe.info/)

Many ECFE programs offer classes specifically for fathers and their young children. These classes could be called “Daddy & Me” or “Date with Dad” and have parent/child activities that are geared toward the dads. Several of these types of ECFE “dad” classes have been going on for more than ten years in a variety of locations across the state. One parent educator from northern Minnesota noted that dads aren't afraid to get messy in art activities with their kids, while she and another Metro area parent educator both felt that “dads seem to interact more with their kids, while moms in their other classes seem to interact more with the other moms.” A parent educator from northern Minnesota was proud to share a story of a non-custodial dad who drove two hours each way to pick up his child in the mother's home town to take him to a weekly ECFE class. Several parent educators felt that more dads are now attending regular ECFE classes, often with the mothers of their children.

The dads who attend these ECFE classes also shared positive comments. A Metro area father stated that “my best experience with an early childhood program is an ECFE dad’s group I’m in now. It’s so rewarding to be able to meet other dads and discuss parenting issues with them.” A dad from northern Minnesota commented that “I’ve been involved in ECFE and preschool programs with both of my daughters for the past 5.5 years. I have learned a lot of valuable parenting advice from the parent educators over the years.”

Some ECFE programs have found that fathers may be reluctant to commit to the normal 10-12 weeks of ECFE classes, so they offer their “dads” classes in shorter series. One Metro area ECFE program offers a 5 week class for fathers and their children, and then follows that up with 5 weeks of open gym time, and that has worked out well. A Metro area father echoed the comments of several other survey respondents with “the ECFE dad’s class is a great way to get involved and meet like minded dads with kids of similar ages – it helps me be a better dad.”

### **FRED (Fathers Reading Every Day) Events**

All types of early childhood programs have sponsored Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) events in Minnesota over the past 7 years. In that time, it’s estimated that there have been over 500 FRED events across the state that have attracted over 10,000 fathers/male caregivers and over 15,000 children, and that over 25,000 free children’s books have been given away to participating families. Despite the fact that there no longer is any statewide organization coordinating the FRED program, this father/child literacy program remains popular in Minnesota, especially with early childhood coalitions.

One early childhood coalition in southwestern Minnesota sponsors FRED four times per year and holds the events in a variety of locations, including a bowling center (with lap reading between turns), an indoor playground, and an airport runway (where pilots read stories). One coalition member described that “fathers enjoy these events and some men attend who would never attend an ECFE class.” One father from northern Minnesota appreciated a FRED event that featured a “pizza party, with everything provided, designed well, and with lots of support and encouragement for dads.” An early childhood coalition member in central Minnesota has started a unique FRED program within a county jail and noted that “the guys like being read to.”

### **FRED**

Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) was developed in 2002 by Texas Cooperative Extension to encourage fathers to read to their children daily. In 2004, Minnesota was one of the first states outside of Texas to pilot the FRED program. FRED events feature fun activities for fathers and children, and also emphasize the importance of dads reading and sharing stories with their children. Presenters and guest readers at FRED events are often males from the local community, such as mayors, school principals, police officers, coaches and athletes. Children’s books are often distributed to fathers and children participating in FRED events. Dads are encouraged to keep a reading log (in a convenient place, possibly the refrigerator) for a few weeks after the FRED event to hopefully develop a habit of reading and sharing stories with their children. For more information about the FRED program, please contact Lowell Johnson at [johnsonlowell@clearwire.net](mailto:johnsonlowell@clearwire.net) or Tom Fitzpatrick at [tfitz17@hotmail.com](mailto:tfitz17@hotmail.com).

### **Family Fun Events**

Early childhood programs sponsor a wide variety of family events, and many programs are consciously developing more events with a father friendly focus - designing activities that are comfortable, familiar, fun and appealing for dads. Like ECFE classes, some are developed just for fathers and father figures, while others invite the entire family but the activities are geared to attract dads.

Several programs in Minnesota have sponsored “building nights” where dads and children engage in woodworking projects such as building bird houses and napkin holders. Another popular program has been “transportation nights” where fathers and children enjoy looking at and learning about all sorts of vehicles, including farm equipment, fire trucks, police cars, ambulances, garbage trucks, construction equipment, tow trucks, and in one instance a helicopter and another a zamboni.

