

# National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse Technical Assistance Webinar

Tuesday September 28, 2010 ~ 2:00 – 3:45 PM (ET)

## **Working with Homeless Fathers: Lessons from the Field**

### **Facilitator:**

Nigel Vann: Senior Director of Training & Technical Assistance,  
National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

### **Presenters:**

Michael L. Ferrell: Executive Director, Coalition for the Homeless,  
Washington, DC

Eileen Hayes: Executive Director, Amos House, Providence, RI

Steve Nordseth: Drop-In Center Program Manager, Bill Wilson  
Center, San Jose, CA



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Overview of Homelessness

Presented by:  
Michael L. Ferrell  
Executive Director  
D.C. Coalition for the Homeless  
September 28, 2010  
[mferrell@dccfh.org](mailto:mferrell@dccfh.org)



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Overview of Topics

- Who Are the Homeless?
- Homeless Sub-populations.
- Issues Affecting Homeless Men Who Are Fathers.
- What Supports Do Homeless Fathers Need?
- What Can Providers Do?



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Who Are the Homeless?

Source: HUD's 2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress

- “Typical homeless person is a middle-aged adult male who is a member of a minority group and by himself.”
- 63.7% of the persons counted in HUD's Homeless Assessment Report were men.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Who Are the Homeless? (cont.)

- More than 1.56 million people were counted as being homeless.
- More than 34% were persons in families.
- More than 60% of persons in families were children.
- More than 79% of the families were headed by single women.

Note: number of men in and heading homeless families grew from 18% in 2007 to 20.4% in 2009.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



**FATHERHOOD.GOV**

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

# Homeless Sub-populations

- **33.9% - Chronic Substance Abuses**  
(mostly men)
- **24.9% - Severely Mentally Ill**
- **42.9% - Disability**
- **12.1% - Domestic Violence**
- **13.1 % - Veterans**



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Issues Affecting Homeless Men Who Are Fathers

- Shame and embarrassment associated with being homeless.
- Long absences from their children (incarceration, military services etc.).
- Inadequate income or lack of income.
- Substance Abuse or health related issues.
- No desire to be a parent.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# What Supports Do Homeless Fathers Need?

- **Caring support group to help men with:**
  - Understanding of personal challenges (e.g. homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse).

Men must be able to effectively address their own personal issues before they can be a “good” father.
  - Help with the legal system to deal with issues of child support.
  - Parenting and how to co-parent.
  - How to play an active role in the lives of their children even though they are temporarily homeless.
  - How to reconcile differences with the mother of their children.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# What Can Providers Do?

- Fatherhood providers should contact homeless shelters to talk about their services and tailor them to meet the needs of homeless fathers.
- Homeless service providers should be flexible in working with fathers in their programs to have visitation and/or telephone contact with their children. This is important for programs that require passes for men to leave the facility.
- Homeless service providers should identify men who are fathers to ascertain if they have any regular relationship with their children and link the fathers to a local fatherhood initiative program.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



**FATHERHOOD.GOV**

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

# Working with Homeless Fathers

Eileen Hayes, LICSW  
President/CEO Amos House



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



**FATHERHOOD.GOV**  
National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

# Facts about fathers who are homeless

- The term “responsible fathering” emphasizes the importance of men’s active involvement in children’s lives, including financial and physical emotional care. (Doherty et al., 1998).
- Fathers who are homeless are deemed a failure when they cannot support their children.
- Fathers who are poor are also less likely to receive public benefits than mothers who are poor.
- Fathers who are homeless are less likely to have custody of their children because of a variety of issues including histories of incarceration, substance abuse, and unemployment.
- 60% of single adult women in shelters are mothers and 41% of males in homeless shelters are fathers, yet only 7% of men have their children with them compared to 65% of women. (Burt et al., 1999). Only 16% of sheltered homeless families include both parents, although we have seen an increase in this number due to the increase in first time homelessness because of foreclosures, eviction and unemployment.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Amos House

Amos House is a house of hospitality and a social service agency providing food, shelter and basic needs to over 15,000 men, women, and children each year. Our soup kitchen serves over 800 meals each day. Our agency employs 55 men and women, 50% of them were formerly homeless. Our one-stop center provides men and women who are homeless with the following:

- Housing (Starting with a 90-Day Transitional Program followed by graduation to Phase II housing that is permanent supportive housing)
- Substance abuse/mental health treatment (Our 90-day program is a recovery based intensive treatment program)
- Job training:
  - 12-week culinary arts with National Serve-Safe Certification and CPR/First Aid
  - 12-week carpentry NCCER training program with OSHA and Lead Abatement certification
  - 16-week green jobs training program with five certifications and OJT slots in deconstruction and weatherization



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Amos House and Homeless Fathers

## Job Placement Services:

- Transitional Jobs Program: 12-week job program providing a stipend and OJT slots for formerly incarcerated men to help them gain paid experience, build a resume and overcome obstacles to employment
- Employment through our businesses, (institutional and private catering, Friendship Café, and Amos House Builds, our home improvement business). Thirty jobs per year provide “stepping stone” positions for homeless men and women to help them become stable.

## Other Services:

- Individual Case Plans review child support orders, visitation schedules and any other court fines or warrants that will prohibit fathers from reunification.
- Family reunification for mothers and fathers who have been separated from their children due to addiction and incarceration
- Financial Literacy and financial counseling to repair credit reports, create savings plan and establish good credit



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Issues Homeless Fathers Face

- Fathers have multiple children with multiple partners
- When they attempt to reunite they are met with resistance from courts, mothers, probation and parole, other agencies
- For some fathers, their criminal activities before incarceration allowed them the opportunity to provide financially for their families. Once they are released, there is a great deal of pressure to re-establish a lifestyle that the families had become accustomed to. These fathers have little or no relevant work experience and struggle to live within the confines of a minimum-wage job. With the current rates of high unemployment (28% in some inner-city neighborhoods), the lure back to street activities is high as the fathers want to provide for their children.
- Many of the fathers are barred from public housing because of their records. (Possession or distribution charges and/or felonies) are grounds for denial from public housing. Oftentimes their children are living in public housing so they are restricted from being a part of the family, even when they want to reunify.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



**FATHERHOOD.GOV**

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

# Strategies that Help

- Strategies that we find helpful:
- Fathers should be assigned a case manager or coach to walk him through the process from homelessness to self sufficiency.
- Stabilize the fathers' living situation including helping him to enroll in a transitional housing program that lays out a plan to get basic needs met such as ID's Birth Certificates, clear up outstanding warrants and fines, license renewals and any license insurance requirements, child support orders and modifications in place, etc.
- Create a plan for training/work/education.
- Begin application for housing (review regs for Section 8 and any other subsidized housing.
- Work with the fathers to understand their legal and moral responsibilities to their children
- Develop a plan with the father that break down the steps he should take to begin the process of reunification
- Schedule a meeting with the child's mother and other family members to begin seeing the child on a regular basis.
- Establish a court ordered visitation plan.
- Provide drug and alcohol screening that is documented and random
- Keep open and consistent communication with probation and parole as well as DCYF
- Provide parenting classes and anger management classes



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



**FATHERHOOD.GOV**

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

# Working With Homeless Fathers:

## Lessons from the Field

### **Presented By:**

Steven R. Nordseth

Program Manager

Bill Wilson 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Drop-In Center

San Jose, CA 95112 - (408) 925-0234

[snordseth@bwcmail.org](mailto:snordseth@bwcmail.org)



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Overview of Topics

1. Overview of Drop-In Center and Homeless Youth Services.
2. Challenges Homeless Dads Face.
3. Techniques to Address Barriers to Services.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Drop-In Center Model

- One Stop Shop, (Open 22-Hours a Day)
  - Bringing as many of the services as possible to where the youth already feel comfortable.
- Operated under the “Harm Reduction” model
  - Meeting people where they’re at.
  - Approach is client oriented/directed.
  - Reduce harm of behavior as opposed to behavior itself.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Drop-In Center Basic Services

- Food and water
- Hygiene supplies
- Shelter
- Sleeping bags
- Tents
- Phone
- Computers
- Mail service
- Clothes
- Condoms
- Showers
- Laundry



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Drop-In Center Advanced Services

- Case management
- Outreach
- Referrals
  - Treatment, shelters, Programs
- Counseling, Mental Health, TAY
- Transportation
  - Rides, bus passes, bikes, skateboards, cars, etc.
- HIV/STD testing
- Activities
- Groups, Peer Groups
- Legal assistance
- Job development
- Financial Assistance
- Needle exchange



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Challenges Homeless Dads Face