Family events that include open gym time have also been popular. One early childhood coalition member from central Minnesota combines literacy with physical activities in a program called “Run and Read.” Outside activities including sledding, bicycling and ice fishing have drawn large numbers of dads and kids.

Fathers also have volunteered to be part of programs’ field trips to places like apple orchards, museums and

sporting events. One Metro area ECFE class enjoyed a field trip this past winter that included riding the light rail to downtown Minneapolis for the Hollidazzle Parade. A Metro area Head Start dad stated that "I have been on many field trips with my daughter. By me going with her makes her happy and me happy. I enjoy that time and getting to know her friends and teachers knowing that she is in a safe place everyday."

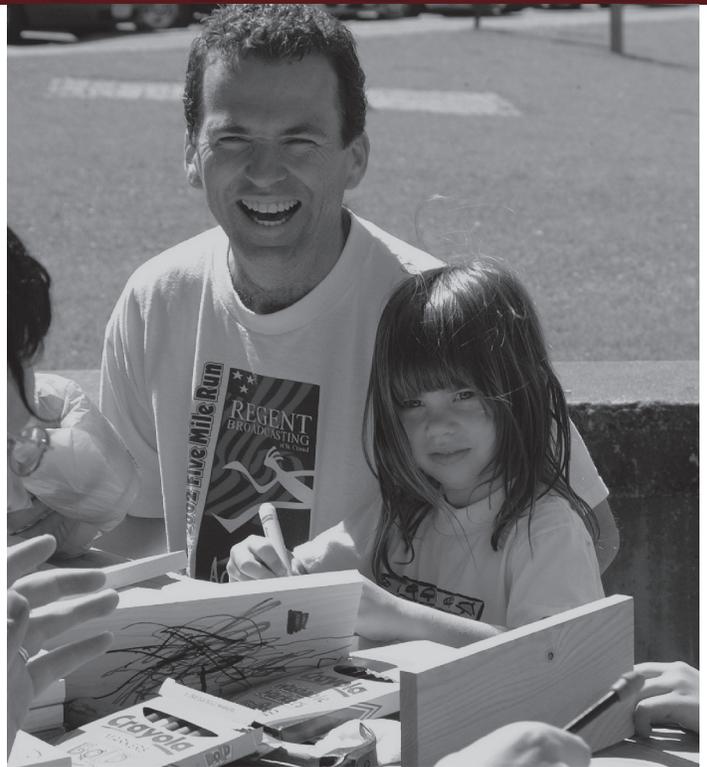
Programs that sponsor these family events often find fathers from their programs that are more than willing to help plan and implement these events. A father from northern Minnesota stated that "I am a career firefighter and every year I come to the class and do a fire presentation which the children love. My daughters are very excited and proud to have me come to their classes. I have also brought various vehicles to transportation night which is very fun. I think it improves my relationship with my girls when they see that I am willing to take time to be with them and their friends."

### Special Events for Dads

Many early childhood programs sponsor special events just for dads. One Metro area dad stated "around Father's Day, our preschool invited the dads to come early when picking up the kids at the end of day and experience an indoor picnic with our kids. The preschool provided snacks and cake and set up tables/chairs for the dads and kids." A father in southern Minnesota reported on "Lunch with dads day! I enjoyed coming to school to see what kind of environment it is. I also got to meet friends that my kids played with, and got to meet all of their teachers."

A Metro area preschool "has for many years held an annual Dad's Night. In preparation for the event, the children draw portraits of their dads, write individual stories about their dads, and learn some special songs. On the night of the event, the dads and children spend about 25 minutes in their classrooms together playing and completing a few special projects, then all the classes come together to do an interactive "Song Fest." It is one of the highlights of our year!"

A Head Start staff from northern Minnesota shared this story. "In June of 2010 we made a big deal about Father's Day Week with something for dads almost every day either at the school or in the community. One day we had a "Me and My Guy" luncheon in the classrooms. All parents are always welcome in our classrooms, but we promoted this and encouraged it as a special event. Fathers and



Father Figures were present in all of our Early Head Start Classrooms for that day, and in many classrooms kids had more than one important male come for them such as a father and an uncle or a godfather and a grandfather. My favorite story from that day was a classroom where we had a father, a grandfather and a great grandfather attend. Four generations from one family in a Head Start classroom! This also sent a message to our staff that fathers and men want to be involved; we just need to create situations where they will feel welcome and have something to "do." In this case a special lunch on a day they knew other men would be there so they wouldn't be the only ones."

Through the success in attracting fathers to these wide variety of events and activities, many programs have noted that these same fathers are now becoming more involved in other aspects of their children's' programs. Special events are a way to bring dads into a program environment and make them more comfortable and likely to come back.

## 4. Increasing The Roles Of Male Staff Members

In the survey for professionals, lack of male staff was rated the number two challenge for involving fathers in early childhood programs. In the survey for fathers, lack of male staff was rated the number three challenge. This is a complex issue, as many female staff have proven to be highly competent working in early childhood programs and are

able to connect well with dads. But from the survey data it's clear that professionals believe more male staff will attract more father involvement and that fathers want more male staff in the programs where their children attend. As the changing role of fathers has evolved over the years, it is consistent and reflective of society's changing gender roles that there is a desire to have more men also working with young children as staff in early childhood programs.

Some data on this topic:

- 97.9% of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) members believe that it is important that men work with children in early childhood education.<sup>1</sup>
- A recent survey in the United Kingdom found that 55% wanted a male childcare worker for their nursery-aged child, rising to two thirds among single parents.<sup>2</sup>
- However, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics from 2010 show that men make up only 5.3% of all child care teachers, and only 3.0% of all preschool and kindergarten teachers.<sup>3</sup>
- The primary reasons men do not work in early childhood education, besides low wages, are stereotypes, fear of being accused of abuse, and low status of the profession.<sup>4</sup>

But let's look at some successes with male staff and volunteers in early childhood programs in Minnesota. Several ECFE classes for dads have been facilitated by male parent educators for many years. A Metro area ECFE coordinator who supervises one male parent educator believes that the continued success of the Dads' class over the years has been at least partly due to the facilitator's gender, as "the trust level within the class along with the intensity and depth of the conversations have been enhanced because he comes from a similar perspective." A father who attends that class shared similar feelings about the male parent educator who is also a father: "it's awesome to have a dad leading the group. Being a father, he's been there and knows what we (the dads) are going through."

An agency in northern Minnesota is happy to have "a male home visitor in our Head Start/Early Head Start program. The dads seem to respond well when they see another man already involved with the children. He's worked in the program for three years and conducts home visits in a rural area. Our program previously did not have a lot of

father involvement, but we're starting to see more dads at more events."

Early childhood programs have been successful at getting more males involved in volunteering in various early childhood programs. Many programs that conduct FRED events have been able to find male guest readers (e.g. mayor, dentist, judge, pilot, high school football players), and the coordinator from one FRED event felt that the "male guest readers made the event more powerful." Other programs get local males to coordinate "building night" projects, while another looks for male guest presenters. And many programs report an increase in the number of fathers who volunteer in various other activities, including field trips. The presence of male staff members and volunteers provides a cue that this is a male friendly environment where other males are welcome and expected.

Many survey respondents obviously feel strongly about the need/desire for more male staff and more male involvement in early childhood programs, and when that happens it appears that fathers will become more involved and that the children will benefit from the male role models.

### **MenTeach**

**MenTeach is a non-profit clearinghouse (based in Minnesota) for both men and women seeking information and resources about men teaching.**

**MenTeach is about children's success. MenTeach wants a diverse workforce, both men and women teachers, educating and caring for our children. Their research report, *The Importance of Men Teachers: And Why There Are So Few* is the largest of its kind and offers interesting information about the education field and has been cited all over the world. For more information, please visit [www.menteach.org](http://www.menteach.org).**

### **Sources**

<sup>1</sup> Bryan G. Nelson, "The Importance of Men Teachers: And Reasons Why There Are So Few," A Survey of Members of NAEYC, November 2002

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Mary Evans, "Parents want more male primary school teachers", Western Mail, Wales, UK, January 27, 2010

<sup>3</sup> US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010

<sup>4</sup> Bryan G. Nelson, "The Importance of Men Teachers: And Reasons Why There Are So Few," A Survey of Members of NAEYC, November 2002

## F. Suggestions/Ideas

There were 67 survey responses from professionals and 80 responses from fathers to the survey question asking respondents to identify their good ideas on how early childhood programs could try to better involve fathers.