- **32% of Youth at the Drop-In Center had at least 1 Biological Child in 2009.**
- **Lack of Housing Can Lead to.....**
  - Basic Needs NOT Being Met
  - Lack of income for child care or child support  
(whether cause or result of homelessness is irrelevant)
  - Custody and CPS issues
  - Lack of Stability
  - Relationship Difficulty
  - Substance Abuse or Self Medication
  - Lowered Sense of Self Worth

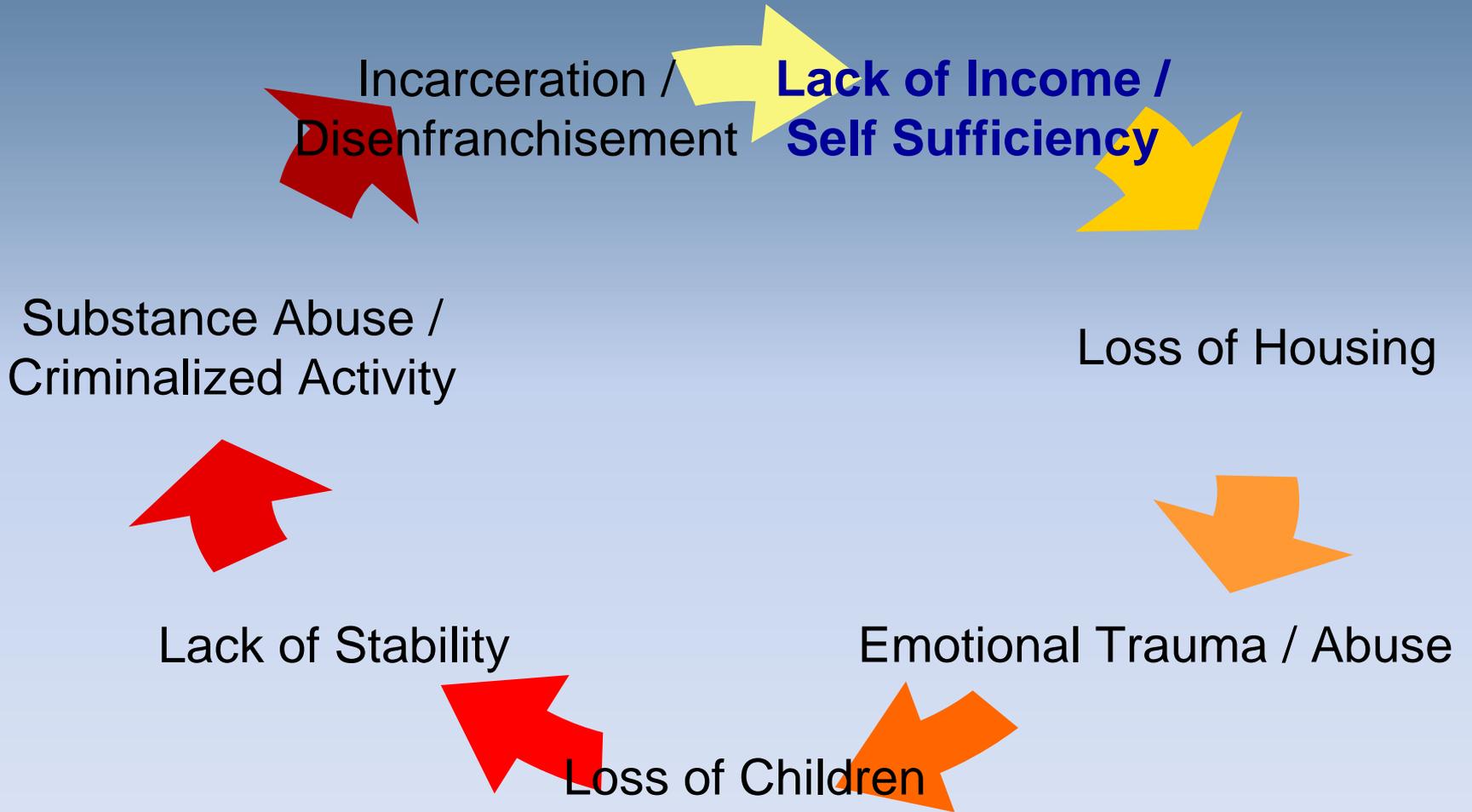


U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



**FATHERHOOD.GOV**  
National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

# Cycle of Failure



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



**FATHERHOOD.GOV**  
National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

# MEET BASIC NEEDS FIRST

- If Fathers do not know where they will eat or sleep, there is no way to effectively parent.
- Meeting basic needs first builds trust.
- Let the client direct the services
  - Parenting may be first or last.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# CREATE PHYSICAL STABILITY