### Suggestions/Ideas from Professionals by theme:

#### Connecting with Dads

- Ask, invite, welcome, encourage!!!
- Ask fathers in specific programs how they would like to be involved.
- Promote a culture of fatherhood, campaign to normalize fatherhood, invite and collaborate with mothers, when services are not exclusive for fathers involve them at intake, train all staff — not just father staff.
- I'd like to do workplace lunch presentations or discussion groups at some large office buildings or businesses, especially for dads.
- Development of father-focused parenting classes in various communities, support with holistic, wrap-around services provided by partners, including early childhood partners. This will create engagement of collaborative partners; bring collaborating partners' expertise to the table, with a focus that starts with engaging fathers on the front-end as the primary focus, then gradually introducing early childhood services. This is a totally different approach than making early childhood agencies more "father friendly." That is an important goal and critical as well, but the approach I'm describing creates more engagement (both in terms of partners and fathers themselves).
- We fill out a family survey to find out when the best meeting times are. We could have them check times specifically for mom and/or dad. We could have an event in each classroom that would specifically request the father's involvement each year.

#### Male Leadership

- Male staff working with dads.
- In a previous community I worked in, we held an ECFE class one session a year that was for fathers only and it was facilitated by a man who worked in our local human services dept. and was well qualified to lead the discussions.
- A "Guys Read" program series, probably monthly, that will involve fathers as volunteers/leaders.

#### Program Ideas

- We do building projects . . . bird houses, tool boxes, bird feeding platforms, camping theme, MN wildlife theme.
- I would like to have the dads make a gift with the child for the moms (or other special woman in the life of the family). Wood working with puzzles--with a certain number of pieces--the picture on the puzzle would be completed prior to the wood cutting portion of the activity. Painting is involved too.
- A Saturday field trip to places dads would like to go with other dads and kids (e.g. baseball game, football game, cart racing, bike ride, fishing etc.).
- Fathers sharing their talents in the classroom. For example, cooking with kids (one of our fathers is an excellent cook). We have talked about it, but it has not been implemented due to staff time constraints. I feel strongly that all service workers and staff need training on the importance of non-judgmental attitudes with fathers, and of the wealth of knowledge fathers bring to the lives of their children. Too many people (staff included) seems to blow off the importance of what dads need from and offer to families.



**“Ask fathers in specific programs  
how they would like to be involved.”**

**—Professional**

## Suggestions/Ideas from Fathers by theme:

### Connecting with Dads

- Encourage mothers to bring the fathers.
- Talk directly to the dads and invite them and stress how excited their kids will be to have them there.
- I would like to see more active promotion of father-centric programs. I also would like to see school districts study the idea of father/parental involvement and release the results as a way of bringing more attention to the issue.
- Just let it be known that Fathers are welcome and that they will be treated with respect as an equal. Pretty simple.
- Tell/show new fathers previous examples of father involvement.
- Create a survey that helps identify various roles that fathers could assist with programs other than lead roles.
- We are building a Leadership Circle here of local family education and service providers to address this topic of father involvement more broadly and hopefully combine our resources and work together to change the culture for families here in our region — a culture that intentionally values, supports, and includes fathers.

### Program Ideas

- More male or dad specific offerings.
- Our Head Start program sent home a survey on 3 ideas that we got to choose from with 3 dates and times. This enabled me to choose an activity that works with my schedule.
- If fathers could be "bribed" ie meal, etc., just one time, to attend a program function— perhaps they would see how happy and productive their child is at school and note how anxious the children are to share their pride and accomplishments with dad.
- Send info in Spanish or bilingual.
- Dads like to do fun, new things with their children. More activities outside of a classroom setting might be appropriate; things that involve fun for both father and children.



**“Just let it be known that Fathers are welcome and that they will be treated with respect as an equal. Pretty simple.”**

**—Father**

- Have more "father/daughter only" events.
- It would be good to have programs just for dads so that they can ask questions without fear of ridicule.
- Like to see more "hands on" building projects (like making bird houses).
- Maybe just have a father child fun night — not a class — just a night to have fun.

### Time

- Flexible schedule for activities/classes
- By doing a monthly event for fathers and children. By doing a survey on a time when fathers are available.
- Different times available, evenings/weekends.

## G. Survey Summary and Recommendations

The following ideas and themes emerged from the surveys and provide a concise summary of important strategies to encourage and support father involvement in early childhood programs.

1. **Time** — be flexible and creative in scheduling activities/events to encourage increased participation/involvement of fathers.
  - Survey fathers to learn their availability.
  - Consider more evening and weekend options.
  - Develop take home projects that fathers and children can do on their own time.
2. **Recruiting Fathers** — be as creative as possible in efforts to involve fathers.
  - Emphasize building trust, developing relationships, and making personal contacts with fathers.
  - Ask the mothers to help recruit the fathers.
  - Encourage children to invite their fathers.
  - Complete and act on a father friendly assessment of your program (that looks at the program policies and procedures, physical space, and staff attitudes).
3. **Program Development** — develop more activities/events that are father friendly.
  - Consider developing activities/events just for fathers and children.
  - Develop family events that include activities that are comfortable and fun for men.
  - Ask fathers to help develop and coordinate father friendly events/activities.
4. **Male Staff/Volunteers** — hire more male staff & recruit more male volunteers to work with children and fathers.
  - Make every effort to recruit males for open positions.
  - Recruit male community members for volunteer opportunities.
  - Recruit fathers from within your program for volunteer opportunities and to provide outreach to other fathers.



### Special Thanks

MFFN would like to thank the following individuals for taking the time to be interviewed for the Successful Stories and Strategies section of this report:

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Jeff Huenecke, Pond Family Center/Bloomington Public Schools  
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Glen Palm, Saint Cloud State University  
Heidi Plasek, Parkers Prairie ECFE  
Angie Reed, District 911 Early Childhood Program in Cambridge/Isanti  
Teri Smith, Redwood Area Early Childhood Coalition in Redwood Falls  
David Struck, father from Moorhead  
Donald Sysyn, Saint Paul ECFE

## 4. Additional Information

There are a number of resources and research documents related to father involvement in early childhood programs. The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network (MFFN) strives to keep their listing of this information up to date and with accurate links. All of the following information can be found on the following page from the MFFN web site:

[www.mnfathers.org/earlychildhood.html](http://www.mnfathers.org/earlychildhood.html)

### Father Involvement/Early Childhood Programs

#### Father Involvement

This Research to Practice Brief, written by Sarah Kaye for the Child Welfare League of America, states the importance of father involvement in the Early Head Start program and some of the barriers to involving fathers, and provides strategies to increase father involvement. Online here (February 2005)

#### Is it just child's play?

In this issue of MFFN Network Notes, learn how fathers promote the kind of play that supports early childhood development.

#### MFFN Info Sheets

Among the many resources that MFFN has developed is a series of 20 info sheets on a variety of fatherhood topics. Info sheets related to father involvement and early childhood programs include #1 Early Childhood Family Education, #2 Staffing a Class for Fathers, #3 Positive Father Involvement, and #9 Dads and Early Literacy.

#### Parents as Teachers

Parents as Teachers is a national organization that develops curricula, trains professionals, and advocates for children and families. The "Resources" page from their web site offers links to fact sheets, screening tools, and the Focus on Fathering curriculum.

#### Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Through Child Care

This article from the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center offers specific steps for early childhood programs to involve fathers (April 2004).

#### Reaching out to fathers: An examination of staff efforts that lead to greater father involvement in early childhood programs

This journal article was written by Stephen Green, who coordinates the Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) program through the Texas A & M University System (2003).

#### Survey of Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning

In the last 10 years, father involvement in schools has increased dramatically. Read the report from the National Center for Fathering and the National Parent Teacher Association, online here (May 2009).



#### Recommended Books

*The Daddy Book: A workbook to guide new fathers through the important stages of infant development* by the Brainerd Lakes Area Early Childhood Coalition (and the St. Cloud ECFE Program), 2008  
(Note: this book is available for purchase through MFFN.)

*Fatherneed: Why Father Care is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child* by Kyle Pruett, 2001

*Fathers and Early Childhood Programs* by Jay Fagan & Glen Palm, 2003

*Why Fathers Count: The Importance of Fathers and Their Involvement with Children*, edited by Sean E. Brotherson & Joseph M. White, 2007

## Additional Comments

Members of the project's advisory committee provided these additional comments:

### **Fathers, Early Childhood and the Work Force**

"There is an unmistakable correlation between a father who is engaged in the environment of his child's early childhood education and the likelihood that the child will get off to a strong start in school. It is a message that not all early childhood educators, fathers and families understand. The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network certainly hopes this report will serve as a stimulus for fathers to take full advantage of opportunities awaiting them in their child's daily development. All early childhood programs should be examining their processes and efforts to encourage more direct father involvement. It is important to also take note that how engaged fathers become in their child's education may also contribute to their own worker productivity and the potential for improved company performance and profitability."

*Bob Gustafson, Minnesota Fathers & Families Network*

### **Children without Involved Fathers**

"We all know that many children in early childhood programs have fathers missing from their lives...either they left before the children were born or some time after, moved, or were incarcerated or even died. We think about these children without a father present in their lives and how we are encouraging programs to focus on fathers and celebrate fathers. In no way do we want to diminish that encouragement. At the same time we believe we need to say in some way that while we want programs to make a bigger deal of fathers and father-figures, making them feel welcome and comfortable and valued, we also feel strongly that early childhood programs need to know the children they serve and know their family situation, and be sensitive to the real fact that for some children there just isn't a father or stepfather or adoptive father present in their lives. The lack of the father or loss of the father may be intensely painful for them. We recommend that for those children program staff can perhaps help their families to identify an uncle, grandfather, mother's boyfriend, family friend, neighbor that they can celebrate as a father-like, male role model, so the absence of their "real" father doesn't become more painful for them."

*Jennifer Barshack, Parents as Teachers – Minnesota Regional Office*

### **The Importance of Male Teachers to Father Involvement**

"This study reaffirms from both professionals' and fathers' responses about the need for more male staff in early childhood programs. The survey doesn't answer why but I'm often asked: "What qualities do male teachers bring to early care and education?" I like to answer with a question: What do we want for our children? We certainly want clean, safe classrooms and environments, the most modern and up-to-date equipment in those classrooms. And we definitely want the most competent and caring adults working with our children. We also want those adults teaching our children to be representative of the diversity in the world where the children and families come from - and if you look at the world - it is made up of 1/2 women and 1/2 men from diverse cultures. If we don't have men teaching our children, if we don't have fathers in young children's lives, we are giving the message that children and education doesn't matter. That nurturing and caring isn't a priority to men and to society. Children need strong, caring men in their daily lives and early care and education is a great place for men to participate."

*Bryan Nelson, MenTeach*

### **Barriers to Father Involvement**

"Time has been identified as a barrier since the beginning of research on father involvement. It is a real issue in the sense that many fathers still work full-time and see their provider role as their primary contribution to child rearing. Our findings in the previous MFFN study of fathers (2007) suggest that attitudes have started to change in relation to the primacy of the provider role. Still the reports in this study of spending time with children in early childhood settings suggest that behavioral change has not caught up with the reported attitude change. Research on fathers' time also suggests that there may be other activities in addition to work that compete for father's involvement in early childhood programs."

*Glen Palm, St. Cloud State University*

### **Dads in Jail**

"There are a number of us in central Minnesota who are doing parent education work with dads in county jails under the auspices of the Initiative Foundation's Inside/Out Connections program. There are many incarcerated fathers of young children in our county jails. They are very concerned about their children and very appreciative of the efforts made to help them become positively involved dads. Children of incarcerated parents are four times more likely to become incarcerated themselves. If we are to break the cycle of incarceration in families, we must work with parents who are presently incarcerated."

*Lowell Johnson, Brainerd Lakes Early Childhood Coalition*

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Brad Kramer, Southwest Initiative Foundation  
Bryan Nelson, MenTeach  
Larry Oberg, Otter Tail - Wadena Head Start  
Glen Palm, St. Cloud State University

By promoting healthy fatherhood, the **Minnesota Fathers & Families Network** contributes to children's well-being, men's development, gender equity, and positive, supportive communities. MFFN enhances healthy father-child relationships by promoting initiatives that inform public policy and further develop the field of fatherhood practitioners statewide. Learn more online at [www.mnfathers.org](http://www.mnfathers.org).

Many of the resources identified in this document are available at [www.mnfathers.org/earlychildhood.html](http://www.mnfathers.org/earlychildhood.html).

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