- Housing
- Job Skills and Employment Placement
- Source of Income, Self Sufficiency
- Increase Knowledge and Skills
- Be Prepared for the Long Term



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# CREATE EMOTIONAL SECURITY

- Individually and Family Counseling
- Mental Health Treatment
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- Positive Outlets



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# BRING THE SERVICES TO THEM

- Bring the services to them as opposed to the other way around. Homeless individuals struggle with issues such as transportation and time management.
- Partner with local live in programs, shelters, and service providers.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# QUICK AND CONCISE

- Curriculum must be condensed in order to be delivered to a transient population
  - One Day Retreats
  - Retreat Weekends
  - Weeklong Institutes



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# REWARD ACHIEVEMENT

- Rewarding efforts towards self sufficiency builds confidence, stability, and empowerment.
- Rewarding efforts towards parenting builds commitment and engagement.
- Culminates in skills and commitment necessary to reclaim children physically and emotionally.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Tools for Reaching Homeless Fathers

- Connect to homeless shelters, providers, and live in programs; provide trainings at staff events covering your services.
- Market your services at street level, or places homeless individuals would visit.
- Outreach, Outreach, Outreach.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Outreach Techniques to Engage Homeless Dads

- Use non-discriminatory language for literature
- Advertise services at locations like:
  - Libraries
  - Soup Kitchens
  - Community Colleges
  - Shelters
  - Streets
  - AA/NA Meetings



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Working with Homeless Fathers

## Examples of Grantee Activity



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Resource, Inc., Minneapolis, MN

- Once a month, dads help out at 2 different homeless shelters.
- As FPO Barbara Spoor describes it: *“Dads in the program give back to the community by hanging out/volunteering at homeless shelters. They provide moral support, empathy, info on the program, mealtime company, etc. so they are kind of “paying it forward” while they participate in the Resource Inc. Fatherhood program themselves. It’s both a good confidence booster and recruitment tool.”*
- For more information, contact Program Director Sherry Glanton at [sglanton@resource-mn.org](mailto:sglanton@resource-mn.org)



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# Children's Institute, Inc. and Weingart Center Association Los Angeles, CA\*

- The Weingart Center has worked with the homeless since 1983.
- In 2007, they received a “Project Fatherhood” grant from the Children’s Institute.

\*For more information see ***Implementing Project Fatherhood to Help Homeless Families*** (Susan Lux et al), in Fatherhood: Insights and Perspectives from Leaders in the Fatherhood Movement, Leadership Center at Children’s Institute, Inc. 2009.

<http://www.projectfatherhood.org/resources/publications/>



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



**FATHERHOOD.GOV**

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

# Shifting the focus

- “For our male participants the focus had been almost exclusively on employment and the maintenance of their sobriety.”
- Project Fatherhood asked us to shift our focus and consider the crucial role of the father in the success of their children, and to apply the same sense of urgency in helping fathers that we gave to our mothers. This transition was to change the entire culture and therapeutic milieu of our agency.”
- “Months were spent re-educating [our case managers] about positive benefits associated with father-child reunification [and] this remains an area of continual re-education for our case-management staff.”



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



**FATHERHOOD.GOV**

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

# Consistency

- “The focus was always on the idea that the most important part of being a father is consistency and having your children know you are there for them.”



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



# A Powerful Story

- In one case, a father had lost touch with his teenage son about eight years ago. Another father helped him locate his son's Facebook page, and e-mails quickly led to a telephone call.
- Now living in Chicago, the young man told his dad that he had thought of him every day.
- The father came back into group, told the story and broke down in tears. He said he always believed 'my son was better off without me' and had no idea how much his son had actually missed him.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



**FATHERHOOD.GOV**

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

# Changing Service Paradigms: Sustaining the Work

- “WCA has incorporated the Project Fatherhood group into the very foundation of our clinical services. Project Fatherhood is no longer seen as a separate program requiring specialized funding. Rather, due to the shift in our service paradigm, it has crystallized our vision that every father has a right and responsibility to be an active participant in his child’s life.”
- “For the fathers and staff of WCA, this has been a life-changing experience, one that we would encourage all organizations to undergo at least once.”



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance

