Bringing Back the Dads: Changing Practices in Child Welfare Systems

PROTECTING CHILDREN

A Professional Publication of American Humane Association

Volume 26, Number 2, 2011

NATIONAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER
ON NON-RESIDENT FATHERS AND THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Project implemented by

American Humane Association™
The nation's voice for the protection of children & animals™

www.americanhumane.org

Partners

National Fatherhood Initiative®
www.fatherhood.org

Center on Children and the Law
www.abanet.org/child

With funding and support of

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families,
Children's Bureau

American Humane Association™
The nation's voice for the protection of children & animals™

Robin R. Ganzert, Ph.D.
President and CEO

Debra Gilmore
Jessica Kendall
Lisa Pilnik
Content Reviewers

Julie R. McGinley
Production Coordinator

Amy Hahn
Guest Editor

Teresa Zeigler Kutt
Graphic Designer

Title
***Protecting Children*, a professional publication of American Humane Association, is published four times a year and distributed to American Humane Association members,**
ISSN# 0893-4231. #CPC26-2.
Volume 26, Number 2.

Peer Review
All manuscripts published in *Protecting Children* are blind peer-reviewed by experts identified by the content reviewers to have expertise in the content of the particular issue.

Permission to Reprint
Requests for permission to reprint any article in this publication may be faxed to American Humane Association at (303) 792-5333. Such requests should include the title of the article, the date and volume in which it appeared, and the manner in which the reprint is intended to be used. Be sure to include your name and contact information in your request. American Humane Association charges a nominal reprint permission fee. Allow 2 weeks for a reply.

Publisher
American Humane Association
63 Inverness Drive East
Englewood, CO 80112-5117
Phone (303) 792-9900
Fax (303) 792-5333
www.americanhumane.org

Ideas contained in each article in this publication are those of the specific authors and do not necessarily represent policies of American Humane Association.

© Copyright 2011 by American Humane Association. All rights reserved.

About the Guest Editor

Amy Hahn, MSW is a Program Specialist in Child Welfare with American Humane Association. In her role, Hahn frequently develops curriculum and trains in specialized areas of child welfare, especially in the area of differential response in child protection. Under the differential response initiative, she coordinates activities of the National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services and has worked with numerous states on their implementation and expansion of differential response. In June 2011, Hahn began co-managing the Quality Improvement Center on Non Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System. Hahn received her B.A. from Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame and M.S.W. from the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work. She is also a volunteer for Denver CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates).

About the Content Reviewers

Debra A. Gilmore, MPA, JD, CWLS is currently a child welfare policy specialist with ICF International, providing support to the U.S. Children's Bureau's policy division. Previously, she worked at American Humane Association and served as interim director of the Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System. During her twenty year career in child welfare, she has been a consultant, trainer, agency attorney, legislative counsel, court appointed special advocate, and residential youth counselor. Ms. Gilmore was a 2008 recipient of a U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Adoption Excellence Award. She presented on American sociological theories of family violence in Argentina. She also has been published in the American Public Human Services Association's professional magazine, Policy & Practice. Ms. Gilmore received her J.D. from the University of Connecticut School of Law and her M.P.A. from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She is certified as a Child Welfare Law Specialist. With her wonderful husband, Cliff, she daily experiences the joys of being an adoptive parent.

Jessica Kendall is co-founder and director of Child & Family Policy Associates, LLC and has extensive experience working in the child welfare and juvenile justice fields at various levels. She has published many articles and books on a variety of status offense and child welfare topics and developed policy and white papers for major advocacy organizations. She has been on national and statewide advisory boards and has spoken at local, state and national conferences on topics ranging from differential response to father engagement. For five years, Jessica was an assistant staff director at the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law where she managed federal and private grants relating to father engagement, differential response, and juvenile status offenders. For many years she was also a member of the attorney guardian ad litem panel in Washington, D.C. where she represented children in child protection proceedings, as well as supervised volunteer attorneys who did the same. Jessica graduated from the Catholic University, Columbus School of Law with a J.D. and the University of Pennsylvania with a B.A.

Lisa Pilnik, JD, MS, is Director and Co-Founder of Child & Family Policy Associates where she focuses on child welfare and juvenile justice policy and practice. She previously served as a staff attorney at the ABA Center on Children and the Law, where she worked on issues related to father involvement in the child welfare system, juvenile status offenders, and the health of court-involved children. She has authored numerous publications on issues affecting children and families involved with the child protective and juvenile justice systems. Ms. Pilnik received her law degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School and a master of science degree from the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice.

In This Issue

Page 4
Introduction
Amy Hahn

Page 6
Fathers' Voices in the Child Welfare System: Not About Us Without Us
Ron J. Clark and Greg Cox

Page 10
Interaction with Mothers, Children, and Systems: Non-Resident Fathers' Self Reports
Joanna Reynolds

Page 29
Where are the Dads? Identifying, Locating, Contacting, and Engaging Non-Resident Fathers of Children in Foster Care
Nancy Thoeness, Carol J. Harper, Gail Folaron, Karin Malm, Oma McLaughlin, Jieru Bai, and Rasa Kaunelis

Page 43
Empowering Fathers: Changing Practice in Public Child Welfare
Gail Folaron, Jieru Bai, and Rob Schneider

Page 53
Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers in the Child Welfare System: How Facilitaors Rated the Sessions in the Model Intervention
Paul Frankel and Joanna Reynolds

Page 70
Helping Dads Be There for Their Kids: A Program Spotlight
Rich Batten and Maggie Spain

Page 82
Fathers in Child Welfare and Legislative Policy
John Sciamanna

Page 87
The Role of Child Advocates in Engaging Non-Resident Fathers and Their Families in Child Welfare Cases
Lara Bruce

Page 98
The Court's Role in Engaging Fathers: Resources from the QIC NRF
Lisa Pilnik and Jessica Kendall

Page 103
Valuing Fathers: Strategies to Enhance Father Engagement
Carol Harper and Natasha Grossman

Introduction

Amy Hahn

In this issue of *Protecting Children*, child welfare researchers and practitioners from across the nation share the lessons they learned from the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF). The QIC NRF is a 5-year (2007-2011), federally funded project to promote knowledge development around engaging non-resident fathers of children involved in the child welfare system, and the impact of that engagement on child safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes.

Through a previously commissioned report entitled *What About the Dads?* and through the Child and Family Services Reviews, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found evidence that very little meaningful engagement occurs between child welfare system professionals and fathers of children involved in that system. The QIC NRF selected four sites to implement a model intervention known as Bringing Back the Dads, a peer-led, 20-week course for fathers. An evaluation was conducted to assess model fidelity, examine the barriers and strategies to overcome barriers surrounding the intervention, and measure outputs and outcomes related to non-resident fathers in the child welfare system.

The QIC NRF has developed a project-culminating toolkit which includes three curricula (a peer-led curriculum for fathers in the child welfare system, a curriculum on father engagement for caseworkers, and a curriculum for legal professionals), a Guide for Fathers, court engagement tools, two Father Friendly Check-Ups™, and many other products, all available at www.fatherhoodqic.org.

The articles in this dedicated issue of *Protecting Children* provide a broad range of perspectives on the issues facing non-resident fathers, as well as the successes they have witnessed in communities around the country. The purpose of this issue is to share new knowledge on the engagement of non-resident fathers. From that vantage point, the issue identifies promising casework, legal and judicial best practices, raises awareness to reduce barriers to engagement, and explores policies that impact the engagement of non-resident fathers.

In "Fathers' Voices in the Child Welfare System: Not About Us Without Us," Ron J. Clark, director of the Family Strengthening Initiative at Hampton University, and Greg Cox, a parent leader for the National Fathers Advisory Council created by the QIC NRF, expounds on the significance of engaging fathers in an advisory capacity to make the most impactful reforms for fathers in the child welfare system.

In Joanna Reynolds' article, "Interaction with Mothers, Children, and Systems: Non-Resident Fathers' Self-Reports," she reports the QIC NRF's major findings from the project's four research and demonstration sites.

In Nancy Thoeness, Carol J. Harper, Gail Folaron, Karin Malm, Oma McLaughlin, Jieru Bai, and Rasa Kaunelis' article, "Where are the Dads? Identifying, Locating, Contacting, and Engaging Non-Resident Fathers of Children in Foster Care," discusses findings from the QIC NRF and recommendations based on those findings.

In "Empowering Fathers: Changing Practice in Public Child Welfare," Gail Folaron, Jieru Bai, and Rob Schneider describe Indiana's child welfare system reform efforts, including a mission to identify, locate, engage, and empower non-resident fathers.

Paul Frankel and Joanna Reynolds analyze the challenges and successes of the Bringing Back the Dads curriculum conducted by each of the QIC NRF project's four research and demonstration sites, in "Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers in the Child Welfare System: How Facilitators Rated the Sessions in the Model Intervention."

In "Helping Dads Be There for Their Kids: A Program Spotlight," Rich Batten and Maggie Spain share the many successes of the Colorado Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, including trainings, public awareness campaigns, and innovative strategies to engage the child welfare system.

In "Fathers in Child Welfare and Legislative Policy," John Sciamanna provides a thorough historical context of child support and child support enforcement efforts and the impact that context has on current day practices.

Lara Bruce then discusses the unique opportunities available to court appointed special advocates, guardians ad litem, and other child and parent representatives to engage non-resident fathers and paternal kin in "The Role of Child Advocates in Engaging Non-Resident Fathers and Their Families in Child Welfare Cases."

Lisa Pilnik and Jessica Kendall directly address the importance of the court, judges, and judicial officers in "The Court's Role in Engaging Fathers: Resources from the QIC NRF."

In the final article, "Valuing Fathers: Strategies to Enhance Father Engagement," Carol Harper and Natasha Grossman describe the work of the Washington State Fathers Engagement Program and offer recommendations for others states to consider based on feedback from the fathers enrolled in the program and the staff working with them.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to the following individuals for making this journal possible:

- The content reviewers and knowledge specialists for reviewing all of the articles;
- The authors who spent considerable time and energy to share their work; and
- The Children's Bureau for supporting the valuable work of the QIC NRF.

Fathers' Voices in the Child Welfare System: Not About Us Without Us

Ron J. Clark and Greg Cox

Ron J. Clark, M.A., M.B.A., possesses nearly 20 years of experience as a consultant, author, and conference presenter on fatherhood, adolescent male, child welfare, child support, and family service issues. He currently serves as director of the Family Strengthening Initiative at Hampton University, leading a statewide and state-funded multi-sector family strengthening initiative for the state of Virginia. Prior to this role, Mr. Clark provided leadership as director of the nationally recognized Virginia Governor's Fatherhood Campaign and as director of national programming for the National Fatherhood Initiative.

Greg Cox is the chairman of the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers' (QIC-NRF) Fathers Advisory Council. He also provides local leadership as chairman of the Cook County Birth Parent Council (BPC). In this role, he has attended focus groups with Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) staff and juvenile court officials, presented at DCFS Foundations Training for newly hired child welfare workers, and joined with another BPC member to present birth parent issues to approximately 150 juvenile court personnel. Mr. Cox's work focuses on helping to engage birth fathers who are involved with the child welfare system.

"I came to understand the importance of fatherhood through its absence—both in my life and in the lives of others. I came to understand that the hole a man leaves when he abandons his responsibility to his children is one that no government can fill."

President Barack Obama[1]

"Diversity is not about how many heads you count; it's about how much those heads count."

Dr. Johnnetta Cole,
Director of the Smithsonian
National Museum of
African Art

Reality and research clearly indicate that U.S. children who come from father-absent households are more prone to experience negative social, health, and economic outcomes. These outcomes cross racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines. Hence, it should be the business of government entities to help fathers be good parents and to maximize children's access to good fathers. However, one of the crucial mistakes of so many well-meaning efforts is the implementation of services with minimal to no input from the target audience. A 5-year-old federal project is making great strides to include the input of fathers in order to ensure that services and resources actually match the real needs and wants of the target population of fathers.

[1] Obama, Barack. (2011, June 16). We need fathers to step up. Parade.

Efforts of the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC-NRF) sprang from a 2006 study entitled What About the Dads?, which was prepared by the Urban Institute for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Malm, Murray, & Geen). This study clearly demonstrated a significant disconnect between the child welfare system and fathers. In short, the study showed that the child welfare system needs to change. It needs to undergo a major cultural shift toward valuing fathers and/or their paternal kin as a resource for children. Moreover, the child welfare system needs to proactively employ measures that expand its service reach toward engaging fathers and/or their paternal kin as a resource for children.

As a vehicle to aid its effort to bring about systemic change, the QIC-NRF developed a National Fathers Advisory Council (NFAC) from a select group of fathers sourced primarily from its four demonstration sites. The group met numerous times over the 5-year project; members were given stipends for their time and all travel expenses were reimbursed. The purpose of the NFAC was to provide leadership, act in an advisory capacity, and be a voice for fathers whose children have been involved in the child welfare system.

One of the chief tasks of the NFAC was to dismantle myths about non-resident dads. Too often, these men are viewed as non-caring when it comes to their children. However, the NFAC membership knows first-hand that dads are often absent due to issues outside of their direct control. Many non-resident fathers struggle with various obstacles, such as unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, and physical and mental illness. Additionally, other challenges such as child support arrearage and conflict with the child(ren)'s mother(s) can cause undue personal and child access problems for fathers.

NFAC members provided relevant comments on these factors in order to guide QIC-NRF staff. The following are examples of heartfelt quotes from NFAC members:

- "Many non-resident fathers feel like no one is hearing them."
- "Staff need to listen to fathers' needs before pushing the paperwork."
- "Many men feel inadequate to face the court system alone."
- "Self-support is critical. . . . If you can't take care of yourself, it's hard to focus on your child or other program services."
- "Many men are dealing with depression and other mental health challenges."
- "Program staff may need to deal with other major issues such as homelessness, substance abuse, mental health, and transportation before addressing fatherhood issues."
- "Many men lack confidence in government programs because of past unfulfilled commitments from government programs…; [for example, they may have] completed [a] job training program but never received [a] job."
- "Due to personal father absence, many men do not have any idea how to be a father. They learn parenting in the process. Our kids are teaching us how to be parents."
- "Show successful stories [via video] of fathers…who have regained custody of their children."
- "Facilitator needs to consistently and continually acknowledge minor and major progress steps by the father."

Fathers are too often labeled as "deadbeats" when they are actually dead broke, according to Solangel Maldonado, professor and researcher at Seton Hall University School of Law (2006). In her 2006 study of the federal child support system and its impact on low-income fathers, Maldonado noted that many low-income fathers provide indirect support to their children (e.g., diapers, milk, and clothing) instead of direct payments through the child support system. Moreover, Maldonado states that 70% of outstanding child support is owed by fathers who make less than $10,000 per year. In other words, they do not lack the will but may lack the necessary resources to support themselves and their children. Therefore, individualized supportive services and resources need to be employed, rather than the common punitive measures, such as court-ordered deliverables, without a determination as to the actual capacity of the fathers to deliver.

Many low-income fathers provide indirect support to their children (e.g., diapers, milk, and clothing) instead of direct payments through the child support system. Moreover, Maldonado states that 70% of outstanding child support is owed by fathers who make less than $10,000 per year.

In addition to qualitative input to QIC-NRF, NFAC members played a role in reviewing and editing QIC-NRF resources prior to final production. The QIC-NRF wanted to ensure that resource content matched the actual needs of its target population of fathers. NFAC members screened pertinent documents to ensure that content, style, and graphics would actually resonate with men. Some documents reviewed included:[2]

- Bringing Back the Dads Curriculum: Steps in the Juvenile Court Process
- Bringing Back the Dads Curriculum: Navigating the Child Welfare System
- Father Guide #1: Your Rights and Responsibilities
- Father Guide #2: What to Do in Court
- Father Guide #3: What You Should Do Outside of Court

NFAC members were not only able to help create father-friendly materials; they were also given the opportunity to share their personal experiences with the system to key stakeholders and to record sound advice, via videotaped interviews, to assist child welfare professionals in involving non-resident fathers. NFAC members signed consent forms and agreed to be videotaped and interviewed in order for their voices to be heard. The interviews serve as training tools to educate child welfare professionals about the unique needs and perspectives of non-resident fathers. Additionally, many NFAC fathers met with elected officials in their communities and participated on panels during community forums to further provide a voice for fathers. Some fathers even co-presented at national conferences to demonstrate community and personal impact of project services and resources.[3]

[2] These resources can be obtained at www.fatherhoodqic.org.
[3] Many of these videos and resources are available on the project website, www.fatherhoodqic.org.

NFAC members met six times during the course of the 5-year grant. Fathers from diverse ethnic, geographic, and socio-economic backgrounds took advantage of the opportunity to be part of a national project that could change the course and the views of a nation on fatherhood. Fathers from different locations (Colorado Springs, CO; Chicago, IL; Indianapolis, IN; Milwaukee, WI; Seattle, WA; and Tarrant County, TX) realized that they all had one thing in common: they all loved their children and thus were willing to help make a difference for their families and for the families that would come after them. Local Fathers Advisory Councils (LFAC) were established in communities of the local demonstration sites, including Seattle, WA; Tarrant County, TX; and Indianapolis, IN. Once established in the local areas, parent leaders recruit LFAC members, host LFAC meetings, present at local conferences, and serve as a voice for fathers to the local child welfare system.

In conclusion, the NFAC and the LFACs greatly benefit the child welfare system and children. The child welfare system experiences that were shared by the NFAC members increased the QIC-NRF's capacity to assist professionals in effectively engaging fathers as a resource for children in the system. Rather than wasting countless hours and dollars in seeking and supporting non-parental placement options for children, the child welfare system now understands that it has a very valuable natural resource in fathers. It is now understood that responsible and committed fathers can fill the gap as the safe, competent, and willing placement option. Most importantly, the children benefit from the involvement of their fathers and experience positive life outcomes on so many fronts.

References

Maldonado, S. (2006). Deadbeat or deadbroke: Redefining child support for poor fathers. *UC Davis Law Review, 39*(991), 993-1023. Retrieved from http://lawreview.law.ucdavis.edu/issues/Vol39/Issue3/DavisVol39No3_MALDONADO.pdf

Malm, K., Murray, J., & Geen, R. (2006). *What about the dads? Child welfare agencies' efforts to identify, locate and involve nonresident fathers*. Washington, DC: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Retrieved from http://urban.org/UploadedPDF/411316_nonresident_fathers.pdf

Interaction with Mothers, Children, and Systems: Non-Resident Fathers' Self-Reports

Joanna Reynolds

Joanna Reynolds, M.A., worked as a research associate for American Humane Association from February 2005 to May 2011. She has worked in project evaluation and impact assessment, developing surveys, conducting data management and analysis, and writing and editing reports. She has participated in workload studies for several jurisdictions, including Jefferson County Department of Human Services and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, as well as the Washington DSHS Children's Administration, a position in which she analyzed the data, conducted focus groups, and collaborated on the report to the Washington DSHS Children' Administration. She has also conducted data analyses and compiled reports in the Philadelphia Outcomes Measure Project (1996-2006) for the Children and Youth Division in Philadelphia. Ms. Reynolds served as evaluator for the Rocky Mountain Quality Improvement Center and currently serves as evaluation consultant for the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers, as well as for the Family Finding and Engagement initiative conducted by the California Administrative Office of the Courts. She holds an M.A. in economics.

Introduction

In the wake of a series of initiatives to strengthen families and reinforce the role of fathers in their children's lives, child protection systems began to examine the impact of father absence on child outcomes, and, in turn, the role of mother-centric practice in perpetuating the tenuousness of family connections on the father's side. A rich array of information regarding social work practice emerged from the 2006 study What About the Dads? (Malm, Murray, & Geen), funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and, as a result, several fatherhood initiatives and programs focusing on child protection, early education, and other social programs have been implemented and evaluated since the first round of Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) completed in 2004 and the 2006 study.

In further response to the growing attention to father absence, the U.S. Children's Bureau funded the Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System, (QIC NRF).[1] The QIC NRF has developed a peer-led curriculum for fathers in the child welfare system, a curriculum on father engagement for caseworkers, a book and curriculum for legal professionals concerned with the rights and responsibilities of fathers with respect to children in the child welfare system, and many other resources and tools.

[1] The QIC NRF is funded under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. The QIC NRF is staffed by three partner agencies, the American Humane Association, the American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law, and the National Fatherhood Initiative.

The QIC NRF was also tasked with developing knowledge about the process and outcomes of engaging fathers. The initial goals of the evaluation and research activities were to evaluate fidelity to a specific model, examine barriers to this process, document strategies to overcome these barriers, measure outputs, and measure outcomes. The QIC NRF evaluation team designed the outcomes measurement to confirm the hypothesis that outcomes for children in foster care would improve if fathers became more engaged both in their children's lives and in child welfare agency practice. In addition, outcomes measurement was initially designed to test the effectiveness of model intervention, and, finally, outcomes measurement was designed to discern those demographic and environmental factors which might mediate the outcomes.

Four sites were selected to implement the model intervention. The program stipulated that a key partner at each site be a county or state child welfare agency, and each site was a county child welfare agency and its partners. Site outreach staff were to contact all non-resident fathers of children in foster care (with certain restrictions, to be described below) and engage them in a 20-week peer-led support program. To be eligible, a prospective participant had to reside outside of the home from which his child was removed, reside in the county of implementation, not reside in a correctional facility, not have relinquished parental rights, and not present a safety concern for the program child(ren). Sites planned to field 10-12 cohorts of 20 fathers each, randomly assigned to either a treatment or a control group.

For the model intervention, a 12-week curriculum was developed for the program, thanks to a supplemental grant. The first 3 weeks were prescribed. The remaining 9 modules were to be conducted in an order to be determined by the fathers themselves, and the final 8 weeks of the program were to be conducted as the groups determined their needs (e.g., extra time on a particularly pertinent module, more in-depth coverage of a particular area). Sites began implementation in 2008, and recruited fathers from August 2008 through September 2010. They ceased to provide services at the end of December 2010. The sites conducted the program in 6 to 11 cohorts.

During the first 6 months of operation, however, all four sites reported contacting fathers in numbers far lower than expected (due to challenges discussed in detail later in this article). The QIC NRF decided to change its research design from a random assignment control study to a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design and, recognizing that this low enrollment itself presented a significant set of issues, the QIC NRF and site staff turned their attention to outreach activities. Elsewhere in these pages, the four site evaluators profile the non-resident fathers of children in foster care, explore the barriers to identifying, locating, and contacting these fathers, and document the strategies employed to overcome these barriers.

In the meantime, the evaluation staff of the QIC NRF continued to assess the group of fathers who were contacted and who did sign up for the program. Site evaluators[2] sent data from father interviews on 228 fathers in all. More fathers were interviewed but were found to be ineligible. This article examines the non-resident fathers of children in foster care who actually enrolled in the program (although many did not attend the sessions). It profiles the fathers and examines whether the nature of their interaction with the mothers of their children, their interaction with their children, and their interaction with the child welfare systems changed during the course of the program.

[2] The author wishes to thank the site evaluators and staff for their collection, management, and submittal of data on a regular and timely basis. Their input and discussion, also on a regular basis, has proven to be invaluable.

Interestingly, in those areas where there is no significant change from baseline to subsequent interviews, the baseline figures were higher than expected, possibly higher than the general population of non-resident fathers of children in foster care. These high baseline figures invite a discussion of this group of fathers as a distinct subpopulation of non-resident fathers of children in the foster care system, of how they may be served, and, by implication, how the other subpopulations may be served. The next section outlines the methods of this study, followed by a general profile of the characteristics of fathers in the child welfare system, and then sections devoted to outputs and results, discussion, and conclusions.

Methods

While other parts of the study involve comparison groups derived from Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) data, this article is confined to a piece of the study which can best be termed quasi-experimental, following a single-group inter-temporal design. The findings cited here come from father self-reports based on interviews as described below.

The evaluators maintained, among others, two databases centering on fathers, one on all fathers of children entering foster care in the four site counties (the "recruitment database" or "recruiting log"), and one on fathers who had been contacted and who agreed to participate in the program (referred to as "program father database," "interview database," or "father self-report database"). The recruitment database was maintained through collaboration between the outreach staff and evaluators at each site and was submitted to the QIC NRF cross-site evaluators on a regular basis throughout the program. This database served to profile the pool in general terms, barriers to reaching and engaging fathers, and the efforts of outreach staff to overcome these barriers. This database has 3,951 records representing the entire pool of fathers of children in foster care. Of these, 2,810 fathers were considered "applicable." Applicable fathers were those who were non-resident, not deceased, and still in possession of parental rights. Unknown fathers were considered applicable unless found to be otherwise. Finally, 842 of the applicable fathers were in the region, had contact information ("accessible fathers"), and were free of safety concerns.

The second database, the program father database, contained the self-reports of the 228 fathers who signed up for the program. At each site, either the outreach staff or session facilitator interviewed the fathers who consented to participate in the program. The majority of father-centered outcomes data came directly from these father self-reports. The interviewers filled out a protocol for each interview and sent these to the evaluation team at each site. Site evaluators then entered these data into a database, which were sent periodically to the cross-site evaluators. Father-related data were collected at intake (T1, baseline), 8 weeks into the program (T2, short-term outcomes), and at or close to exit from the program (T3, intermediate-term outcomes, approximately 16 weeks after program start). These variables measured the outcomes of father attitudes toward—and ease of interaction with—the child welfare systems, as well as nature and quality of engagement with their children in foster care. Facilitators were asked to supplement the father interview database with attendance records for each program father.

A further database was derived from the father interview database (the "long child file"), which measured father-child interactions and support for each child, 320 children in all, less two children termed "not part of the investigation."

The evaluators summarized and analyzed change scores and correlations using largely non-parametric statistics, as the low sample sizes and non-normal distributions did not permit many of

the parametric analyses the evaluators had hoped to perform.

Background and General Characteristics of Fathers

The Pool in General: Fathers of Children in Foster Care

During the initial stages of the project, QIC NRF staff estimated that roughly one half to three quarters of the children in foster care would have been removed from homes without biological fathers.[3] As mentioned above, sites kept a recruiting log accounting for every father of every child removed from the home during the period of operation (August 2008 to September 2010). According to these logs, about three quarters of children removed from their homes were removed from homes where their biological fathers were not present. Of these non-resident fathers, many were incarcerated (14%), many had moved out of jurisdiction (22%), many had no reliable contact information (21%), some presented a safety risk to the child (13%), and some were completely unknown. Thus, of the non-resident fathers noted in the logs, only one quarter were eventually contacted.[4]

Program Fathers

The fathers who enrolled in the program numbered 22 in Colorado, 98 in Indiana, 67 in Texas, and 41 in Washington. Their median age was 28, and the median age at birth of first child was 24. Table 1 shows demographic characteristics for these fathers. The most populous site (Indiana) drove the cross-site averages, but not all sites paralleled the central tendency. The range column shows considerable variation across sites with respect to age, full-time employment, educational attainment, and race/ethnicity.

Table 1. Father Characteristics

Characteristic	Statistic	Range of Site Statistics
Median Age	28	26 – 36
Median Age at Birth of First Child	24	21 – 32
Modal Employment Status: Unemployed, Looking	48%	29% – 59%
Percent Employed Full-Time	21%	17% – 32%
Education: Percent with Less Than 12 Years	54%	29% – 73%
Percent with 12 Years	23%	10% – 37%
Percent with More Than 12 Years	23%	16% – 33%
Race/Ethnicity: Percent African American	53.6%	31.8% – 65.3%
Race/Ethnicity: Percent White	31%	28.6% – 59.1%
Race/Ethnicity: Percent Hispanic	8%	1% – 28%
Race/Ethnicity: Percent Native American	6%	3% – 16%
Race/Ethnicity: Percent Asian	<1%	2% of a single site
Race/Ethnicity: Percent Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	1%	7% of a single site

The number of children a father has may influence the quality of his interactions or his support. Almost three quarters of program fathers had one child, 18% had two children, and 10% had three, four, or five combined. Based on mothers' first names, 10 program fathers (4%) had children by more than one mother; fathers reported more than one mother at only two of the four sites.

[3] This estimate was based on an estimate in Malm, Murray, and Geen (2006), in turn based on an examination of FFY 2002 AFCARS files.

[4] Site evaluators report extensively on the barriers to identification, locating and contacting fathers, and the strategies used to overcome these barriers elsewhere in these pages (Thoennes et al., 2011).

While multi-partner fertility is often cited as a complicating factor in father support and involvement, relatively few of these fathers were in this situation. This figure is lower than the 59% cited by Turney and Carlson (2010) for a similar population or the 8% for a "representative sample of American men" (Guzzo & Furstenberg, 2007).

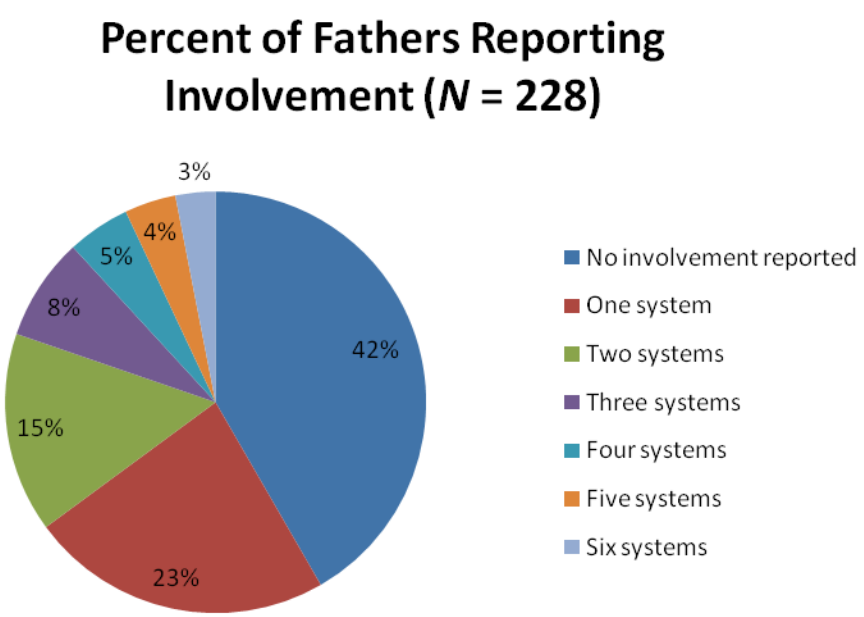
Housing, Health, Substance Abuse, Mental Health, and Transportation

There are many challenges facing non-resident fathers of children in foster care, factors which could influence their participation in the intervention and their outcomes pertaining to interaction with mothers, children, and system. As mentioned above, program fathers were interviewed three times, once at consent, once after 8 weeks, and once after 16 weeks. The first interview sought two types of information: identifying and contextual information, and baseline information to be used in order to assess results. The contextual information contained in this section profiles the fathers and describes the factors which may have mediated the results.

While the recruitment logs reveal that housing difficulties often impeded contact (many fathers not contacted were noted to be "homeless"), this study did not gather information on housing from program fathers. Since only fathers able to be contacted were included in the program, the program selected for some degree of stability in housing.

Ill health can certainly serve as a barrier to participation and engagement with one's children. During the first of three interviews, fathers were asked about their health. Overall, 43% reported themselves to be in excellent health, while an additional 29% reported good health, 20% reported themselves to be in average health, and only 7% reported below average or poor health. Fathers were also asked whether any visits with children had been cancelled due to illness or injury, and few reported that they had. Again, as with housing, it is possible that selection bias in favor of healthy fathers may skew findings with respect to health and health-related outcomes.

Figure 1. Involvement with Other Agencies (Excluding CSE)



Some context questions were deferred to the second interview, as staff deemed them too invasive for the first. Fathers were asked at the second interview to provide information on substance abuse and mental health treatment. Of the 96 fathers who responded, 39 fathers (41%), reported receiving treatment for substance abuse at some point in their lives, and 38% of those responding reported seeing a counselor for mental health issues.

Limited mobility can affect program participation, visitation, and other activities related to involvement with children or self-care. Thirty percent of program fathers reported that they had a car; the remaining fathers took public transportation, borrowed cars, accepted rides from family, walked, or rode bicycles or motorcycles. The four sites were in urban areas; thus, participants had some means of transportation at their disposal.

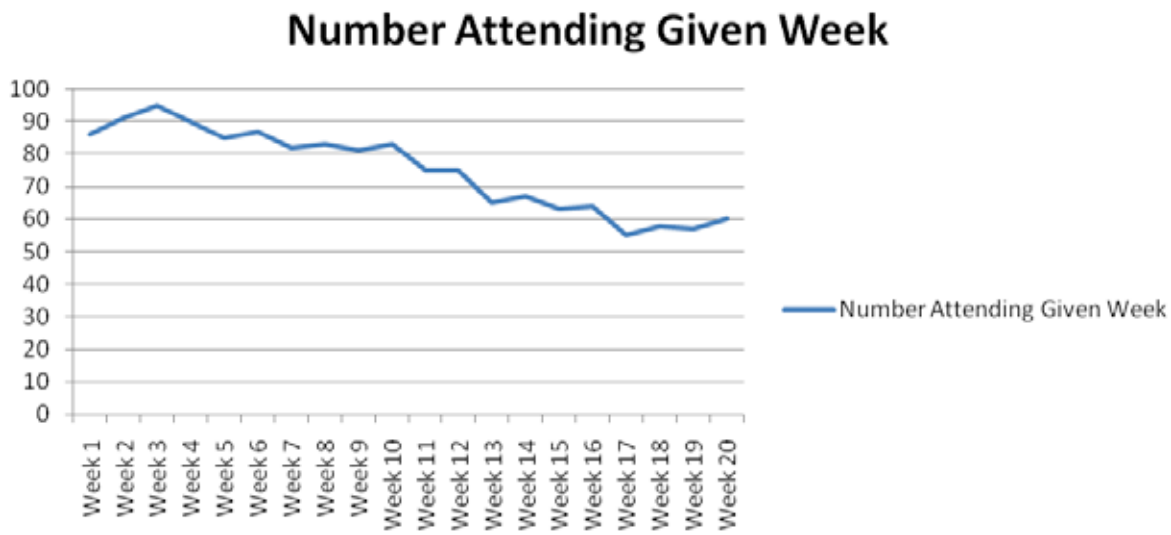
During Phase I, the needs assessment phase of the QIC NRF project, many informants cited complexity of system interaction as a possible mediating factor for participating in the program and for engagement with children. In order to assess take-up factors, fathers were asked, in the three interviews, whether they had had dealings with TANF administrations, law enforcement, corrections, the court system, legal aid, an employment service, or any other agency since the last interview. Since two sites elected not to pose these questions at first interview, a variable was created for each system with a value of "1" if fathers had answered "yes" to the given questions either at baseline or at the second interview. This new series was summed to determine whether fathers were interacting with several systems at once, concurrently with their participation in the program. As Figure 1 shows, roughly 45% of fathers reported involvement with at least two agencies. While these multiple involvements presumably complicate fathers' lives, not all interactions or changes in interaction are affected by these complexities.

Outputs and Results

Attendance

Basic to measuring the impacts of any intervention is "take-up," defined as the degree to which participants avail themselves of services or

Figure 2. General Attendance



comply with requirements. Attendance records show that retention of fathers participating proved problematic. The original sample of fathers consisted of 228 fathers. For each father interviewed, the number of sessions attended was summed. Ninety-three fathers took the first interview but attended no sessions (41%). Of those who did attend at least one sesson (N = 127), one-quarter attended fewer than 7, half attended fewer than 11 (the median), one quarter attended 16 or more sessons. Three fathers attended all 20 sessions.

For each week number, the total attending was also summed across cohorts. Of those who attended, more fathers (95 fathers, or 42%) attended week 3 than any other. The last week drew 60 attendees, or 26% of program fathers. In spite of the steep attrition, facilitators report engagement among those who attended (see Frankel & Reynolds, 2011).

As shown in Figure 2, the attrition is gradual, with attendance hovering in the 70s for several weeks before falling away. Approximately one quarter of program fathers (all fathers taking the first interview) attended week 12. These attrition results do not differ markedly from other social welfare programs. One study of substance abuse programs cited a completion range from 18% to 25%, depending on treatment modality (Wickizer et al., 1994), and Johnson and colleagues' metastudy of parenting education cited a "high rate of attrition" for a program which it determined to be promising (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 220). One fatherhood program evaluator cited a 30% completion rate over 13 weeks (Roy & Dyson, 2010).

Attendance figures are also compiled for each father and summarized. As Table 2 indicates, many fathers dropped out initially. Out of those 105 fathers who attended fewer than 3 sessions, 99 attended no sessions. Thus, the steepest attrition occurred during the interval between sign-up and first session.

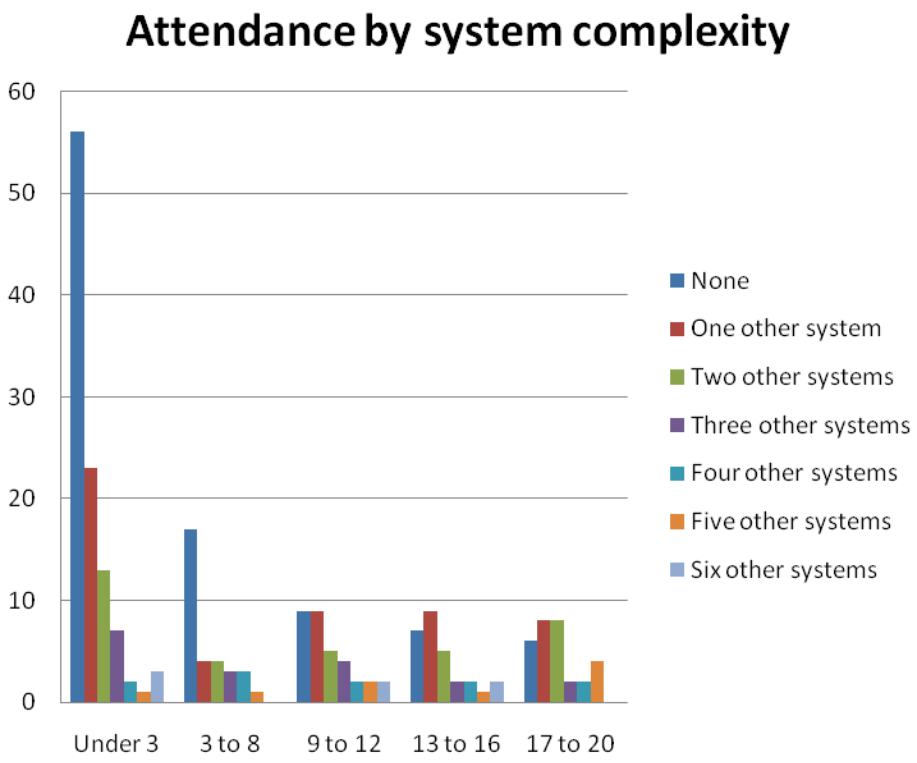
Table 2. Participant Attendance

Attendance (Mean sessions attended = 6.59)	
Number of Sessions Attended by a Given Father	Number of Fathers Attending
Under 3 sessions	105
3 to 8 sessions	32
4 to 12 sessions	33
13 to 16 sessions	28
17 to 20 sessions	30
Total	**228**

How do the challenges facing fathers affect their attendance? During Phase I of the QIC NRF project, informants cited such barriers to engagement as lack of transportation and complexity of system involvement, and QIC NRF staff included these in the interview protocols as possible factors which may influence attendance. Fathers were asked if they drove their own car or motorcycle, and, if not, what form of transportation they used. Transportation and agency complexity as captured in the father interviews were cross-tabulated with attendance to determine if either of these factors bore a significant relationship to attendance. Transportation bore no significant relationship to attendance,[5] while complexity did bear a significant relationship to attendance, but not in the expected direction. The significance was driven by those attending no sessions, the majority of which had no other system involvement. In fact, among those fathers attending more than 8 sessions, differences in system complexity were hardly apparent, as shown in Figure 3. No other demographic or environmental factor has been found to exhibit any statistical relationship with attendance.

[5] The absence of any statistical relationship between transportation and attendance may be explained by the pains taken by the sites to meet the participants' needs. Fathers were given gas cards and/or bus passes as incentives to continue participation.

Figure 3. Participant Attendance by Complexity of System Involvement



Baseline Interactions

Interaction with Mothers at Baseline

The baseline interview contained four questions designed to assess relationship and interaction with the mothers of program fathers' children. Fathers were asked to characterize the past relationship at its strongest (married, committed relationship, on-again-off-again, casual, hardly knew her), present relationship (committed relationship, steady but not exclusive, casual, just friends, not friends), how they get along (very well; moderately well; not well, not badly; not well; very badly; no interaction), and how many times spoken with the mother in the past 3 months.

Nearly half (49%) of fathers characterized their past relationships with mothers as a committed relationship, and this was the most frequent response in all sites (see Figure 4). Add to this the 15% of fathers who reported having been married, and the percentage of committed relationships inclusive of marriage is 63%. Beyond that, however, patterns differ across sites. In Indiana and Washington, the next most populous category was "on-again, off-again", while in Colorado and Texas the next most populous category was "married." Overall, only 5% of fathers reported, "I hardly knew her." One should draw inferences with caution, however, as the fathers in this program were those most readily found. Program evaluators speculate that the fact that such a high proportion of these fathers report having been married or committed to their children's mothers may bear some relation to their accessibility.

Figure 4. Past Relationship with Mothers at Baseline

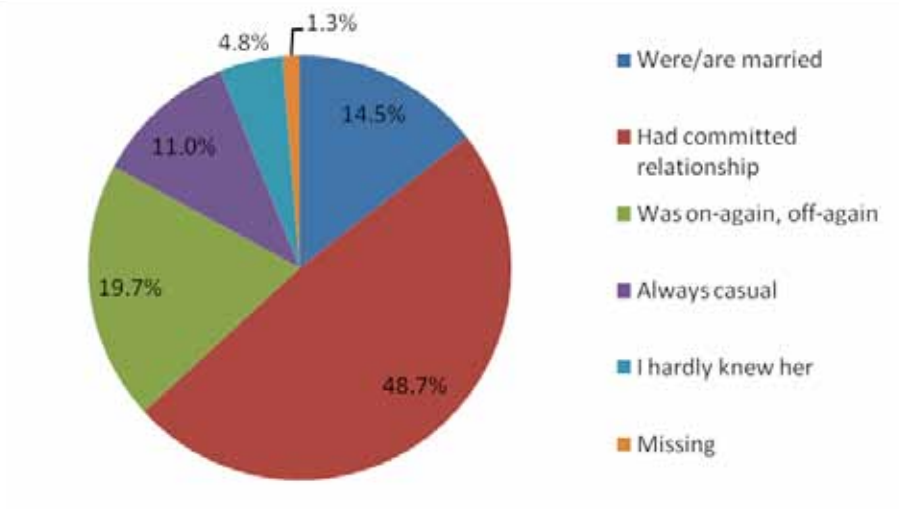


Figure 5. Present Relationship with Mothers at Baseline

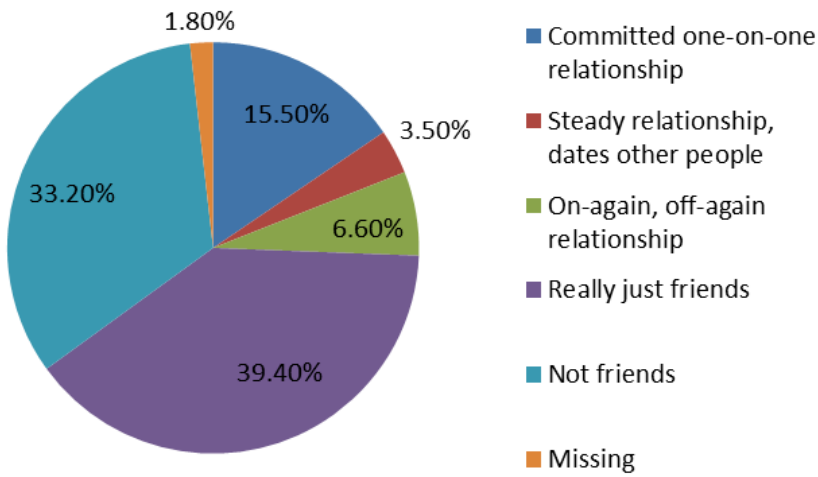
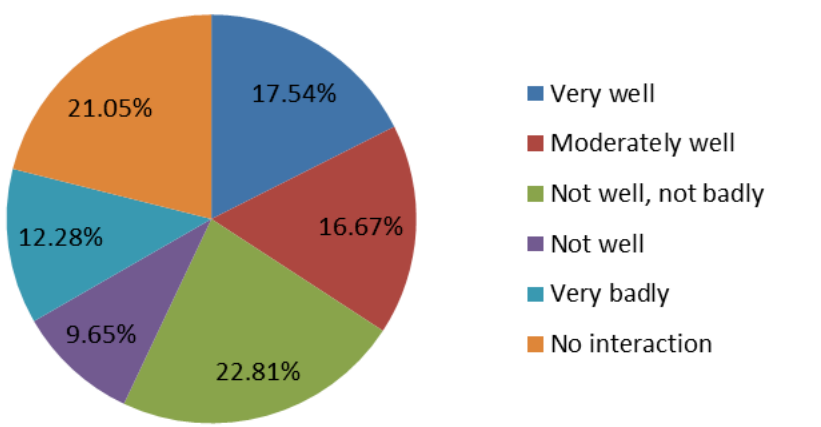


Figure 6. Get Along?



Fathers characterize their current relationships with benign neutrality as well (Figure 5). The most populous category (39%) for present relationship is "really just friends," and the second most populous (33%) is "not friends." Interestingly, two sites follow (drive) this pattern, while two sites differ. Some report having a committed relationship with their children's mothers (15%).

Present interaction patterns ("how they were getting along at the time of the program") cannot be generalized across sites (see Figure 6). While, overall, the neutral category ("not well, not badly") was the most populous, it does not clearly predominate in any of the sites. In Colorado, 32% reported that they got along with the mother of the first child "very well"; in Indiana, equal numbers (28%) reported getting along "not well, not badly" and having "no interaction"; in Texas, 27% reported "very well"; and, in Washington, 22% of fathers reported that they got along "very well" with mothers of the first child. It is interesting to note that over half of the fathers reported a better-than-antagonistic relationship with the mothers of their first children.

The final variable measuring father-mother interaction counts communication events. At first interview, fathers were asked how many times they had spoken with their children's mothers in the past 3 months. This variable shows a bi-modal pattern. At the low end, 34% of fathers had spoken to the mothers of their children once, twice, or not at all, while 14% of fathers report conversation on a daily basis. As shown in Table 3, half of all fathers spoke with the mothers of their children under six times. Sites vary considerably as to median and modal number of communication events. A table breaking down these frequencies for the four sites is included here, as it shows how the sites vary in mean and median numbers. It is beyond the scope of this study to discern the reasons for this variation. If this study is replicated, some general tendencies may emerge, or regional differences in conditioning factors may be found to account for these differences.

Table 3. Frequency of Communication with Mothers Within Last 3 Months (First Interview)

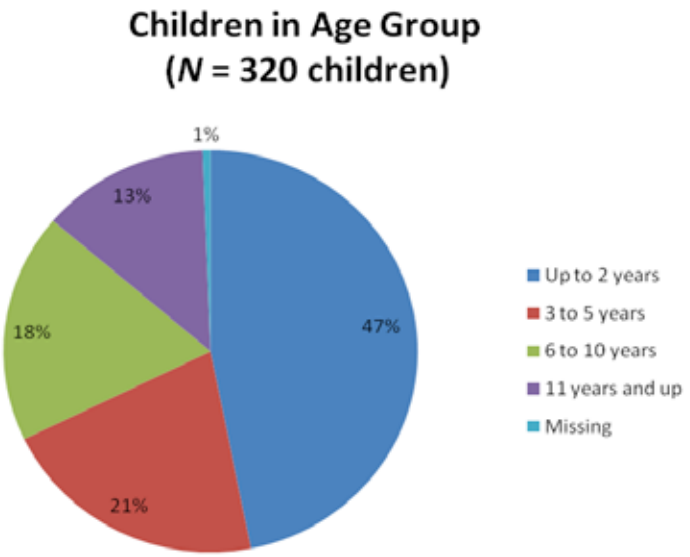
	Site				
	CO	IN	TX	WA	Overall
N =	13	98	59	30	200
Number Not Responding to This Question	9	0	8	11	28
Mean	11.69	22.40	30.92	23.97	24.45
Median	1.00	10.00	10.00	3.00	6.00
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum	90	90	236	100	236

Interaction with children

The fathers' interactions with their children was assessed at baseline and in the two subsequent interviews. Measurable indicators included the frequency of father-child visits and the degree to which fathers had observed their children's tastes and development. Open-ended questions probed activities and topics of conversation while visiting. In addition, fathers were asked if they had visited their children's schools.

Almost half of the children of program fathers were either infants or toddlers, and an additional 21% were very young (see Figure 7). The median age of these children was 3 years, whereas the median age of children at first removal in the four states in general is 7 years. Many of the questions asked of fathers to elicit their reports of child interaction and other parenting activities are not relevant to children in the youngest age group. Hence, in some analyses, the evaluators selected for children for whom the question was appropriate.

Figure 7. Ages of Program Children



At baseline, most fathers in this population could name three activities their children enjoyed. Evaluators summarized these measures using the long child file and the father file, measuring the responses for the oldest child. The response patterns were similar, and eldest child percentages are given here. Evaluators selected for fathers of oldest children 3 years of age or older. At baseline, 99 fathers responded. Of those responding, 83% of fathers named three activities, while 4% of those responding named none.

Frequency of visits with children at baseline showed a high degree of dispersion. Fathers were asked at baseline how often they had visited their children in the past month. Visits with oldest child were measured. Of the 225 fathers responding to that question, 21% reported no visits, 20% reported fewer than one visit per week, 32% reported once or twice a week, 8% reported three or four times per week, 3% reported four to six times per week, and 15% reported daily visits. Thus, a third reported weekly visits, over a third reported infrequent or no visits, while a quarter reported visits more than once a week. Interestingly, many of these were clustered at the daily end.

At baseline, 39 fathers reported having visited their children's schools, constituting 17% of the total number of fathers and 41% of school-aged children (children over 5 years of age).

Interaction with Systems at Baseline

At the baseline interviews, fathers were asked several questions about their interaction with the child protective services (CPS) agency: whether they felt they had been treated fairly; whether they had been interviewed; whether they knew their caseworker's name; whether they had expressed an interest in serving as a placement resource for their children; and whether CPS had expressed an interest in placing the children with them.

Table 4. Did the Child Protection Agency Interview You at the Time of Placement?

	Number of Fathers (Within-Site Percentage of Fathers)				
	CO	IN	TX	WA	Overall
No	6 (27.3%)	34 (34.7%)	29 (43.3%)	14 (34.1%)	83 (36.4%)
Yes	14 (63.6%)	64 (65.3%	37 (55.2%)	27 (65.9%)	142 (62.3%)
Missing	2 (9.1%)		1 (1.5%)		3 (1.3%)
Total	**22 (100%)**	**98 (100%)**	**67 (100%)**	**41 (100%)**	**228 (100%)**

Fathers' interaction with CPS is a key element in the program and in the curriculum. As fathers become more skilled in navigating through the child welfare system, they may develop more positive interactions. The perceptions of how they were treated at baseline run the full gamut of responses. Overall, more fathers indicated that they were treated "very fairly" than any other response category, but this was the most frequent response in only one of the four sites—Indiana. In Colorado and Texas, an equal number responded neutrally. In Washington, more fathers responded "not at all fairly" than in any other category.

The degree to which fathers are included in planning can be measured from both the fathers' and the agencies' perspectives. At baseline, fathers were asked to report on whether the agency had interviewed them at the time of their child's placement (see Table 4). Of the 228 fathers who agreed to join the program, 142, or 62% of program fathers, reported having been interviewed by CPS. In all sites, those who reported not having been interviewed range from 27% (9% missing) to 43%. This is a worrisome proportion of those fathers who in fact have proven to be the most accessible. The 142 fathers who report having been interviewed constitute approximately 5% of applicable fathers considered for enrollment by the four sites to date.

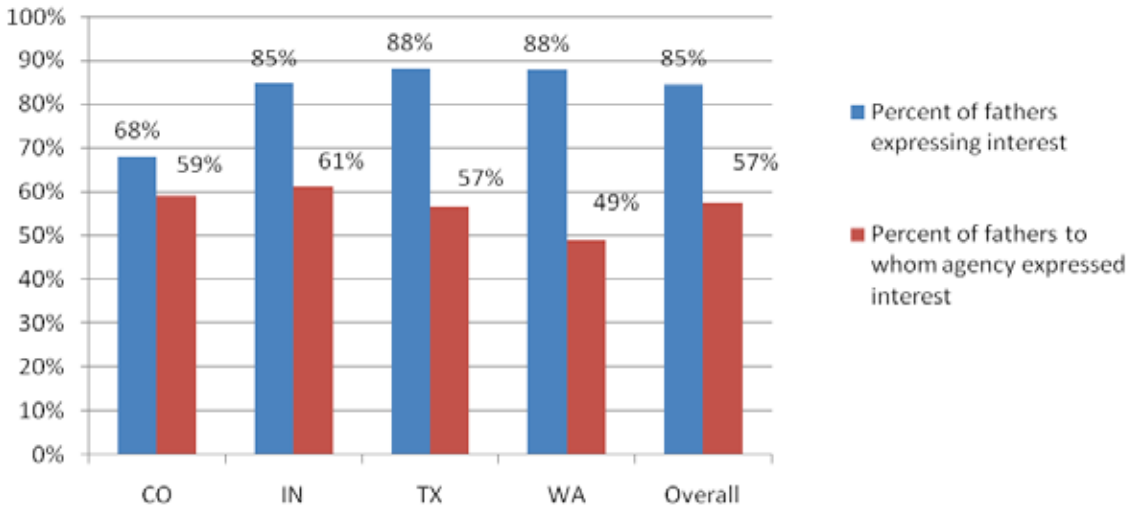
As for variation among sites, these proportions show less than one would expect. Demographic variables differed among sites more than did this one. In three sites, just under two thirds of program fathers reported that CPS interviewed them, while, in the remaining site, those interviewed come to just over one half.

Two other aspects of fathers' interaction with the system were whether the father expressed interest in having the child live with him, and whether CPS expressed interest in placing the child with the father. As Figure 8 indicates, 85% of fathers interviewed at baseline for the QIC NRF expressed an interest in having their children live with them. Percentages range from 68% to 88%. There is no way of knowing how many fathers not contacted by the QIC NRF expressed such an interest.

Figure 8 indicates that a smaller proportion of fathers interviewed for the QIC NRF were approached by CPS concerning the placement of their children with them. Overall, 57% of fathers interviewed at baseline reported being approached, while percentages ranged from 49% to 61%.[6]

[6] These percentages are somewhat higher than those in Malm et al. (2006). In a sample of 1,071 non-resident fathers with whom caseworkers had been in contact, 50% of these fathers expressed an interest in having the children placed with them, while 47% of 1,050 fathers were considered for placement by agencies. 1,071 represents the number of fathers case workers reported contacting at least once. Authors noted that "Caseworkers responded "don't know" to the question regarding whether the agency had considered the father as a placement resource in 21 identified and contacted father cases."

Figure 8. Interest in Placement (Temporary or Permanent) of Children with Father



Changes

Interaction with Mothers

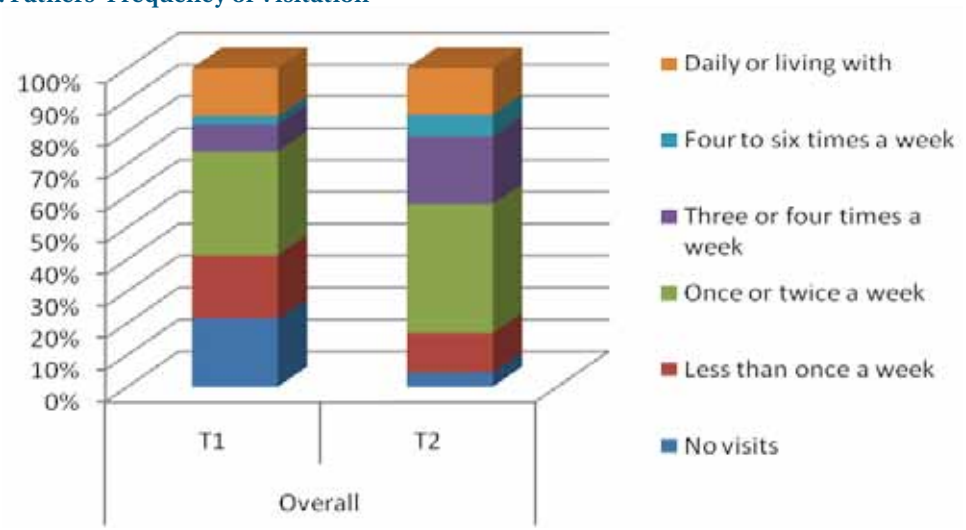
In all three sets of interviews, the interviewers asked participating fathers how many times the father had spoken with his child's mother over the past 3 months. The median number of times the fathers reported speaking with the mothers of their children at first interview was 6; at the second interview the median was 4; at the third, the median was 2 (see Table 5).[7] These tendencies suggest that attention should be paid to the issue of the damping of impact in general, and to support for the emotional issues between parents in particular. It should be noted that these changes were not found to be statistically significant. Replications of this project with higher numbers may show a different pattern.

Interaction with Children

As fathers become involved with their children, it is hoped that visits become more regular and more frequent. Data measuring the number of visits reported by program fathers in the month before referral show that 41% of children had either no visits with their fathers or visits occurring less than once a week (93 out of 228 fathers). At the time of the second interview—8 weeks after the first session—17% of children received visits less frequently than once a week (15 out of 89 fathers). High numbers of visits per month equated to daily visits, twice daily visits, or residential proximity. Some fathers are in fact living with the relative in whose care the child has been placed.

[7] The means, on the other hand, are driven by outliers. At the first interview, fathers reported speaking with the mothers of their eldest children 24 times on average during the past 3 months. At the second interview, fathers reported speaking with their children's mothers on average 17 times since last interview (usually 2 months). The application of a weight of 1.5 (3/2) to the second interview figure yields an average of about 25. Among those interviewed a third time, fathers report speaking to the mothers of their eldest children on average 27 times. Evaluators at one site represented this figure as several hundred times (since last interview) for two fathers who spoke to their children's mothers several times daily, hence the discrepancy between means and medians.

Figure 9. Fathers' Frequency of Visitation



Since many of the fathers reflected in Figure 9 did not have a second interview, percentages to be compared are the "valid percents," or percents only of those whose values are known. Although patterns varied among the individual sites, Figure 9 shows that the percent of fathers reporting no visits with their children is greatly diminished from baseline to second interview and the percentage of fathers reporting weekly visits increased, as has the percentage of those visiting three or four times per week.

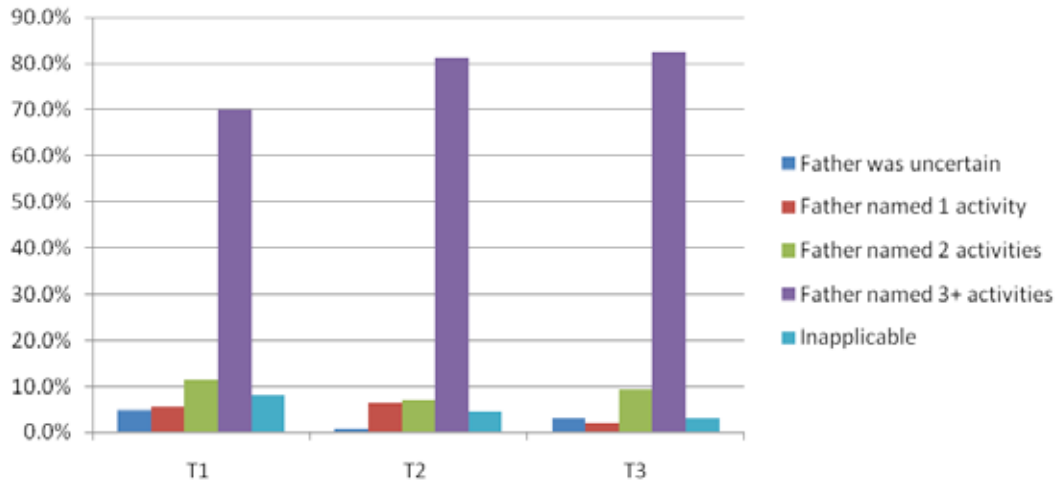
In order to free the comparison of selection bias, a weight of 2 was applied to the baseline number of visits, and a comparison was performed only among fathers who took both the first and second interviews. Of the 228 fathers in the database, 79 were found to have reported a number of visits in both T1 and T2. A paired sample T-test was performed on these 79 fathers to assess the significance of the difference in mean number of visits. Even with the weighting, the mean number of visits at baseline had been 15, while the mean number of visits for these 79 men at T2 was 29. This difference was found to be significant at a level of .000 ($M1 = 14.63$; $M2 = 28.54$; $t = -3.842$; $p = .000$). This means that the probability was less than one-thousandth that this difference occurred by chance.

In the three interviews, staff asked fathers to name their children's favorite things to do as a way of measuring how well fathers knew their children. The evaluators coded responses according to how many activities a father could name and whether he seemed uncertain (as perceived by the interviewer). Again, since so many of the children of program fathers were very young, responses could not be expected for all of them. Notwithstanding this expected diminution in response, fathers of more than 70% of 301 children (responses were missing for 19 of the 320 children) at baseline were able to name three activities. Figure 10 shows the naming frequencies for percentages of program children.

The differences in ability to name activities were not significant according to the Wilcoxon signed-rank test; however, the direction of the movements, albeit small, is encouraging. The percent of children whose fathers were able to name three activities increased over time, while the percent of children whose fathers seemed uncertain decreased. By the third interview, the percent of children whose fathers who seemed uncertain or could only name one activity decreased to less than 5%.[8]

[8] These numbers should be interpreted with caution, as attrition could contribute to a selection bias in favor of those fathers with knowledge of their children.

Figure 10. Activity Naming (N = children)



Note: for T1, *N* = 307 children; for T2, *N* = 128 children; for T3, *N* =97 children.

Evaluators performed a second comparison using responses only from fathers regarding their eldest children who had given all three interviews and whose responses were not inapplicable due to age of the child (N = 50 fathers). A cross-tabulation between the first and third interviews showed that while 3 fathers either seemed uncertain or could name one activity at baseline, all 50 fathers in this group named at least two activities in the third interview. A Pearson's Chi-Square test revealed significance at the 5% level ($p < .049$).

In all three interviews, interviewers also asked fathers if they had visited their children's schools as a measure of parental involvement. When asked about school visits with respect to each child, many of the children were found to be too young to attend school. For this reason, evaluators examined the visits to the schools of the first (oldest) child of each father. In addition, children too young for school were recoded as "inapplicable." In the first interview, interviewers asked fathers if they had ever visited their children's schools; in the second and third interviews, the interviewers asked fathers if they had visited the children's schools since the last interview.[9] A composite variable was created, reflecting whether a father had reported visiting at any of the three time periods. This variable was then cross-tabulated with the baseline variable. As Table 6: School Visits shows, at least 16 fathers who had not visited their children's schools prior to the program visited their children's schools sometime during the program.

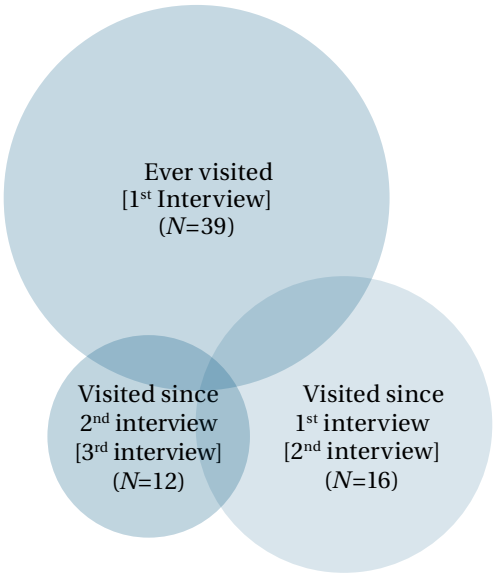
Of the 39 fathers who visited the eldest child's school at baseline, 7 reported visiting at both first and second interviews, 4 reported visiting at first and third interviews, 4 reported visiting at both second and third interviews, and 1 reported visiting in all three interviews. These figures are reflected in Figure 11. Interestingly, the greatest number of fathers reported having ever visited their oldest children's schools at baseline, but the number of additional school visits encouraged the evaluators to believe that the program had a positive effect on this particular aspect of father engagement.

[9] These questions were put to fathers with respect to each child, but evaluators elected to present results by father, using responses to first child query.

Table 6. School Visits: Fathers Reporting Visits to School of First Child

	Numbers Visiting Schools	% of Fathers (*N* = 228)	% of Fathers of School-Aged Children (*N* = 96)
Number/Percent Visiting at Baseline	39	17%	41%
Number/Percent Ever Visiting (baseline, second, and third interviews combined)	55	24%	57%

Figure 11. Fathers Reporting School Visits First Child



A logical extension to these measures would be to test for a statistical relationship between fathers' school visits and children's performance in schools. Unfortunately, children's scholastic performance was unavailable to QIC NRF staff.

Interaction with System

Interviewers also explored fathers' feelings about their interaction with the CPS agency staff. A question relating to "fair treatment" was asked of all program fathers at baseline, and of fathers at two of the four sites at the third interview, and the responses proved surprising to the evaluators. Of the 62 fathers who participated in the third interview at these two sites, 28 responded to this question as follows: 11 "not at all fairly"; 4 "unfairly on the whole"; 4 "okay"; 2 "fairly"; and 7 "very fairly."

Interestingly, two fathers (both in the same site) who had characterized their treatment as "very fairly" at baseline characterized treatment at 16 weeks as "not at all fairly," while in the other site, three fathers' perceptions moved in a positive direction. While these numbers are too small to

permit inferences beyond chance variations, they point to the variability of perceptions through time. The fact that some program fathers have gained custody of their children is a matter of some significance. Exactly how this may relate to program participation is a matter for further study. Does the fact of a father's participation influence the court's decision to award custody, does a specific module help a father negotiate the hurdles, or does the presence of a support system give a father the confidence and strength to proceed through the process? Perhaps in the future, the sample sizes will support a path analysis which will reveal how these results are mediated.

Summary of Major Findings

Despite the small numbers, the variations among sites, the substantial attrition rate, and the distributions of the continuous variables, several key findings have emerged:

- **Take-Up**: Attrition was certainly apparent during the course of the program. The steepest reduction in program attendance, however, occurred between the interview and the first session. In discussions, a facilitator suggested a number of measures to correct this initial loss of participants. In discussion, staff recommended: weekly phone calls prior to session start to keep fathers engaged; reduction of lag time between enrollment and first session; and catchment protocols that permit timely cohort formation.

- **Interaction with Mothers:** While more fathers than expected reported non-acrimonious relationships with the mothers of their children, there was no significant change in numbers of times spoken with mothers; the number of times seemed to decrease, in fact.

- **Visitation:** Among fathers interviewed at baseline and at 8 weeks, the average number of father-child visits weighted for a 2-month period was almost double at 8 weeks over what it had been at baseline.

- **Complexity:** Ongoing involvement with other systems did not seem to affect father attendance or visitation with children in the way evaluators expected. In fact, involvement with several systems seemed to correlate with higher attendance.

System Interaction: Changes in attitudes can go in both directions. As fathers learn to navigate the system, they come to know what to expect and how to interact in such a way as to move the process along. On the other hand, increasing clarity of expectations can lead to disappointment if those expectations are not met, or if the system itself suffers a period of instability.

Discussion

These findings must be interpreted with great caution. Although use of a comparison group is brought into play for assessment of safety and permanency outcomes in a separate analysis of administrative data, the self-reported results in this article are measured according to a single-group, inter-temporal design, often considered to be one of the weaker research designs (Johnson et al., 2008). Moreover, the self-reports of the outcomes variables and correlates constitute a single source. Amato and Gilbreth's 1999 meta-analysis of parenting programs gave scores for methodological rigor to the studies under examination. The present study would have received 2.5 out of 5. Lastly, the data precluded most of the usual parametric analyses and inferential procedures. Did the program select for high-functioning fathers? The evaluators and other QIC NRF staff had some discussion about the characterization of this particular

group of fathers. Facilitators who worked with program fathers characterized them as a "fragile population." Program fathers' needs ranged from warm clothing to proper nutrition to job readiness. Some of the baseline statistics, however, surprised evaluators, such as the degree of commitment and interaction with children's mothers. As discussed in another article within these pages, program fathers most readily chose topics around job readiness, budgeting, and household finance in the voluntary sessions of the program.

For this group, where baseline figures were higher than those in similar populations (Fragile Families, for example) change was slight or not significant. Into this category fall the general relationships with children's mothers, fathers' knowledge of their children, and willingness to serve as placement resources or permanent homes. At baseline, this population of fathers had a preponderance of better-than-neutral interactions with mothers. Perhaps the non-resident father population as a whole, insofar as they are inaccessible, would register a more neutral and less involved characterization of their relationships. The number of times fathers spoke with mothers did not show the same dramatic increase as did frequency of visitation. In fact, the median number of times fathers spoke with the mothers of their eldest children decreased at the third interview. The low numbers of fathers taking the third interview prevent conclusions based on statistical inference, however.

As for interaction with systems, here again baseline figures were "higher" than evaluators were led to expect. One third to two thirds of this group of fathers had been interviewed at baseline. Over three quarters knew their caseworkers' names and had expressed a desire to serve as a placement resource. Over one half had been approached by CPS. The interesting results came with the self-reports of fair treatment by the child welfare system. Although numbers are too low to draw sound inferential conclusions (only three sites reported), as many fathers' assessments of fair treatment fell, 7 others rose. Conversations with site personnel revealed that, over time, caseworker turnover can erode a client's trust if continuity is broken. Case management practice should encompass mandated procedures to ensure continuity in the face of high turnover.

Conclusion

The challenges to recruiting fathers to participate in this program have led the QIC NRF staff to consider the distinctions among subpopulations of non-resident fathers of children in foster care. Each population brings with it its own set of challenges, needs, risk factors, and protective factors. These other subpopulations include: fathers living out of jurisdiction (potentially the most similar to the program fathers), incarcerated fathers, fathers with housing less stable than the program group, fathers with problems of health, mental health, and substance abuse too serious to allow participation in the program, and fathers who present safety risks for their children.

The explorations of sustainability and replication which took place in the final months of the sites' involvement included, among other things, consideration of serving incarcerated fathers. Discussions have included cross-jurisdictional collaboration in order to provide services and facilitate connections between children and fathers geographically removed. One site has begun replication programs, but is offering participation to resident fathers as well. Finally, as family finding initiatives ramp up, fathers will be found, and fathers found through greater effort may prove to be more challenging to engage. Baseline figures will be lower for other subpopulations, and change may be modest.

These preliminary findings trend toward supporting some of the QIC NRF's working hypotheses: a concerted effort to support fathers in some way contributes to more frequent interactions with their children (as measured by number of visits with children and number of school visits), and fathers' willingness to interact with the child welfare system will result in permanency arrangements entailing close father involvement. These results show promise for future iterations of this and similar programs.

The fathers participating in the program were those for whom the barriers to identification and engagement were either easily surmountable or moderately surmountable. As successor programs extend beyond the limits established by this one, many opportunities for future research will present themselves. These include a more comprehensive analysis of the factors mediating outcomes, a path analysis permitting assessment of mediating factors and program elements on father and child outcomes, and comparison of these relationships and outcomes across subpopulations.

References

Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G. (1999). Nonresident fathers and children's well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61*, 557-573.

Frankel, P., & Reynolds, J. (2011). Quality improvement center on non-resident fathers in the child welfare system: How facilitators rated the sessions in the model intervention. *Protecting Children, 26*(3), 54-70.

Guzzo, K., & Furstenberg Jr., F. F. (2007). Multipartnered fertility among American men. *Demography, 44*(3), 583-601. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Johnson, M. A., Stone, S., Lou, C., Ling, J., Claassen, J., & Austin, M. J. (2008). Assessing parent education programs for families involved with child welfare services: Evidence and implications. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work, 5*(1/2), 191-236.

Malm, K., Murray, J., & Geen, R. (2006). *What about the dads? Child welfare agencies' efforts to identify, locate and involve nonresident fathers.* Washington, DC: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

Roy, K., & Dyson, O. (2010) Making daddies into fathers: Community-based fatherhood programs and the construction of masculinities for low-income African American men. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 45*(1), 139–154.

Thoennes, N., Harper, C., Folaron, G., Malm, K., McLaughlin, O., Bai, J., & Kaunelis, R. (2011). Where are the dads? Identifying, locating, contacting, and engaging non-resident fathers of children in foster care. *Protecting Children, 26*(3), 30-43.

Turney, K., & Carlson, M. J. (2010). *Multipartnered fertility and depression among fragile families.* Fragile Families Working Paper: WP10-03-FF. Retrieved from http://crcw.princeton.edu/workingpapers/WP10-03-FF.pdf

Wickizer, T., Maynard, C., Atherly, A., Frederick, M., Koepsell, T., Krupski, A., & Stark, K. (1994). Completion rates of clients discharged from drug and alcohol treatment programs in Washington state. *American Journal of Public Health, 84*(2), 215-221. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Where are the Dads? Identifying, Locating, Contacting, and Engaging Non-Resident Fathers of Children in Foster Care

Nancy Thoeness, Carol J. Harper, Gail Folaron, Karin Malm, Oma McLaughlin, Jieru Bai, and Rasa Kaunelis

Nancy Thoennes, Ph.D. is the Associate Director of the Denver-based Center for Policy Research. She conducts research nationally on child welfare and other family issues.

Carol J. Harper, MPA, is a faculty and research member at the University of Washington School of Social Work. She has over 20 years of experience conducting research and evaluation studies as well as engaging in program implementation, curriculum development and training, with a focus in the child welfare, human services, and juvenile courts. She also serves as a Board Member on the National Association of Social Worker, Child Welfare Section.

Gail Folaron, Ph.D., is a professor at Indiana University School of Social Work, where she is the lead faculty for the school's child welfare concentration. Dr. Folaron has both practice and research experience in child welfare and has completed several research projects that focused specifically on the Indiana public child welfare system.

Karin Malm, M.S., is the Director of the Child Welfare Program Area at Child Trends in Washington, D.C. where she directs research and evaluation studies of child welfare policies, programs, and practices. Currently she is the principal investigator on two multi-site, random assignment evaluations—one of a specialized adoption recruitment program and one of the family finding intervention, an intensive relative search model increasingly being implemented by child welfare agencies to improve outcomes for foster youth.

Jieru Bai, M.S.W., is a Ph.D. candidate at Indiana University School of Social Work. Her research interests include acculturative stress of Chinese students and mental health of youth. She is currently a research assistant with a specialty in data analysis in both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Introduction

In the past, fathers have been largely absent from the research and writings on child welfare. In 1990, two researchers reviewed five major journals where studies and theoretical writings related to child abuse and neglect were commonly published. In a 27-year span of time, they found only 21 articles related to fathers (Greif & Bailey, 1990). While fathers are still not as visible as mothers in the literature, they are no longer "ghosts" or "afterthoughts" as they were once described (Brown, Callahan, Strega, Walmsley, & Dominelli, 2009; Lee, Bellamy, & Guterman, 2009). For example, a recent study, building on the work of Greif and Bailey, found 62 articles in six journals between the years 2004-2008 that dealt explicitly with fathers in child welfare. While this was a significant gain, the authors of this study concluded that "there continues to be…a significant lack of research including fathers relative to mothers in family-related research" (Shapiro & Krysik, 2010).

The intent of this article is to bring greater national attention to the issue of non-resident fathers (NRFs) and the factors and challenges related to the child welfare system's efforts in the identification, location, contact, and engagement of NRFs. From a policy and program perspective, this information is intended to highlight the need for system changes within local and state child welfare agencies and the partnerships that they should consider. Specifically, this article will:

- Provide an overview of the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF);
- Describe the QIC NRF program sites' recruitment processes;
- Present findings on the percentages of non-resident fathers reviewed for program recruitment, found eligible, and enrolled; and
- Describe practice considerations, recommendations, and potential future research areas.

Background

The Children's Bureau funded the creation of the Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF) in October 2006. The 5-year project came as a result of the federal Child and Family Services Reviews and the What About the Dads? report (Malm, Murray, & Geen, 2006). Both indicated that very little meaningful interaction occurs between the child welfare system and fathers. The first phase of the QIC NRF focused on identification of gaps in knowledge and service, the establishment of research priorities, and development of an experimental research design. At the end of phase one, the QIC NRF issued a request for applications to fund program sites which would implement the second phase. Four sites were selected through a competitive process and announced in January 2008. The four sites were El Paso County, Colorado; Marion County, Indiana; Tarrant County, Texas; and King County, Washington.

Each of the funded sites was instructed to deliver a program model as spelled out in the announcement. The model program included two major practice interventions: gender-specific first contact with the non-resident fathers and a 20-week facilitated peer support group intervention. While the first intervention was clear, the second intervention incorporated three elements found to be helpful in involving fathers: (1) self-help with peer support; (2) information on navigating the child welfare system and related systems, including child support, juvenile and family courts, and visitation; and (3) education and skill building related to shared parenting, child development, parental self-care, and the role of culture in parenting. The 20-week session included a 12-week curriculum designed by the QIC NRF project staff, followed by 8 weeks of site-specific sessions.[1] Each site was responsible for identifying and recruiting non-resident fathers of children newly removed from their homes.

The implementation of the father peer-support model provided a cross-site lens through which to explore father engagement. While other QIC NRF reports will present findings about peer group implementation and outcomes, caseworker education and training, and the outcomes associated with father involvement, this article focuses primarily on an unintended study domain that presented itself, specifically the identification, location, and contact phases that must occur prior to father engagement.

[1] The curriculum included the following 12 sessions: (1) Introduction; (2) Dad as Part of the Solution: Overview of the Child Welfare System; (3) Dad as Planner: Service Planning in the Child Welfare System; (4) Dad as Provider: Supporting Your Children; (5) Dad as Team Player: Shared Parenting; (6) Dad as Parent: Understanding Your Children; (7) Dad as Community Member: Identifying and Accessing Resources; (8) Dad as Part of the Court Process: Legal Advocacy and Court Etiquette; (9) Dad as Part of Children's Placement: Visiting With Your Children; (10) Dad as a Healthy Parent: Taking Care of You; (11) Dad as Cultural Guide: The Role of Culture in Parenting; and (12) Dad as Worker: Workforce Readiness.

Literature Review

Importance of Fathers in Child Welfare Cases

There are a number of reasons for concern about the lack of research and writing on fathers in the child welfare system. The development of effective prevention strategies, treatments, and case processing approaches often follow from experimentation or critical writings. But, perhaps more importantly, the lack of literature has probably reflected a lack of attention to fathers in the field and nowhere is this more likely than in the case of non-resident fathers. Attention to non-resident fathers, both in study and in practice, is critical for a number of reasons. From a parental rights' perspective, the Supreme Court has recognized a birth parent's right to direct the upbringing of his or her child as a fundamental liberty interest protected by the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution. This right has been described as "one of the oldest of the fundamental liberty interests" (Troxel v. Granville, 2000). Generally, most states provide non-resident fathers basic legal rights to: notice of proceedings and opportunity to participate, visitation with children, and court-appointed counsel if indigent.

But states vary considerably on two key issues: (1) whether the child must be placed with the non-resident father absent proof of unfitness, and (2) whether the court can order a fit non-resident father to comply with services that it deems are in the child's best interests (Kiselica, 2009). From the perspective of the child in placement, there are a number of arguments in favor of involving non-resident fathers in child welfare cases. Numerous studies document the importance of fathers in children's development (Knox, Cowan, Cowan, & Bildner, 2010; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006; Popenoe, 1996). In child welfare cases there are also some preliminary studies finding more positive outcomes for children if their non-residential fathers are involved. Key findings from Malm and Zielewski (2009) include:

- Children with unidentified non-resident fathers were more likely to be adopted and less likely to be reunified, when compared to children of non-resident fathers who were either identified but not contacted, or identified and contacted.
- Children with involved non-resident fathers were reunified more quickly than were children with non-involved non-resident fathers.
- Children whose non-resident fathers were contacted by child welfare had shorter periods of time in the child welfare system compared to children with unknown non-resident fathers, or children whose non-resident fathers were known, but not contacted.
- Children with highly involved non-resident fathers had cases open for less time than children with non-resident fathers who were less involved or not involved.

Similarly, research using the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being found, among 5,501 children in the study who had been investigated by child protection, a relationship between the involvement of a noncustodial parent, most often a biological father, and a reduction in the likelihood that those children would be placed into out-of-home care (Bellamy, 2009).

Parental involvement is considered of sufficient importance that the Child and Family Services Review[2] process requires that states work toward: (1) achieving permanency through reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with

[2] In 2000, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued a rule establishing a new approach to monitoring state child welfare programs. Under the rule, states are assessed through the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) for substantial conformity with certain federal requirements for child protective, foster care, adoption, family preservation and family support, and independent living services: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/results/keyfindings2003.htm

relatives; (2) facilitating visitation of children in care with parents and siblings; (3) preserving family connections; (4) placing children with relatives; (5) supporting the relationship of children in care with parents; and (6) involving children and parents in case planning. However, involving fathers in child welfare cases requires several steps that are often challenging, including identifying, locating, and contacting the father, and then engaging the father in the case process and services.

Issues in Identifying, Locating, and Contacting Fathers

Many caseworkers rely primarily on mothers for information about the father and may not consult other resources to identify him. In the What About the Dads? study, mothers were the most frequently asked source for identifying non-resident fathers, with 84% of caseworkers reporting that the child's mother was asked to identify the non-resident father. However, less than one third of the time did the caseworker report that the mother actually provided information about the father's identity.

Some percentage of mothers who deny knowing the identity of the child's father may not know enough about him to provide a good lead. Others may be engaging in "gatekeeper" behavior or "boundary setting," in which the mother works to limit the father's involvement with the children due to anger with him, or perceptions that he has not been a responsible father, financially or otherwise (McBride et al., 2005; Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Mothers may want to exclude the father due to a history of domestic violence. There are many studies that suggest that child abuse and partner abuse have a relatively high incidence of co-occurrence (O'Leary, Slep, & O'Leary, 2000).

On the other hand, a mother who has a positive relationship with the father may not identify him due to concerns about the consequences for an undocumented immigrant father, a father without a child support order who may be identified and required to pay support, a father who is delinquent on his child support obligation and may be prosecuted by the child support agency, or a father with an outstanding arrest warrant (Smithgall et al., 2009). If these types of issues are present, the mother's reluctance to identify the father may be an effort to protect him from "the system."

Whatever the reason, many non-resident fathers in child abuse and neglect cases are not identified. One recent study found that fathers were not identified in one third of the 9,000 cases studied that had an assessment completed (Smithgall et al., 2009). Another study reported that 12% of caseworkers said that they did not know the fathers' identities and over a third said that paternity had not been established (Malm & Zielewski, 2009).

Even when the father's identity is known, there are often challenges in locating him. It has been argued that "child welfare caseworkers, courts, and attorneys typically do an inadequate job of locating nonresidential fathers at the outset of a case" (Sankaran, 2008). Malm and her colleagues (2006) interviewed caseworkers about 1,958 cases, and found that 86% of the workers reported asking the child's mother about the father's location, but only a third had used the federal parent locator service and only 20% contacted the local child support agency for help in locating the father. This is not surprising, given that only a third of the workers reported having received any training on how to refer a case to child support for assistance in locating a parent. In addition, some caseworkers were reluctant to use the child support agency due to concerns that the agency would use the request as an opportunity

to establish a child support order against the father, which might alienate him and reduce his cooperation with the child welfare system.[3]

Some studies suggest that caseworkers are reluctant to make contact with fathers. This reluctance may be due to concerns that the father's involvement in his child's life will be a negative factor, perhaps exposing the child to the father's drug use, domestic violence, or other serious problems (Smithgall et al., 2009). The reluctance may also grow out of concern that encouraging father involvement will increase caseworker workloads. Workers do confirm that most non-resident fathers need help with their parenting skills and almost half of the caseworkers interviewed for What About the Dads? said that working with a non-resident father creates a more complicated case (Malm et al., 2006).

Smithgall et al. (2009) found that actual contact and interviews with non-resident fathers are increasing. In their study of cases with an initial assessment conducted between 2005 and early 2009, the percentage of cases with fathers who were interviewed rose from 40.5% in 2005 to 55.4% in 2008. However, the same study also reported that when the father was identified and the case proceeded to an initial assessment, the worker interviewed the father in 58% to 80% of the cases, depending upon the region, while mothers were interviewed in 69% to 93% of the same cases.

Malm and her colleagues (2006) concluded that early identification of the father appears to be a key in ensuring that he is contacted. Almost 80% of the fathers who were identified and located when the case was opened were contacted by a worker, compared to only 13% of the fathers identified more than 30 days after case opening. However, in follow-up research, Malm noted that "simply contacting fathers is unlikely to affect outcomes for children, but . . . contact should support fathers' engagement or re-engagement in their children's lives" (Malm, Zielewski, & Chen, 2008).

Issues in Engaging Fathers

Ultimately, if the child welfare agency is to be successful in working with a non-resident father, more will be required than mere contact. The word "engagement" is often used to describe the agency's goal in working with parents. However, a number of researchers have noted that "engagement" is a complex concept. Littell and Tajima (2000) note that caseworkers often define parents who cooperate with the agency as "engaged," while, in interviews with the parents, researchers found that compliant parents often do not self-report feeling "engaged." Other researchers argue that engagement consists of a constellation of attitudes, relationships, and behaviors (Cunningham, Duffee, Huang, Steinke, & Naccarato, 2009). Yatchmenoff (2001), for example, hypothesizes that engagement includes such elements as receptivity (openness to help); expectancy (perceiving a benefit to cooperation); investment (commitment to the process); working relationship (good communication and mutuality); and trust. Engagement is also a complex concept because it can refer to the non-resident father's relationship with his child, as well as his relationship with the agency.

Whatever the reason, a number of studies concur that non-resident fathers are often less

[3] Recognizing the importance of locating fathers, the Adoption and Safe Families Act "granted child welfare agencies permission to obtain information from child support agencies derived from the state and federal parent locator services." The SPLS and FPLS allow child support agencies to search for absent parents in a variety of databases, including the National Directory of New Hires, which is a repository of data related to employment, unemployment, and wages; the Federal Case Registry, which contains information on child support cases; as well as data maintained by the Internal Revenue Service, the Social Security Administration, the Department of Defense and Veterans' Affairs, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Security Administration. While most child welfare agencies cannot directly access the FPLS, child support workers can search this database for child welfare and report back on data that may allow the caseworker to find a noncustodial parent.

than fully engaged with the child welfare system and with their children in the system. One study published in 2001 reported that most fathers had no contact with caseworkers during the 12 months under study (O'Donnell, 2001). In the original study What About the Dads?, Malm et al. (2006) report that, although the vast majority of caseworkers noted sharing the case plan with contacted fathers and telling fathers about their children's placements (94% and 96%), only half of contacted fathers expressed an interest in having the child live with him. In follow up on these cases, researchers found that 56% of the non-resident fathers provided no known support for their children, either financial or non-financial, during their time in the system, and non-resident fathers were less likely to have visited their children than were resident mothers (Malm & Zielewski, 2009).

Lack of engagement with the agency by fathers has also been noted as a relatively common problem. Smithgall et al. (2009) were encouraged to note that agency investigation reports frequently included "notation that the father was willing to engage in services." However, the study also remarked that this was more common among resident than non-resident fathers. The study also reported some evidence that caseworkers are more open to reunification with mother than placement with father, but concluded that other relevant factors included fathers' unwillingness to complete services.

Some barriers to engagement appear to be shared by a wide range of programs targeted to low-income non-resident fathers. Programs designed to serve low-income, typically never-married parents frequently are underutilized. Participation rates in voluntary programs, such as parenting education and fatherhood development, usually range from moderate to low, especially among low-income parents. Program operators have found it difficult to get people to agree to participate in programs, and, even among those who agree and complete an enrollment process, to get them to actually attend is a challenge (Dion, Avellar, & Clary, 2010).

An evaluation of responsible fatherhood initiatives conducted by The Urban Institute also reported that "recruitment is a critical challenge and a major part of serving non-resident fathers… past fatherhood initiatives uniformly had great difficulty meeting enrollment goals" (Martinson & Nightingale, 2008).

A number of researchers (O'Donnell, 2001) have speculated that there may be disconnects between the service needs of non-resident fathers and the services provided. There are also undoubtedly barriers created by a father's lack of transportation, stable housing, substance abuse, unemployment, poverty, prior incarceration, or limited education and job skills.

Other engagement problems may be somewhat unique to the child welfare system. Cohen (2008) contends that, for non-resident fathers, the child welfare system could be "cold, unforgiving, and filled with roadblocks." Another study speculated that the lack of engagement by non-resident fathers might, at least in part, reflect the fact that caseworkers do not have the same expectations for fathers as they do for mothers. Perhaps non-resident fathers are simply responding to low expectations—expectations that likely mirror those of the community and society in general (Malm et al., 2006).

Data Sources and Methods

All four QIC program sites provided the data for these analyses. Each program adhered to site-specific eligibility criteria and there was some uniformity across the program sites on key eligibility elements. Inconsistencies are noted in each table. In each site, the attempt was made to review all cases involving children removed from

their homes by child protective services agencies in order to identify potentially eligible biological non-resident fathers for participation in a series of education and support classes.[4]

Recruitment was limited to biological non-resident fathers who had at least one child placed in out-of-home care and who were not a party to the current maltreatment report, and recruitment was limited to placements made between September 2008 and October 2010. Each site hired a male worker (either within the child welfare system or a community-based agency) to identify, locate, contact, and recruit potentially eligible non-resident fathers.

There were variations by site regarding how fathers could be identified, and then recruited and engaged. Once fathers were recruited and enrolled, there was some variation in the length of time from initial contact with fathers and peer group start; groups began when a sufficient number of fathers enrolled. Groups also varied in the number of fathers attending.

Findings

Frequency of Non-Resident Fathers in the Child Welfare System

Across all four sites, 3,935 fathers were identified as fathers whose children were taken into protective custody at some point during the 21-month project period. Indiana reported the largest number of fathers identified (n = 1,081), followed by Texas (n = 1,019), Washington (n = 1,000), and Colorado (n = 835). The difference in these numbers may be partially explained by the timing of each state's entry into the project as well as the overall rate of child entry into foster care. Indiana was the first site to recruit a cohort of fathers and start the educational/support group sessions. Indiana began its first sessions in November 2008. Colorado, on the other hand, began its recruitment of fathers in September 2008 and initiated its first group in March 2009.

In some sites, fathers were first identified using statewide databases. In Texas, fathers were first identified through information collected on the county "petition for removal" forms. When a father's information was not found on the petition form, the automated case record was searched. Due to the differences in the automated systems in each site, different fields were used, yielding different results. To be eligible for the program, the father of the foster child had to be a non-resident father, defined as not being in the home at the time of the child's removal. As expected, some of the fathers identified were resident fathers. As illustrated in Table 1, the number of resident fathers that were included ranged from 300 in Colorado to 93 in Indiana, with Texas (n = 284) and Washington (n = 266) falling within this range.

After the 677 resident fathers were removed from the pool, along with fathers who were deceased or had their rights terminated, a final sample of 2,838 fathers were reviewed to determine whether they met the other program eligibility criteria. Specifically, Colorado identified 513 NRFs, Indiana identified 942, Texas identified 701, and Washington identified 682 NRFs.

Reasons for Ineligibility

Table 2 presents a breakdown of the remaining 1,412 (50%) non-resident fathers who were deemed ineligible for the program. These included 642 (23%) fathers who lived outside of the geographic boundaries defined by each individual state, 372 (13%) who were incarcerated, and 210 (7%) with violent histories or other safety concerns. These criteria were used across all four sites. Non-English speaking fathers were also ineligible across all sites but added to the "other"

[4] The curriculum includes the 12 weekly sessions prescribed by the American Humane Association curriculum followed by 8 weeks designed by the program sites.

Table 1. Frequency of Non-Resident Fathers in the Child Welfare System

	Colorado	Indiana	Texas	Washington	Total
Total number of fathers reviewed	835	1,081	1,019	1,000	3,935
Total number of resident fathers	300	93	284	266	943
Father was deceased or his rights had already been terminated	22	46	34	52	154
Number of these fathers who were non-resident	513	942	701	682	2,838
Percentage of fathers reviewed who were non-resident	61%	87%	69%	68%	72%

This figure includes 3 fathers for whom the case records were sealed so that residency status could not be determined.

category along with other site-specific criteria such as early case closures. This resulted in an additional exclusion of 188 (7%) fathers.

The biggest barrier to participation across all four sites was geographic location. Due to anticipated transportation concerns, each site recruited only fathers who lived in the agency's service area. One site tracked specifically where fathers resided outside of the jurisdiction and learned that two thirds (66% or 127) of the fathers outside of their jurisdiction were living in other states or countries. Across the four sites, 23% (n = 642) of the identified fathers lived outside the service area. In Colorado, 160 (31%) of the identified fathers were excluded based on this criteria, while Indiana excluded 131 (14%), Texas excluded 159 (23%), and Washington excluded 192 (18%).

Incarceration was the second biggest barrier to participation. The project sites did not offer the groups program within the prison/jail system and the curriculum was not designed to do so. Indiana reported the highest number of incarcerated fathers with 134 and Colorado had the fewest with 39 (14% and 8%, respectively). Texas and Washington fell in between with 112 incarcerated fathers in Texas and 87 in Washington (16% and 13%, respectively).

One final category that all states included as reason for ineligibility was a violent history. This included prior substantiated child abuse or neglect to a level that still raised current safety concerns, arrest for domestic violence, or other safety concerns such as being a sexual predator, arrests for battery, or involvement in gang violence. Texas and Washington had the highest percentage of fathers deemed ineligible due to violence or safety concerns (12% each). Indiana had the lowest percentage of fathers excluded for violence and safety concerns with 3%, and Colorado excluded 4%.

Other reasons for exclusion varied across states and included language barriers and cases in which the children were returned home or the case was closed before the father could be notified. Washington had the highest number of fathers excluded for other reasons, with 10% of the fathers falling into this category. The most common reasons for fathers in Washington being excluded for other reasons were: coming into care prior to December 2008 (18); having cases closed within days of the report (17); and non-English speaking fathers (15). These three reasons accounted for 77% of all fathers in this category. Texas excluded 6 non-English speakers, and program staff could not determine the eligibility of an additional 5 fathers. Colorado exclusions

[5] In Indiana, the actual number of NRFs incarcerated was 166 prior to a cohort start-up date. Thirty-one fathers had release dates within the time frame of the project, so letters were sent to these fathers and follow-up contacts arranged for fathers who were interested in participating.

Table 2. Breakdown of Reasons for Ineligibility

	Colorado		Indiana		Texas		Washington		Total	
	Number	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*
Number of fathers who were non-resident	513	100%	942	100%	701	100%	682	100%	2,838	100%
NRFs living outside the jurisdiction served	160	31%	131	14%	159	23%	192	28%	642	23%
NRFs incarcerated at search/outreach	39	8%	134	14%	112	16%	87	13%	372	13%
NRFs with violence history❖	18	4%	26	3%	86	12%	80	12%	210	7%
NRFs who did not qualify for other reasons*	23	4%	84	9%	13	2%	68	10%	188	7%
Total of NRFs who did not qualify	240	47%	375	40%	370	53%	427	63%	1,412	50%
NRFs in the potential pool for services	273	53%	567	60%	331	47%	255	37%	1,426	50%

❖ These fathers may have been named on another child abuse or neglect case or a serious domestic violence case, or other types of violence, such as gang membership, was indicated.

* The "other reasons" vary by site but may include situations where the case was immediately closed, children were not placed out of the home, child was placed prior to IRB approval, father was a non-English speaker, or father was identified but eligibility criteria could not be determined.

were primarily due to fathers being non-English speaking and children being immediately returned home. Indiana has a state designation of Informal Adjustments (IA), which means there is a safety concern for the child but not enough concern to warrant children's long-term removal from their parents' custody. These fathers (n = 10) were added to the ineligible category, along with another 41 Indiana fathers, because their children's cases closed before the fathers could be notified.

Results of Identification and Location Attempts With NRFs

Not all potentially eligible NRFs could be identified. In some cases, no name was provided; in other cases, the father had not yet established paternity. As illustrated in Table 3, Colorado had the highest percentage of unknown fathers with 40%, Washington was unable to identify 19% of potential fathers, and Indiana and Texas were each unable to identify 11% of their fathers. It is important to note that not knowing the identity of the father was not entirely due to mothers refusing to share the fathers' names. For example, one state discovered that, among the unidentified fathers, 18% of the mothers refused to share who the father was, 11% of the fathers refused to take a paternity test, and paternity testing was delayed for 18%. For the remaining 53% of the time, the father was reported to be unknown because the mother stated that she was unsure who the father was.

Even when fathers were identified by name, often there was insufficient, missing, or invalid contact information. Addresses provided were

not always current and phones were often disconnected. In some situations, follow up, most often with social workers, revealed new or additional contact information, but often this resulted in either insufficient or invalid contact information. These fathers were considered potentially eligible since there was a lack of information to the contrary. This group is listed in Table 3 as NRFs with insufficient contact information. The total number of fathers in this category was 34% of the total sample of potentially eligible fathers, with the following breakdown by site: Indiana, 40% ($n = 228$); Texas, 32% ($n = 107$); Colorado, 30% ($n = 83$); and Washington, 26% ($n = 67$).

Participation in the project was further hampered by the inability of program staff in many situations to actually speak with a father. In these cases, contact information was available, but the fathers did not respond to messages left on answering machines or with relatives. Other fathers did not respond to letters of inquiry that were sent to explain the program. This group of fathers appears in Table 3 as "presumably eligible, but the program staff were never able to speak with the father." It may be that the program staff did not have the correct or most current contact information, or not responding was a passive approach on the part of the father for declining. This group of fathers comprises 20% of the total sample, ranging from 24% in Indiana to 13% in Washington.

Eleven percent of fathers contacted declined to participate. The reasons fathers provided for declining ranged from a lack of interest in the program to their children having been returned to the mothers' homes, thereby making the program seem unnecessary to them. For other fathers, barriers included meeting times that conflicted with work schedules (evening and weekend groups were held in attempts to mitigate this conflict); having their children placed with them; and difficult and/or long travel times to and from the meeting site. Generally, however, fathers said they would think about participating and then failed to arrive for a scheduled appointment. The percentage of fathers who declined ranged from 8% in Indiana to 14% in Texas.

A total of 226 (15%) fathers agreed to participate in the program. Each father who agreed was required to sign an informed consent and participate in an initial interview. Of the 226 fathers who agreed, 119 (8%) attended three or more sessions. The percentage of fathers attending three or more sessions ranged from 6% in Colorado to 11% in Washington. The percentage of fathers who signed an informed consent but had very limited attendance ranged from zero in Colorado to 11% in Texas.

The reasons for the fathers' failure to attend all sessions ranged from transportation problems to full time employment to obtaining custody of their children to an ending of their children's involvement with child welfare, although the reasons also encompassed a lack of interest in participation in an educational program. In addition, the initial research design called for a control group. This was discontinued after the first several cohorts, due to the limited number of fathers available and willing to participate in the program. In Indiana, there were 14 fathers in the original control group. Several of these fathers were later re-contacted and invited to join a group, but most refused. All 14 fathers are included in the limited attendance category.

Findings and Implications

The four program sites discussed in this article were not selected due to their similarities; however, the percentage of non-resident fathers in the child welfare caseload at each site, the

Table 3. Results of Identification and Location Attempts With NRFs

	Colorado		Indiana		Texas		Washington		Total	
	Number	*% of NRFs in potential pool*	*Number*	*% of NRFs in potential pool*	*Number*	*% of NRFs in potential pool*	*Number*	*% of NRFs in potential pool*	*Number*	*% of NRFs in potential pool*
NRFs in the **potential** pool for services	273	100%	567	100%	331	100%	255	100%	1,426	100%
NRFs whose identity was unknown♠	109	40%	61	11%	37	11%	68	26%	275	19%
NRFs with insufficient contact information❋	83	30%	228	40%	107	32%	67	26%	485	34%
Presumably eligible, but the program staff were never able to speak with the father●	35	13%	135	24%	72	22%	45	18%	287	20%
Declined❖	29	11%	45	8%	46	14%	33	13%	153	11%
Signed consent form but limited attendance	0	0%	50	9%	35	11%	22	9%	107	7%
Signed consent form and attended 3+ sessions	17	6%	48	8%	34	10%	20	8%	119	8%

♠ The CPS agency had no name, or had not been able to establish paternity.

❋ Father's name was known, but the contact information for him was either missing or invalid.

● Some of these fathers may have been ineligible, but program staff were unable to determine or the contact information was no longer valid.

❖ Some fathers actively declined, others indicated they would "think about" the offer, some indicated they wanted to participate but never could be contacted again and never came to a session, or came to fewer than 3 sessions.

percentage deemed eligible based on a variety of criteria, and the percentage identified and able to be contacted are remarkably similar across sites. While the sites in no way represent a national sample, the group of sites may be representative of urban areas. The range of non-resident father percentages in these urban localities (61% to 87%) mirrors prior research. Federal data on the family structure of households in which children enter foster care reveal that a majority—between 50% and 80%—are removed from single-mother or unmarried-couple families (Malm et al., 2006).

Overall, only 3% of the fathers of children removed from their homes during the project period were considered to be program participants (i.e., attended at least three program sessions). Just over one third of the non-resident fathers were either outside the service area (23%)

or incarcerated (13%). Program planners may want to examine alternative ways in which to reach out to a larger number of fathers to provide the educational and supportive services they need to be engaged in child welfare casework.

There were high rates of potentially eligible non-resident fathers whose identities were unknown (19%) or for whom contact information was insufficient to attempt engagement (34%). Among all fathers reviewed—3,935—these two categories comprised 7% and 12% of the group, respectively. These numbers point to a need for ongoing training for caseworkers, supervisors, and program managers. All levels of staff need to continually ask the mother and other family members for information about the father. In addition, because early identification of fathers can result in increased father involvement, providing workers with access to family finding tools or training staff to support the worker with identification and location activities could be beneficial. This consideration is noted especially because, at initial placement, workers have multiple demands placed on their time. The high rate of fathers with unknown identities or insufficient contact information meant a reduction in the number of fathers that group facilitators were able to engage in the program.

Project staff were never able to make contact with another 20% of the potential pool of fathers, even though the fathers' names and some type of contact information were available. This group may represent vulnerable fathers unable to maintain stable housing or a consistent cell phone number. These fathers may also be absent at court hearings and child visitation sessions.

Once contacted, another 11% of the fathers declined to participate in the program. These fathers may represent the most stable group for a number of reasons. First, they were successfully contacted, which means that they were identified and had accurate contact information. Second, anecdotal evidence points to these fathers declining for reasons that suggest stability—some had custody of their children and could not commit to attending a multi-week program, and others had work conflicts. As noted earlier, other reasons fathers shared for declining included disinterest or being busy with other demands.

The high percentage of fathers who were either living out of jurisdiction or were incarcerated highlights the need for child welfare systems to examine how they might reach out to these fathers. Changes may require adjustments to practice on a national level. Engaging these populations would require additional efforts, as regular face-to-face meetings are not an option with either caseworkers or their children. In some cases, the reasons for the fathers' incarcerations would be a factor in the type of relationship that should be fostered between the child and father.

Recommendations

Several programmatic recommendations arise from these findings. First, a re-examination of the target population needs to occur. For purposes of the grant project sites, fathers were ineligible if they were incarcerated, living out of the service area, or had current safety concerns related to their children's cases. Program planners need to examine whether there are other services that could be provided to these fathers. In addition, many fathers were unable to attend the evening classes due to employment conflicts. Flexibility in the way in which non-resident fathers obtain the 12-week session information, and other services, needs to be considered. Regardless of how the target population is defined, many fathers will not fit neatly into a program format. An important lesson learned for each community is the need to determine in advance what is known about the fathers of the children in care, where they reside, and presenting issues that might impact their ability to participate in engagement processes. A second lesson learned is that, given variations in the non-resident father population, a variety of engagement formats are required if there is a commitment to engage all fathers.

To increase the numbers of non-resident fathers to whom this type of model approach could be presented, the following list of activities should be considered. QIC NRF sites did engage in many of these activities; however, large-scale change requires time and a cultural shift among child welfare workers. Over the course of the project, all sites experienced a pattern of fathers being identified more often and earlier. Thus, a commitment to engaging in the listed activities could expand the number of fathers identified, located, and contacted, thereby increasing the numbers that might agree to participate in an engagement program. Additional evaluation is needed to confirm the potential impact of implementing these types of activities.

- Educate professionals and the broader community on the value of father involvement (e.g., trainings, workshops, panels).
- Provide staff with concrete ways to identify, locate, contact, and engage fathers/paternal relatives (e.g., trainings, tip sheets, office protocol).
- Provide child welfare staff with tools and access to family finding resources, and prioritize identifying fathers and timely paternity testing.
- Engage upper-level management in the implementation of father involvement efforts within the agency and cross-system.
- Strengthen court and legal system partnerships in efforts to identify, locate, contact, and engage fathers.
- Partner with public and community providers, as well as with father coalitions and father and mother representatives, in order to build community support for father engagement.
- Educate mothers on the value of father engagement both to create buy-in and to increase access to information about the father.

Recommendations for future research are plentiful. The authors' experience found that most non-resident fathers of children in foster care tend to be fragile and face challenges to increasing their involvement in case planning as well as maintaining relationships with their children. Future research could examine the attributes of resident fathers and non-resident fathers who are involved in child welfare casework in order to determine the characteristics that distinguish them from fathers unable to be located and engaged.

References

Bellamy, J. L. (2009). A national study of male involvement among families in contact with the child welfare system. *Child Maltreatment, 14*, 255-262.

Brown, L., Callahan, M., Strega, S., Walmsley, C., & Dominelli, L. (2009). Manufacturing ghost fathers: The paradox of father presence and absence in child welfare. *Child & Family Social Work, 14*(1), 25-34.

Cohen, A. (2008). Representing nonresident fathers in dependency cases. *Child Law Practice, 27*, 147-155.

Cunningham, W. S., Duffee, D., Huang, Y., Steinke, C., & Naccarato, T. (2009). On the meaning and measurement of engagement in youth residential treatment centers. *Research on Social Work Practice, 19*, 63-76.

Dion, M. R., Avellar, S. A., & Clary, E. (2010). *The building strong families project: Implementation of eight programs to strengthen unmarried parent families.* Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research.

Fagan, J., & Barnett, M. (2003). The relationship between maternal gatekeeping, paternal competence, mathers' attitudes about the father role, and father involvement. *Journal of Family Issues, 24*, 1020-1043. doi:10.1177/0192513x03256397

Greif, G., & Bailey, C. (1990). Where are the fathers in social work literature? *Journal of Contemporary Human Services, 71*, 88-92.

Kiselica, M. S. (2009). Reaching nonresident fathers in the child welfare system: Understanding male help-seeking behaviors. *Child Law Practice, 27*, 161-170.

Knox, V., Cowan, P., Cowan, C., & Bildner, E. (2010). *Policies that strengthen fatherhood and family relationships. What do we know and what do we need to know?* MDRC Discussion Paper No. 1376-10.

Lee, S. J., Bellamy, J. L., & Guterman, N. B. (2009). Fathers, physical child abuse, and neglect. *Child Maltreatment, 14*, 227-231.

Littell, J. H., & Tajima, E. A. (2000). A multilevel model of client participation in intensive family preservation services. *Social Service Review, 74*(3), 405-435.

Malm, K., Murray, J., & Geen, R. (2006). *What about the dads? Child welfare agencies' efforts to identify, locate and involve nonresident fathers*. Washington, DC: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

Malm, K., Zielewski, E., & Chen H. (2008). *More about the dads: Exploring associations between nonresident father involvement and child welfare case outcomes*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

Malm, K. E., & Zielewski, E. H. (2009). Nonresident father support and reunification outcomes for children in foster care. Children and *Youth Services Review, 31*(9), 1010-1018. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.04.016

Martinson, K., & Nightingale, D. (2008). *Ten key findings from responsible fatherhood initiatives.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

McBride, M., Brown, G., Bost, K., Shinn, N., Vaughn, B., & Korth, B. (2005). Paternal identity, maternal gatekeeping, and father involvement. *Family Relations, 54*, 360-372.

O'Donnell, J. M. (2001). Paternal involvement in kinship foster care services in one father and multiple father families. *Child Welfare, 80*(4), 453-479.

O'Leary, D., Slep, A., & O'Leary, S. (2000). Co-occurrence of partner and parent aggression: Research and treatment implications. *Behavior Therapy, 31*(4), 631-648.

Popenoe, D. (1996). *Life without father: Compelling new evidence that fatherhood and marriage are indispensable for the good of children and society.* New York: The Free Press.

Rosenberg, J., & Wilcox, W. B. (2006). *The importance of fathers in the healthy development of children.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Sankaran, V. S. (2008). Advocating for the constitutional rights of nonresident fathers. *Child Law Practice, 27*, 129-137.

Shapiro, A. F., & Krysik, J. (2010). Finding fathers in social work research and practice. *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, 7*(1).

Smithgall, C., DeCoursey, J., Gitlow, E., Yang, D., Jarpe-Ratner, E., Lansing, J., & Goerge, R. (2009). *Identifying, interviewing, and intervening: Fathers and the Illinois child welfare system*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Troxel v. Granville. 450 U.S. 57, 65 (2000).

Yatchmenoff, D. K. (2001). *Measuring client engagement in non-voluntary child protective services.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon.

Empowering Fathers: Changing Practice in Public Child Welfare

Gail Folaron, Jieru Bai, and Rob Schneider

Gail Folaron, Ph.D., is a professor at Indiana University School of Social Work, where she is the lead faculty for the school's child welfare concentration. Dr. Folaron has both practice and research experience in child welfare and has completed several research projects that focused specifically on the Indiana public child welfare system.

Jieru Bai, M.S.W., is a Ph.D. candidate at Indiana University School of Social Work. Her research interests include acculturative stress of Chinese students and mental health of youth. She is currently a research assistant with a specialty in data analysis in both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Rob Schneider is the coordinator of external affairs for the Indiana University School of Social Work. Previously, he worked as a reporter for The Indianapolis Star for 33 years, covering a variety of beats, from urban affairs to state government.

Indiana began a bottom-up reform of the state's public child welfare system in 2005 with the creation of a new Department of Child Services (DCS). The new DCS was moved out from an umbrella agency and became an independent agency, directly responsible to the governor. This move enabled the DCS to change its mission and priorities from one of family economic self-sufficiency to a focus on child protection through a partnership with the community and families (http://www.in.gov/dcs/2370.htm). In the early stages of the reform, it became evident that there were systemic problems when it came to partnering with fathers. In 2007, Indiana joined a four-site demonstration project, funded by the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF) and administered by American Humane Association and its partners, to pilot a practice model that would shift current practice to an emphasis on family, embracing both mothers and fathers.

Early in the transition to the new practice model, Indiana was audited by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, in the form of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). Among the review outcomes were four areas that include services to fathers: Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care; Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents; Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning; and Item 20: Worker visits with parents.

In the final report issued in 2008, Indiana received some of its lowest ratings for performance on these four items. The report states, "Performance on these items may be attributed at least in part to lack of efforts to locate fathers, assess their needs, and engage them" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2008, p. 4).

Fidelity research on the state's new practice model was conducted concurrently with the CFSRs. The researchers found similar results. The report concluded that all options for team membership were not fully explored. It stated that "workers in lower-scored team meetings often failed to engage significant team members, including fathers" (Folaron & Sullenberger, 2009, p. 63). In the early stages of the reform, the agency practice appeared to remain mother-centric. Fathers were marginalized.

Indiana's DCS was committed to changing its practice. By partnering with the QIC NRF, the agency had a shared mission to identify, locate, engage, and empower non-resident fathers, arguably the more marginalized group of fathers that interacts with the child welfare system.

The Benefits of Father Involvement

Studies suggest that an actively involved and nurturing father can enhance an infant's cognitive ability (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006; Yogman, Kindlon, & Earls, 1995), a school-aged child's psychological well-being and social interactions (Mosley & Thompson, 1995), an adolescent's educational achievement (Goldstine, 1982; Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997), and all children's general well-being (Lamb, 1997). Malm, Murray, and Geen (2006) suggest that the involvement of non-resident fathers can also offer other "tangible benefits, such as critical knowledge of medical and/or genetic information or financial benefits, such as consistent child support payments or benefits for children of veterans" (p. 23).

For children who are victims of abuse or neglect, Velazquez, Edwards, Vincent, and Reynolds (2009) suggest that father engagement contributes to child safety, permanence, and well-being as evidenced by a lower rate of repeat abuse and neglect reports, shortened length of stay in foster care, a higher reunification rate with fewer repeat placements, and greater stability in foster care.

Personal and Systemic Barriers to Father Involvement

Historically, father-friendly policies, practices, and training have been lacking, creating a mother-centric environment within the public child welfare system (Jenkins, 2009; O'Donnell, 2002; Franck, 2001). This was supported by early CFSR reviews that found several areas relating to fathers needing improvement across the nation, including father involvement in case planning, efforts to establish contact with fathers, assessments of fathers and their relatives as placement resources, and services to fathers (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006).

Researchers have identified several caseworker concerns that create barriers to father engagement, including concerns for the safety of children or mothers, parental conflict, paternal substance abuse, anger issues, mental health issues, and a lack of interest on the part of the father (English, Brummel, & Martens, 2009; Malm et al., 2006). Another concern expressed by public agency administrators was the stress of adding to an already overwhelming workload, particularly when sibling groups have multiple fathers (Malm et al.).

Barriers to engaging fathers in the child welfare system are not only the result of embedded mother-centric practices, but, in some cases, the fathers themselves make it difficult to engage and intervene with non-resident fathers (Sonenstein, Malm, & Billing, 2002). In some cases, the limited involvement may be the result of the fathers' circumstances, such as homelessness, incarceration, or history of past violence or substantiated child abuse or neglect (Raichel, 2009; Greif & Zuravin, 1989).

Some fathers may be reluctant to be involved with a government agency after a history of negative experiences with government services, particularly with child welfare or the child support system (Raichel, 2009; Miller & Knox, 2001). In a study by Malm et al. (2006), one state agency administrator suggested that fathers may react more positively to services provided by community-based organizations than the public agency programs.

On a personal level, some non-resident fathers do not know how to engage with children or how to assume the fathering role because they did not have positive father role models in their lives (Raichel, 2009). Others may believe that they need to prove themselves as worthy parents much more frequently and to a higher degree than mothers (Strega, Brown, Dominelli, Walmsley, & Callahan, 2009).

Empowerment Practice: The Indiana Experience

Marginalized groups need intervention at both the individual and system levels in order to empower the individual and alleviate oppression. This strategy is at the heart of empowerment practice and consistent with the new DCS mission in Indiana. Empowerment practice provides some direction for balancing efforts in work with individuals to maximize strengths and build resources, and also directs workers to identify and address structural barriers and power dynamics that create an oppressive environment (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998). Group work is generally the preferred modality for empowerment practice because the group experience offers a forum for mutual support and solidarity (Parsons, 1991). To that end, non-resident fathers were invited to participate in a 20-week educational/support group to learn about the child welfare system and to interact with other non-resident fathers with children in care.

Addressing Strengths and Building Resources

In November 2008, the first fathers' educational/support group in Indiana was launched using the new curriculum developed by American Humane Association. The educational/support groups were conducted outside the DCS offices at an agency called the Fathers and Families Center in Indianapolis, Indiana. This Center is a 501(c)(3) agency with a father focus. According to its website, the organization's goals are to "enhance the capacity of young fathers to become responsible and involved parents, wage earners, and providers of child support" (http://www.fatherresource.org). The Fathers and Families Center has a history dating back to 1993 and has served more than 5,000 young fathers and their parenting partners. The Center is staffed by experts in areas of parenting education, child support, access and visitation, workforce development, education, basic life skills, supportive services, and the law. The staff is predominately male and fathers are generally engaged in educational and supportive services throughout the day.

Support group participants were identified from the "non-resident parent" field of the state database. Once identified, contact was made by a male social worker. Initially, 988 fathers were identified, but not all fathers were invited to participate in the program due to insufficient contact information (n = 289), worker time restraints (n = 135), or early reunification of their children with their mothers (n = 51). Out of the initial pool of participants, 317 fathers were considered ineligible because of language barriers (n = 26), incarceration (n = 134), history of violence or child abuse (n = 26), or residency outside of the county (n = 131). In addition, 38 fathers were deceased and 8 had their rights terminated prior to the time of their children's removal. In the end, 150 fathers were invited to participate. Out of that

number, 45 fathers declined the invitation, and 105 fathers agreed to participate, although 7 never came to a meeting.

The 98 fathers who participated in the program started in different cohorts over a 2-year period. The first cohort was the smallest, with only 3 fathers. Over time, the cohorts grew in size and, ultimately, 11 separate cohorts of fathers participated in the education/support groups. The last cohort, which completed services in December 2010, was the largest with 11 fathers signed up to participate. In the end, of the 98 fathers who signed informed consents, completed an intake interview, and agreed to participate in the program, 48 fathers attended three or more sessions, 37 fathers continued beyond week 12, and one father attended all 20 sessions.

Each weekly session began with a warm dinner. The meal provided informal time for the program fathers to join other fathers from the Fathers and Families Center and mingle with staff. The educational format which followed was more structured and included the non-resident program fathers along with a facilitator from the Fathers and Families Center. Guest speakers, including child welfare workers, child support staff, parenting experts, workforce development experts from the Fathers and Families Center, and attorneys, were invited to various sessions. Each session included time for discussion and sharing.

Throughout the week, the fathers were individually supported and mentored by Fathers and Families Center staff. Support included follow-up phone calls, one-on-one mentoring sessions, guidance on legal concerns ranging from child support and paternity to custody, accompanying the father to court and/or DCS team meetings, and a gas card or a bus pass to offset the cost of transportation to the meetings.

Fathers who participated in the curriculum were asked for a minimum 12-week commitment. The first three sessions were required and make-up sessions were available when fathers were unable to attend all three sessions. The first 3 weeks provided the fathers with an overview of the child welfare system and information on how to make choices that are in the best interest of each man in his role as father. In the first two sessions, a representative from DCS was available to lead the discussion and answer questions.

In week 4, the fathers were provided with information on community resources and guided in efforts to access those resources. Later sessions included content on the juvenile court system and how the legal process works, the impact of culture on parenting, child development, how the child welfare visitation process works, how to support their children, and how to share parenting responsibilities with the children's mothers. The final session focused on workforce readiness.

At the conclusion of the 12th session, the fathers received certificates of completion to share with the caseworker and take to court. The fathers who continued through the 12th session were offered an additional eight sessions designed to help them reach their personal potentials. Thirty-seven fathers continued beyond the 12th session, although only one father attended all 20 sessions. The mean number of sessions attended was 9 and the median was 10.

Addressing Structural Barriers and Power Dynamics

Education and group support alone are insufficient to empower marginalized groups. With a commitment to empowerment, the Indiana public child welfare leadership began to identify and address structural barriers that marginalized non-resident fathers.

At the state level, some of the structural barriers to father engagement were obvious. Policies, practices, and trainings to support and encourage father engagement were absent. This was highlighted in the first round of CFSRs. Specifically, the final report read, "It appeared that [DCS] did not identify and/or attempt to locate fathers early on in the case planning and service delivery processes (CFSR, 2002, p. 19). In addition, the federal reviewers said, "In some cases, [DCS] did not consider paternal relatives for placement" (CFSR, 2002, p. 29). Little changed before the next round of federal reviews in 2007.

In response to the federal reviewers and as a new partner in the four-site demonstration project on non-resident fathers, the director of DCS issued a directive to case managers to locate absent parents. The expectation that workers apply due diligence efforts in each case became policy (http://www.in.gov/dcs/2354.htm). Training consultants that were brought into the agency offered a new perspective for modifying the environment and services to become more father-friendly.

Gender balance of the DCS line staff created a second potential systemic barrier. American Humane Association reported, in its review of child welfare services, that engagement approaches were "often not as considerate of a father-friendly culture as they are of a mother-friendly culture" (Velazquez et al., 2009). In Indiana, where women make up most of the line staff, past research indicated that workers were sometimes hesitant to work with fathers. (Folaron & Sullenberger, 2009). The hiring of male staff to contact and engage non-resident fathers countered this potential barrier.

Outreach and System Change

The educational/support groups were designed to educate fathers about the child welfare and court systems and to help them understand the needs of their children with a goal of increasing or improving the father-child relationship. To reach that goal, fathers needed to feel comfortable with DCS, including their line staff and the environment itself.

DCS assessed its environment using the Father Friendly Check-Up™ developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative (www.fatherhood.org). This assessment is designed to identify and address barriers that might interfere with father engagement, including structural barriers. As a result of the checkup, DCS made structural changes to improve the environment and make it more father-friendly. Changes included the installation of a diaper changing table in the men's bathroom, a marquee notifying clients of DCS services, and the addition of framed pictures featuring fathers as part of various family structures and cultures. Informational brochures highlighting father-friendly services in the community were put on display in the DCS waiting rooms.

Gender staffing was also addressed as required by the terms of the grant. Findings from focus group interviews conducted by the American Humane Association suggested that fathers would be more comfortable with a male worker. Jenkins (2009) found that "the sociopsychological approaches for engaging fathers should be different from those for engaging mothers, and sensitivity to gender and cultural assumptions of gender roles must be part of a successful program" (p. 14). In response, DCS hired a male social worker to make the initial contact with all non-resident fathers and to invite them to participate in the educational/support groups. This staff

member was a contract employee of the Fathers and Families Center with office space at both the Center and at DCS. His presence in the DCS offices served as a reminder to DCS supervisors and line workers that fathers are important. In daily contacts with the workers and regular attendance at supervisory staff meetings, the male social worker reminded DCS staff of the value of including fathers in their case planning and regularly requested contact information of non-resident fathers from workers who had children on their caseloads.

Engaging Fathers

The fathers who participated in the program faced multiple hardships. On a personal level, several fathers were struggling with trust issues, failed relationships, and economic hardships. Some had lost hope of reuniting with their children; others did not know how to seek custody or reunification.

The mean age for fathers who attended three or more sessions was 29, with a range from 19 to 59. Seventy-two percent of the fathers were under 30 years old. The racial breakdown included 64 African American, 30 Caucasian, 2 Asian, 1 Hispanic, and one father of mixed racial heritage who did not self-identify. The average year of educational completion was 10th grade, with a range from 7th grade through graduate school. Seventy-nine percent (n = 38) were unemployed. Only 10 fathers had jobs. Sixty-eight of the fathers had one child, 23 fathers had two children and 7 had three or more children removed by DCS.

The educational/support groups were adjusted with each cohort to meet each father at his level of experience and need. Feedback from the weekly father satisfaction surveys suggested that, after 12 weeks, the fathers were especially grateful for the information they received. Several also appreciated both the chance to hear from other fathers in similar situations and to have a place to talk about their concerns.

Throughout the 20-week curriculum, fathers had an opportunity to be mentored, network, have questions answered, and share their problems and concerns with other staff and other fathers. Those fathers who attended regularly appeared to benefit significantly. Two fathers who completed 18 or more sessions included Robert and James. Both have improved their relationships with their children and have sought custody. When interviewed, they described how they felt empowered by the program.

Robert's Story

Robert's son is now 13. When his son was 5 or 6, Robert decided it would be best for his family if he moved out. His intention was to share the responsibilities of raising his son with his wife, even though they would live apart.

Over the years, Robert explained, arguments and disagreements led to resentment and, on occasion, his wife would not let him see his son. This led to court hearings to determine visitation rights. Eventually, the court ruled that it was in the best interest of his son that Robert no longer have contact with him.

Robert had not seen his son for about 5 years when he learned through an acquaintance that his son was in foster care. Surprised, he decided to find out why. When he first contacted DCS to find out why his son was in foster care, Robert felt that the caseworker treated him as if he were the enemy. During this time, a suggestion was made that he contact the Fathers and Families Center and enroll in a program they were offering.

Robert described himself as being older than the fathers in his class, but he quickly realized that they all faced the same problems. "I felt, 'Why am I here with these younger people?' I've never had any felonies, nothing." Then he realized the issues they faced were all the same, even if their individual stories were different. "The stories may be different, but you get railroaded because you are a guy."

Robert attended 18 sessions. He reflected that the first three sessions offered information about the child welfare system, which helped him understand for the first time what was happening with his son. Previously, he said, his dealings with caseworkers left him in the dark. "They used words I didn't understand." Just knowing the terminology and knowing the steps, Robert felt, was invaluable.

The class also provided support, something Robert said he had not received before. There was a lot of camaraderie. "That's what I liked. You get to talk and you get to vent." The Fathers and Families Center was also a place where Robert could network. "Talk to people outside of there and the first thing they ask is, 'How could your son be in foster care?' They look at you like you are a bad parent."

Without the Fathers and Families program, Robert said he never would have advanced as far and as fast as he has. He now hopes a decision will be made that will allow his son to live with him. "They were a good support system. They are professional. They came to you with open hearts. For some of the guys who didn't have a meal, that guy got a meal. You sure can't fight a war to get your child back if you are hungry."

"Without them," Robert said, "I would have been lost. More so, my son would have been lost."

James's Story

In April of 2010, James was still adjusting to life outside of prison, having been released only 2 months earlier. One day at work, he received a call saying his son had been taken by DCS and placed with a relative because of bizarre and threatening statements that his son's mother had made about his son and about another child who had a different father.

James contacted DCS and said he was the boy's biological father, but had no legal documents establishing his paternity. James was told he would have to establish his legal standing with his son. He was then contacted by the Fathers and Families program, asking if he would participate in a 20-week class. At first, James said he was upset by the suggestion because he was not responsible for his son being removed. However, he decided to give it a try. "That's what got me to do everything they wanted, including drug and alcohol classes, home-based counseling. You

got to do it. It's just that simple." James said he realized he had to go to the classes; otherwise, he would not have looked like someone who wanted to be in his child's life.

As with Robert, James said he received the support he needed to become a better father from the Fathers and Families program. "They embraced me as a father. That made me want to come back and learn more about being a father." James attended 19 sessions.

James said the key things he learned were how the child services system works, what the court hearings meant, and what was going to be said at the hearings. He also learned a lot about being a father, something he now realizes he didn't know much about. "As long as you can learn more about being a father, you can never learn too much. There is stuff you don't know about being a father they can show you."

Without the program, James said he likely would have become discouraged and given up. "Now, it's different. He is going to be coming with me. It's beautiful. I really appreciate the people who got me to that step."

As James waited for a court decision that would allow his son to live with him, he said, "[Without the program,] I wouldn't be at the stage I am at now. I got to thinking, maybe you need to do that."

Within 2 months after completing the curriculum, James obtained custody of his son.

Moving Forward

Environmental changes, attention to staffing, and participation in a demonstration project to engage fathers has shifted the practice in one urban county in Indiana. Indiana, however, is mostly rural. After considering the experiences with this project and the commitment of the leadership to embrace fathers, Casey Family Programs funded a similar project in three rural areas in other parts of the state.

Based on the experiences and successes in both the demonstration and Casey Family Programs projects, structural changes continue to be made statewide. In December 2010, the state issued a request for proposals (RFP) to providers to implement fatherhood programming that would provide assistance and support to fathers whose children are involved in the public child welfare system. DCS placed a father engagement worker in several of the county offices throughout the state. The father engagement worker will be housed within the county agency, conduct intake interviews with fathers, and work collaboratively with DCS and other contracted service providers "to develop, maintain, and provide appropriate programming for fathers whose children are involved in the child welfare system." (The RFP document is available to view at http://www.in.gov/dcs/files/ATTACHMENT_A_Community-Based_Services_Service_Standards_12_16_10.pdf.)

In an attempt to be culturally competent, the service standards required flexibility among workers to work within the time constraints of the fathers. The idea was to provide services in locations comfortable for the father, including his home, and to conduct services "with behavior and language that demonstrates respect for socio-cultural values, personal goals, life style choices, and complex family interactions and be delivered in a neutral, valued, culturally competent manner." Applicants were asked to "possess a clear understanding of male learning styles and male help-seeking behaviors and will practice effective techniques for father engagement

through a non-judgmental, holistic viewpoint regarding father/child relationship, focusing on the child in the context of the family."

DCS received more than 300 applications in response to the RFP. The RFP does not specify gender for the father engagement workers. The assumption made early in the demonstration project, that men would be more comfortable with males and therefore more easily engaged, did not bear out. Data collected by the Casey Family Programs project in monthly interviews with 59 fathers found that only 3.3% of the fathers felt that gender made a difference in their engagement. An interesting finding was that 14.6% of the fathers indicated that it mattered that the first contact was with a private agency (Wright, 2011). Although data was not collected on these variables in the original demonstration project, the male social worker noticed that his success rate in reaching fathers in the initial attempt increased when the caller ID was not from a government agency. As this became apparent, some fathers in the demonstration project were asked about their gender preference at first contact and, similar to the Casey Family Programs finding, the fathers were not as concerned as originally expected.

Another effort at system change included the development of a training module for line staff called Advanced Fatherhood Training. According to the description written in the state's 5-year plan, "This course provides a manual on skill-building for practitioners and is based on a three-year research project on engaging and involving fathers in their children's lives. Specific examples are provided on how to engage fathers" (Mitchell & Payne, 2008, p. 170). This comprehensive plan extends from October 1, 2009, to September 30, 2014, and was submitted to the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

System change takes time, especially in a government bureaucracy with an established history of practice. Casey Family Programs, with its strong history of consultation with public child welfare agencies, suggested that it takes from 9 to 15 years to fundamentally, philosophically, and at the grassroots level incorporate major system change (Folaron & Sullenberger, 2009). Indiana is moving fast to change practice and emphasize father involvement. Changes mandated in new policies are becoming institutionalized in practice and the state has demonstrated its commitment to fathers by backing its effort with financial support.

This is all good news for fathers like Robert and James, who needed support, education, and guidance to negotiate the child welfare system and meet the needs of their children. It is also good news for all those children waiting for permanent homes who have fathers and/or paternal kin willing and able to meet their long-term needs.

References

English, D. J., Brummel, S. L., & Martens, P. (2009). Fatherhood in the child welfare system: Evaluation of the pilot project to improve father involvement. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 3*(3), 213-234.

Folaron, G., & Sullenberger, S. W. (2009). *Reforming public child welfare: Indiana's experience: Final report*. Submitted to the Indiana Department of Child Services.

Franck, E. J. (2001). Outreach to birthfathers of children in out-of-home care. *Child Welfare, 80*(3), 381-399.

Goldstine, H. S. (1982). Fathers' absence and cognitive development of 12–17 year olds. *Psychological Reports, 51*, 843–848.

Greif, G. L., & Zuravin, S. J. (1989). Fathers: A placement resource for abused and neglected children? *Child Welfare, 68*(5), 479-490.

Jenkins, K. (2009). Introduction: Engaging non-resident fathers—Challenging the system. *Protecting Children, 24*(2), 2-4.

Lamb, M. E. (1997). Fathers and child development: An introductory overview and guide. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The Role of the Father in Child Development*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Malm, K., Murray, J., & Geen, R. (2006). *What about the dads? Child welfare agencies' efforts to identify, locate and involve nonresident fathers.* Washington, DC: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Retrieved January 10, 2011, from http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/06/CW-involve-dads/index.htm

Miller, C., & Knox, V. (2001). *The challenge of helping low-income fathers support their children: Final lessons from parents' fair share.* New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

Mitchell, D., & Payne, J. (2008). Protecting our children, families, and future: Indiana program improvement plan. Chicago: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved February 2, 2011, from www.in.gov/dcs/files/2004-2009statecw5yearplan.doc

Mosley, J., & Thompson, E. (1995). Fathering behavior and child outcomes: The role of race and poverty. In W. Marsiglio (Ed.), *Fatherhood: Contemporary theory, research, and social policy* (pp. 148-165). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nord, C., Brimhall, D., & West, J. (1997, October). Fathers' involvement in their children's schools: National household education survey. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved February 3, 2011, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98091.pdf

O'Donnell, J. M. (2002, Summer). *Father involvement in kinship foster care: An empirical study. Best Practice, Next Practice: Family-Centered Child Welfare*, 11-13. Retrieved February 3, 2011, from http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/newsletter/BPNPSummer02.pdf

Parsons, R. J. (1991). Empowerment: Purpose and practice principles in social work. *Social Work with Groups, 14*(2), 7-21.

Raichel, J. (2009). Engaging and involving fathers in a child's life and in the child welfare case, *Protecting Children, 24*(2), 23-33.

Robbins, S., Chatterjee, P., & Canda, E. (1998). *Contemporary human behavior theory: A critical perspective for social work*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Rosenberg, J., & Wilcox, W. B. (2006). The importance of fathers in the healthy development of children. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Retrieved January 20, 2011, from http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/fatherhood.pdf

Sonenstein, F., Malm, K., & Billing, A. (2002). Study of fathers' involvement in permanency planning and child welfare casework. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved December 30, 2010, from http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/CW-dads02

Strega, S., Brown, L., Dominelli, L., Walmsley, C., & Callahan, M. (2009). Working with me, working at me: Narratives of fathers in child welfare. *Journal of Progressive Human Services, 19*(2), 72-91.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2008). Children's bureau CFSR final report: Indiana. Retrieved January 20, 2011, from http://library.childwelfare.gov/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb_web/Blob/31.pdf?w=NATIVE%28%27DT+ph+is+%27%27CFSR+Final+Report%27%27+and+STATE+%3D+%27%27Indiana%27%27+and+RPERIOD+%3D+%27%271st++Round+CFSR%27%27+and+DOC_AVAILABILITY+%5E%3D+%27%27Not+publicly+available+on+the+Children%27%27%27%27s+Bureau+website%27%27%27%29&m=1

Velazquez, S., Edwards, M., Vincent, S., & Reynolds , J. (2009). Engaging fathers with the child welfare system, phase I of a knowledge development project: What does it take? *Protecting Children, 24*(2), 5-22.

Wright, M. (2011, January). Indiana site report. Paper presented at the meeting of the Father Engagement Summit, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Yogman, M. W, Kindlon, D., & Earls, F. (1995). Father involvement and cognitive behavioral outcomes of preterm infants. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 34*(1), 58-66.

Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers in the Child Welfare System: How Facilitators Rated the Sessions in the Model Intervention

Paul Frankel and Joanna Reynolds

Paul Frankel, Ph.D., a devoted non-resident father, experimental psychologist, and a member of the research and development staff at the Mental Health Center of Denver, has a long history of conducting program evaluations, training and capacity building, and advocating on behalf of vulnerable children and families in historically underserved communities. Dr. Frankel has worked for more than 15 years in local schools and diverse communities to provide technical assistance, resources, and support. He has designed assessments, questionnaires, and surveys, developed educational materials for fathers and children, and has been privileged to collaborate with colleagues, universities, corporations, and not-for-profit organizations worldwide. Dr. Frankel has directed local, national, and international research, and has provided assistance and support to state agencies, counties, and tribes. He has volunteered for the YMCA, Big Brothers Big Sisters, primary and secondary schools, and has taught undergraduate psychology courses at Tulane University in New Orleans, the University of Colorado Denver, and Metropolitan State College of Denver. Dr. Frankel holds a Ph.D. and M.S. in social psychology from Tulane University, and a B.S. with honors in the social sciences from Michigan State University.

Joanna Reynolds, M.A., worked as a research associate for American Humane Association from February 2005 to May 2011. She has worked in project evaluation and impact assessment, developing surveys, conducting data management and analysis, and writing and editing reports. She has participated in workload studies for several jurisdictions, including Jefferson County Department of Human Services and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, as well as the Washington DSHS Children's Administration, a position in which she analyzed the data, conducted focus groups, and collaborated on the report to the Washington DSHS Children's Administration. She has also conducted data analyses and compiled reports in the Philadelphia Outcomes Measure Project (1996-2006) for the Children and Youth Division in Philadelphia. Ms. Reynolds served as evaluator for the Rocky Mountain Quality Improvement Center and currently serves as evaluation consultant for the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers, as well as for the Family Finding and Engagement initiative conducted by the California Administrative Office of the Courts. She holds an M.A. in economics.

Background and Introduction

In 2006, the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Administration for Children, Youth and Families funded the Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF). This QIC was designed to address the lack of involvement of non-resident fathers in their children's care and the underutilization of fathers and paternal kin as resources for placement or other forms of support to caregivers. The QIC NRF's first year of operation entailed a needs assessment, literature review, problem

definition, and program design. At the end of the first year, the Children's Bureau awarded the QIC NRF a supplemental grant, which was used for the development of a 12-module curriculum for the peer-led support group. The sessions formed the core of the model intervention, which was designed to last for 20 weeks: the 12 sessions as outlined in the curriculum, and 8 additional weeks focusing on topics of the fathers' own choosing. The first three sessions were proscribed. For the 4th through the 12th weeks, participants and facilitators together chose the modules to be covered each week.

These sessions sought to foster fathers' knowledge of the child welfare system, strengthen their parenting skills, strengthen their life skills, and, in general, promote a higher degree of engagement among fathers with their children and with the systems with which they were involved (see Appendix A).

Site and cross-site evaluators—in Colorado, Indiana, Texas, and Washington—gathered data from a number of sources to assess the effectiveness of the program and to examine barriers, strategies, and knowledge for future iterations and replications of the program. Among these activities, a weekly facilitator feedback survey formed part of the ongoing formative evaluation of the non-resident father model program intervention (see Appendix B). With this survey, facilitators and evaluators assessed the 12 structured and 8 semi-structured peer-led sessions, and provided recommendations regarding future program modifications and improvements. QIC NRF staff sent a weekly reminder to all site facilitators and site evaluators with information about accessing the online formative survey through SurveyMonkey, a web-based survey tool. Each week (in theory), site facilitators completed this brief online survey about the particular sessions that were implemented at their research and demonstration sites during the preceding week. The online survey included standard evaluative items and ratings from week to week, as well as the ability to respond to open-ended questions for each session.

Throughout the term of the QIC NRF, facilitators provided information to the QIC NRF research and training staff regarding the challenges and successes of implementing the model program intervention. Based on the relults of the online surveys taken by facilitators, evaluators examined the choices made by fathers, both in the ordering of sessions 4-12, and in the choice of topics for sessions 13-20. Evaluators also sought information on time allocation, degree of engagement, unusual behavior on the part of fathers, and the use of guest speakers.

This paper will present findings on choice of session, ratings, engagement, and time allocation, followed by a qualitative section presenting facilitator feedback on each module through their open-ended comments. These sections will be followed by a discussion and conclusion.

Findings

During the period the QIC-NRF was operative, facilitators conducted 473 curriculum sessions of the non-resident father model program intervention across the four research and demonstration sites. Implementation of sessions began in December 2008, and session facilitators have provided model intervention feedback in an accumulated fashion continuously for more than 3 years (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number of Curriculum Sessions and Cohorts by Site

Site	Number of Curriculum Sessions	Number of Cohorts	Percentage of Total Curriculum Sessions
CO	105	6	22%
IN	127	11	27%
TX	130	11	27%
WA	111	6	24%
Totals	**473**	**34**	**100%**

Table 2. Frequency of Curriculum Modules or Topics

Frequency Rank	Name of Module or Topic	Frequency of Implementation	Percentage of Total
1	Dad as Part of the Solution: Overview of the Child Welfare System	35	7.4%
2	Dad as Healthy Parent: Taking Care of You	32	6.8%
3	Dad as Planner: Service Planning in the Child Welfare System	32	6.8%
4	Dad as Provider: Supporting Your Children	31	6.6%
5	Dad as Worker: Workforce Readiness	31	6.6%
6	Dad as Part of Children's Placement: Visiting With Your Children	30	6.3%
7	Introduction Session	30	6.3%
8	Dad as Part of the Juvenile Court Process: Legal Advocacy and Court Etiquette	27	5.7%
9	Dad as Team Player: Shared Parenting	26	5.5%
10	Dad as Community Member: Identifying and Accessing Resources	24	5.1%
11	Dad as Cultural Guide: The Role of Culture in Parenting	23	4.9%
12	Dad as Parent: Understanding Your Children	19	4.0%
13	Other (session was part of the last 8 weeks)	133 (= 16 for each week slot)	28.0 % (= 4% for each slot)
	Total	**473**	**100.0%**

The 473 total curriculum sessions represented 11 cohorts of non-resident fathers in both Texas and Indiana, and 6 cohorts in both Colorado and Washington. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, the unit of observation is the session-occurrence. Given that there was a total of 34 cohorts across sites, each session-module should have been conducted 34 times. However, sessions were cancelled; most were made up, but some topics were not held. Since fathers were allowed to choose the order of the module topics, frequency of modules provides some indication of the choices made by participants and facilitators (see Table 2).

Of the prescribed 12 curriculum session modules, program designers required 3 sessions to be implemented first. These were the Introduction Session, Dad as Part of the Solution: Overview of the Child Welfare System, and Dad as Planner: Service Planning in the Child Welfare System. Thus, as anticipated, site staff implemented Dad as Part of the Solution: Overview of the Child Welfare System (7.4%), Dad as Healthy Parent: Taking Care of You (6.8%), and Dad as Planner: Service Planning in the Child Welfare System (6.8%) relatively frequently. Site staff and participants chose Dad as Provider: Supporting Your Children (6.6%), Dad as Worker: Workforce Readiness (6.6%), Dad as Part of Children's Placement: Visiting With Your Children (6.3%), and the remaining 5 sessions constituted approximately one quarter (25.2%) of the remaining recorded sessions.

Participants' Choices Based on Perceived Needs

Evaluators assumed that for the sessions immediately following the first three, fathers would choose the modules which addressed their immediate needs. Table 3 below shows the

Migration and Child Welfare National Network

Join the Migration and Child Welfare National Network Today!

Leading organizations in the fields of immigration and child welfare have come together to increase the effectiveness of the child welfare system's and other corresponding systems' response to migration issues.

Membership is FREE and there are several advantages to joining:

- Members learn from the experience and expertise of others.
- Members share knowledge and strategies.
- Members receive up-to-date e-news on resources and research available.
- Members participate in collaborative efforts to improve services for immigrant families in the child welfare system.

Learn more: www.americanhumane.org/migration

Follow the MCWNN On twitter

frequency of sessions chosen for weeks 4 and 5. There is considerable variety in the choices, but it is clear that facilitators and participants showed a keen interest early on in the Juvenile Court Process, Visitation, and Health and Support.

Table 3. Frequency of Modules Chosen for Early Sessions

Module/Topic	Week 4	Week 5
Dad as Part of the Juvenile Court Process	9	3
Dad as Part of Children's Placement	6	6
Dad as Healthy Parent	4	2
Dad as Parent	4	1
Dad as Provider	4	5
Dad as Cultural Guide	2	3
Dad as Worker	2	2
Dad as Community Member	1	4
Dad as Planner	1	
Dad as Team Player		2
Other		1

As each cohort neared its 12th session, the cohort would discuss and determine the topics of the last 8 sessions. They could either return to a module which they felt merited further discussion, they could further explore a topic previously covered, they could conduct modules from other curricula (Texas conducted several sessions of their Fathers Offering Children Unfailing Support [FOCUS] curriculum), or they could examine a topic not covered in the other curriculum modules. Their choices for these last 8 weeks indicated a perceived need for practical help in job search and job readiness, budgeting and personal finance, and non-abusive ways to discipline a child. Table 4 shows the topics chosen for these last 8 weeks, along with the frequencies of these topics. Fathers chose job readiness and budgeting/finance most frequently. The frequencies also show an interest in conflict and anger management; the leadership, planning, and decision making that fatherhood entails; child safety; and discipline.

Table 4. Topics Covered During the Last 8 Weeks

Chosen Topic	Frequency
Job Search and Job Readiness	14
Close Out and Graduation	10
Budgeting and Finance	8
Fatherhood Leadership, Planning, and Decision Making	7
Anger, Stress, and Conflict Management	6
Child Safety	6
Discipline	6
Follow Up	6
Legal	6
Child Support	5
Health	5
Parenting	5
Pursuit of Happyness (movie)	5
Films on Fatherhood	4
Next Steps	4
The Family	4
Practical Matters	3
Ethics	2
Fathers Advisory Council	2
Generational Differences	2
Life Mapping	2
Marriage	2
Self Discovery	2
Other	14

In the survey, for each session conducted, facilitators made a global judgment and rated the quality of each session's facilitated discussions and activities as a whole. Across all 466 sessions (13 were unrated), facilitators rated discussions and activities very highly on a scale of (1) poor to (5) excellent, with a mean rating of 4.4 out of 5.0. Specific sessions were rated as poor in just 2 of the

Table 5. Mean Facilitator Overall Ratings for Fatherhood Sessions Across All Sites

Rank	Module/Topic	N	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Mean Rating
1	Dad as Part of the Solution (Overview)	35	.52979	3	5	4.69
2	Dad as Planner	32	.71842	2	5	4.50
3	Dad as Part of the Juvenile Court Process	27	.64273	3	5	4.48
4	Dad as Cultural Guide	23	.51075	4	5	4.48
5	Other (session was part of the last 8 weeks)	130	.62525	3	5	4.48
6	Dad as Provider	30	.56832	3	5	4.43
7	Dad as Parent	18	.60768	3	5	4.39
8	Dad as Worker	31	.70938	3	5	4.35
9	Dad as Team Player	26	.73589	2	5	4.31
10	Dad as Healthy Parent	31	.69251	3	5	4.29
11	Introduction session	29	.88918	1	5	4.17
12	Dad as Community Member	24	1.31876	1	5	4.00
13	Dad as Part of Childs Placement	30	.74278	2	5	4.00
	Overall	**466**	**.72474**	**1**	**5**	**4.38**

466 sessions: One was the Introduction Session, and the other was Dad as Community Member: Identifying and Accessing Resources. On average, the highest rated session was Dad as Part of the Solution: Overview of the Child Welfare System (M = 4.69), followed by two of the flexible group-selected alternative sessions, Dad as Planner: Service Planning in the Child Welfare System (M = 4.50), Dad as Part of the Juvenile Court Process: Legal Advocacy and Court Etiquette (M = 4.48), Dad as Cultural Guide: the Role of Culture in Parenting (M = 4.48), and the "other" sessions (M = 4.48). All other sessions were clustered around the mean.

Facilitators could comment on their ratings, and comments showed what the facilitators were considering as they rated the sessions. Those who rated their sessions highly (excellent) praised the guest speakers, the discussion, the relevance of the topic, and the fathers' questions. Those who rated their sessions less highly mentioned low attendance ("only one dad"), irrelevance of subject matter to those present, and the participants' reserve (usually during the first session).

Additionally, for each session, the facilitators rated the level of participant engagement that they had observed. Overall, across the 451 reported sessions (22 were unrated), the facilitators rated very highly the level of engagement of the non-resident father participants (overall M = 4.43) on a scale of (1) not engaged at all to (5) fully engaged. No facilitator rated any single session's engagement level as "not engaged at all." As shown in Table 6, the session with the highest rated level of active engagement was Dad as Part of the Solution: Overview of the Child Welfare System (M = 4.74); that with the

Table 6. Mean Facilitator Engagement Ratings for Fatherhood Sessions Across All Sites

Rank	Module/Topic	N	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Mean Rating
1	Dad as Part of the Solution (Overview)	35	.505	3	5	4.74
2	Dad as Planner	31	.551	3	5	4.65
3	Other (session was part of the last 8 weeks)	117	.609	1	5	4.55
4	Dad as Parent	19	.513	4	5	4.53
5	Dad as Part of the Juvenile Court Process	26	.647	3	5	4.46
6	Dad as Cultural Guide	22	.596	3	5	4.45
7	Dad as Community Member	24	.770	3	5	4.38
8	Introduction Session	29	.614	3	5	4.34
9	Dad as Provider	30	.837	2	5	4.30
10	Dad as Team Player	26	.724	3	5	4.27
11	Dad as Worker	31	.729	3	5	4.26
12	Dad as Healthy Parent	31	.669	3	5	4.23
13	Dad as Part of Children's Placement	30	.828	2	5	4.07
	Overall	**451**	**.674**	**1**	**5**	**4.43**

lowest was Dad as Part of Children's Placement: Visiting With Your Children (M = 4.07), although all sessions were highly regarded (see Table 5). Level of engagement often figured in the facilitators' comments, as discussed below.

In 205 of the total reported sessions (43%), an engaging guest expert co-facilitated (e.g., child support specialist, parent educator, legal liaison, nurse, attorney, caseworker, workforce center manager); whether a given session featured a guest was recorded in the facilitator survey. The overall session and father engagement ratings were reported to be particularly high when guest speakers were present (overall Ms = 4.57 and 4.54, respectively, for overall rating and engagement with a guest speaker, as compared to 4.25 and 4.30, respectively, without a guest speaker). Evaluators performed a cross-tabulation and chi-square test. The difference was shown to be highly significant ($p < .000$). Facilitator comments also stressed fathers' enthusiasm and active questioning of guest speakers during the sessions with guest speakers. One facilitator commented that "the facilitator for this session is great; he really gets the men to interact with each other along with himself. As they asked the more difficult questions, light bulbs start going off in these fathers' head and they are now ready to get more information," after the Dad as Planner session.

Table 7. Presence of a Guest Speaker: Overall Ratings and Level of Engagement

Was there a guest speaker?	Overall Rating		Engagement	
	N	Mean	*N*	Mean
No	167	4.251	162	4.296
Yes	202	4.569	202	4.540
Unreported	97	4.227	87	4.425
Total	**466**	**4.384**	**451**	**4.430**

Since the curriculum was specially developed for this project, evaluators were interested to find whether adequate time had been allotted to the modules. In 402 of the total reported sessions (85% of 473), facilitators indicated that there was adequate time to complete all of the session's activities and facilitated discussions; in 52 of the sessions, facilitators reported insufficient time;

for 19 of the sessions, there was no indication as to time. There was no clear pattern to sessions where it was reported that there was not enough time to finish the session, other than the fact that such comments were generally reported in weeks 1 and 2, when facilitators and fathers were new to the process of implementing the model program intervention.

Further, overall ratings were not appreciably reduced in the relatively small percentage of sessions where facilitators reported inadequate time to complete the week's session (overall Ms = 4.44 and 4.48, respectively, for overall rating and engagement). In fact, intense and lively engagement can be expected to cause a given session to run overtime.

Table 8. Sufficient Time: Overall Ratings and Level of Engagement

Was there sufficient time to cover the material?	Overall Rating		Engagement	
	N	Mean	*N*	Mean
No	52	4.442	50	4.480
Yes	399	4.373	393	4.417
Unreported	15	4.467	8	4.750
Total	**466**	**4.384**	**451**	**4.430**

Lastly, although very rare, in 10 separate sessions and across three different sites it was reported that a father experienced unusual stress or sadness during the sessions (e.g., a father showed a lot of emotion; a father laid his head down; a father appeared under the influence of drugs or alcohol). Facilitators indicated in qualitative comments that, in many of these situations, other peer fathers and the facilitator were able to offer words of encouragement and mutual support to assist the fathers in moving toward acceptance and reconciliation (see Table 9).

Table 9. Frequency of Unusual Behavioral Incidents by Module/Topic

Module/Topic	Total number of sessions with unusual incidents	Sites where incidents took place
Dad as Healthy Parent: Taking Care of You	3	Indiana, Texas
Dad as Parent: Understanding Your Children	1	Colorado
Dad as Part of Children's Placement: Visiting With Your Children	1	Indiana
Dad as Part of the Juvenile Court Process: Legal Advocacy and Court Etiquette	1	Indiana
Dad as Part of the Solution: Overview of the Child Welfare System	2	Indiana
Dad as Provider: Supporting Your Children	1	Indiana
Other (session was part of the last 8 weeks)	1	Indiana
Total	**10**	

Feedback on Specific Modules

The most useful information about the modules came from the facilitators' open-ended comments (see Appendix B). These indicate which modules went smoothly, which encountered resistance, which have different impacts on different audiences, and which are most subject to change and in what direction. In this section, each module is discussed in terms of some of these comments.

Comments on specific modules show that not all groups are equal. Particularly with some small groups, information relevant to one group is not so relevant to another.

Introduction Session

Although several facilitators commented that interaction proceeded slowly during the first session and that fathers showed some reserve at first, the facilitators also acknowledged that the session proved useful in establishing expectations and allowing fathers to tell their stories:

- "Love this getting-to-know-you session, although I don't think I'll ever get all the way through to the video. Session sets the stage for good discussion and expectations. Questions draw out strengths-based responses, provide opportunities to address pain, [and] diffuse tension."

Facilitators also noted that fathers came to this first meeting with highly emotional stories to tell, and suggested that more time be allocated to allow fathers to air their stories and feelings at the outset.

Dad as Part of the Solution

Sessions on this topic greatly benefited from guest facilitators from the child welfare agencies. These speakers elicited and answered many questions from the fathers; facilitator comments praised the guests in superlative terms:

- "Dads consistently voiced appreciation for someone taking the time to explain their role in the system, as well as understanding the steps. Also mentioned their 'place' in the process."

- "Some of the men needed this session so badly that I had to skip the introduction to get right to this session. The reason for doing this was because the men said this is what they desperately needed during the first week."

One facilitator commented that this topic could fill 3 weeks. Several facilitators noted that there was a great deal of information in the plan, and most of these pieces of information provoked questions. Thus, facilitators felt challenged in "getting through the material," which they felt was important, without "cutting the dads off."

Dad as Parent

Many iterations of this topic had guest speakers, to whom facilitators and participants responded with great enthusiasm. One facilitator commented, "Best week ever!" Specific comments noted the growing understanding of child development and age-appropriate expectations:

- "The fathers involved in this session were able to gain an understanding of their children. They enjoyed the discussion on what children should be expected to do at what stage in life."

- "Got creative this week trying to drive home the issue of kids needing different things at different ages. Watched a strengths-based video clip of a father dealing with a little girl's fear effectively. Afterward, we identified the 'tools' this father used."

Dad as Planner

Comments on the sessions on this topic varied with the groups. As with the other topic modules pertaining to the child welfare agency, having a guest facilitator helped fathers to further understand the system. Facilitators valued the detailed presentation of a case plan, as some fathers "had never seen a case plan." One facilitator wrote:

- "This is the tools session and the men realize this real early so they become very attentive. The co-facilitator in this session gives them a whole new perspective on dealing with the department."

Facilitators here and elsewhere commented occasionally on low attendance. They also noted that fathers have some trouble with role-play as an instructional technique.

Juvenile Court System

Facilitators emphatically endorsed this module/topic and noted fathers' almost uniformly high engagement:

- "This is the part when men really perk up and they ask some questions that some lawyers would not answer. Patrick [the co-facilitator] is great at trying to give them what they need even if it means [that they need to] look further than him for the answer."

Most of the sessions on this topic featured guest speakers, usually lawyers. One facilitator suggested, "Find the best lawyer you can for this segment." Another indicated that this topic should be allotted 2 weeks.

In general, facilitators' comments indicated a tendency to extend the discussion beyond conduct and etiquette in the courtroom, as implied by the title of the session, and into a thorough review of the fathers' rights.

Dad as Provider

This session supported and informed fathers in their dealings with child support enforcement. Some groups had no support orders, so this session seemed irrelevant. Most groups, however, were comprised of fathers with orders, and so this session engaged them. The emotional tenor of these sessions, understandably, was not always positive; the success of the session often rested with the skill of the guest facilitator:

- "This week has historically been touchy depending on, I suppose, how much the fathers owe. So everyone is not enthused during this session. . . . Child support has never been the best session, but my co-facilitator is great at keeping the crowd friendly."

One facilitator had a practical suggestion:

- "We should probably have some modification paperwork handy so the child support worker can kind of help the men at least know what they are looking for when they are filling out the paperwork."

Dad as Team Player

This session covered co-parenting and constructive interactions with the child's mother. As one might expect, some angry feelings surfaced:

- "The fathers in this group have been very vocal about issues they have with their children's mothers, so this discussion helped focus the fathers to understand that they may not have to like the mother, but have to at least work with her for the child involved."

- "Overall the fathers in this group were pretty well engaged. The men in this group are kind of young, so they were a little confrontational when talking about respecting and dealing with their children's mothers."

One facilitator noted that the material in this module is applicable beyond the relationship between parents:

- "We as men need a lot of help being team players sometimes. I have found that this subject can be expanded easily to cover not only team player within this context, but also to include other relationships."

Another commented that issues surrounding co-parenting could fill an entire 20-week curriculum by itself.

Dad as Part of the Community

Comments on the Dad as Part of the Community session varied widely across sites and cohorts. This module elicited some incisive, critical comments from the facilitators. The basic plan for this topic seemed to be somewhat inapposite; either the material was too basic or the use of the phone book (one of the elements of this module) seemed incompatible with the dads' patterns of cell phone usage. The facilitators wrote:

- "The session was a little too basic for our audience. They are familiar with using the Internet and cell phones and the exercises had them working with phone books. They already knew most of the resources that they covered. Learning about 211 was the most [useful element in the session]."[1]
- "It is my opinion that this section should be reworked to reflect what these men would like to be, and not just what we think they should be."

In many cohorts, however, the information was useful to the participants, particularly when facilitators and participants broadened the content to include pathways to community leadership and the benefits to children of a strong community. Facilitators wrote:

- "The fathers in the group enjoyed learning about opportunities in the community to do things with their children for little or no cost. They also appreciated the conversation on where to find different services in the community."
- "We did a Part 2 to this curriculum with me doing the follow up from Marvin's [co-facilitator's] previous week. The class dug deeper into the meaning of community leadership, and more so what prevents men from being active in the community."
- "It needs to be changed from community member to community leaders in my opinion and the men can tell you why if you ask them. I think it is wrong to assume these men are not already community members and that they don't know how to ask for help."
- "As part of this session most of these guys came to the Father Advisory meeting on a Saturday, so when we did this session they were on fire concerning community."

Dad as Part of Children's Placement

This session dealt mostly with visitation. Again, the impact and responses depended on the audiences. There were no suggestions to expand the sessions, and the subject matter does not appear to have elicited the strong emotions arising out of some of the other sessions. The comments included below illustrate the differences in responses:

- "Visiting is the one thing these fathers have been doing pretty regularly so this session is not needed by a lot of these men. But we keep it interesting by exploring improvements that can be made."
- "I have often found that this session is kind of a hard one to facilitate. Generally there is not a whole lot of discussion. However, this group made the best of the topic in discussing some of the things they have done with their children while they visit."
- "Excellent tools and simple to follow. Helps fathers see the visitation issue from the perspective of children and other players while giving them tools to make visitation time about parenting time."
- "Great discussion. The dads were very interested in this session and had many questions for the subject matter expert."

[1] By analogy with 411 and 911, 211 is a nationwide number to call for information about health and community services.

Dad as Healthy Parent

Facilitators felt that, although sessions on this topic are sometimes difficult to lead, the topic is ultimately rewarding. Fathers are sometimes resistant to the idea of discussing their own unhealthy practices, and facilitators' language reflected the sense of heavy labor. The comment on stressors exemplifies the comments of several other facilitators as well. Although the topic of substance abuse proved laborious, fathers responded positively to the identification and management of stressors:

- "This is the heavy lifting week and everyone does not want to work this hard. For me, this is where you pay for your meal, so to speak, so I don't expect all the dads to participate fully."
- "This is the session that has probably been altered the most, simply because of what I have learned from the previous groups. When the men are happy with this session I know I did not put enough weight on the bar, so to speak."
- "This is where barriers are broken and men really begin to know each other, and trust each other."
- "Fathers were able to discuss some of the stresses they face on a daily basis. This was truly a healing time for some of them. The other group members were able to support the others as they tried to share what they faced."
- "After doing this session three times, I have come to a conclusion that this is one of my favorite sessions to lead. The fathers really like the rock activity, because it allows them the opportunity to see what stressors are affecting their lives on a daily basis."

Dad as Worker

Differing audiences elicited differing responses for this topic. Groups consisting of unemployed fathers welcomed the information and support. The rare groups consisting solely of employed fathers found much of the material too basic for them, with the sole exception of a group whose facilitator channeled the discussion into career paths and professional development.

Facilitators in general found mixed groups challenging, but one group welcomed the sharing of experience by a seasoned member of the workforce:

- "We only had two guys in class this week, but I felt the discussion went really well. One gentleman has worked in the same place for 10 years, so he was able to share some things that have led to his longevity in staying in the same place."

Facilitators called for more material specific to convicted felons' search for employment. While conventional job search techniques present closed doors to convicted felons, there are resources devoted to employment for felons, and these should be shared if necessary.

In general, the fact that fathers frequently chose this subject matter for weeks 13-20 bears testimony to its vital importance to these dads. Success in the face of diverse audiences rests on the ability of the facilitator to assess the needs of any given group and to tailor the session to these needs. Perhaps future versions of this module could include alternative plans and exercises.

Dad as Cultural Guide

Fathers commented that, at first, the concept of culture as presented in the curriculum was hard to understand. Sessions with guest speakers elicited comments such as "fascinating." One facilitator remarked:

- "The fathers really enjoyed this session. They thought it was a good opportunity to think about who they are, and what they can pass along to their children in way of family heritage."

Facilitators also suggested that the "writers might include more questions for each activity as conversation extenders."

Discussion

Facilitators rated the father-selected flexible sessions 13-20 very highly. Sessions 1-12 followed a facilitator training guide script and included timed activities. By contrast, in sessions 13-20, the participants selected topics for further learning and study. As indicated previously, many of these topics were a continuation of topics covered in sessions 1-12, but with added benefit, such as résumé creation, dealing with stress and pressure, getting along with mothers, and a special graduation ceremony session. Further, some of the father-selected sessions were very innovative, and included more information from guest presenters and facilitators about communication, leadership, love and logic, anger, and personality types. Facilitators rated these sessions, on average, at 4.48 out of 5.

An anomalous finding in the ongoing formative analysis of the model program intervention curriculum sessions was that particular sessions were rated highly overall, but engagement ratings were relatively lower (or vice versa). Although the bivariate correlation of the overall session ratings and father engagement was relatively high ($r = .59$, $p < .01$), there were ranking differences among the sessions that should be examined in future research (see Table 8). For example, while Dad as Parent, Dad as Community Member, and the Introduction Session were given relatively low ranks in terms of overall ratings, perceived father engagement was somewhat higher. In particular, Dad as Parent was ranked low overall (Rank = 8), but engagement was relatively high (Rank = 4). In Dad as Parent, there is one uniquely positive,

Table 8. Relative Ranks of Each Curriculum Session Based on Mean Ratings by Facilitators

Module/Topic	Rating Rank	Engagement Rank
Dad as Part of the Solution: Overview of the Child Welfare System	1	1
Dad as Planner: Service Planning in the Child Welfare System	3	2
Other (session was part of the last 8 weeks)	2	3
Dad as Parent: Understanding Your Children	8	4
Dad as Cultural Guide: The Role of Culture in Parenting	4	5
Dad as Part of the Juvenile Court Process: Legal Advocacy and Court Etiquette	5	6
Dad as Community Member: Identifying and Accessing Resources	13	7
Introduction Session	11	8
Dad as Worker: Workforce Readiness	6	9
Dad as Provider: Supporting Your Children	7	10
Dad as Team Player: Shared Parenting	9	11
Dad as Healthy Parent: Taking Care of You	10	12
Dad as Part of Children's Placement: Visiting With Your Children	12	13

fun, and highly interactive group activity—What Do Kids Need?—and it is hypothesized that the enthusiasm of the facilitator, in addition to the appealing activity, raise engagement levels for this specific session. In the future, each session will have to be analyzed individually, activity-by-activity, to examine the reasons for relative differences in ranking. (Highlighted modules show relatively disparate rankings.)

One implementation challenge has been the relatively small size of each session cohort, and several facilitators even commented, "I wish I had more men to work with," as well as, "The exercise does not work well with a small number of dads." The sessions were developed for maximum learning when facilitated within a peer group; lower attendance may have been due to the fact that fewer non-resident fathers than originally anticipated were eligible to participate due to stringent eligibility requirements of the research design and other recruiting challenges documented by the four demonstration sites throughout the life cycle of this project. As each demonstration site and other interested agencies in the United States expand implementation and funding to serve non-resident fathers, resident fathers, teen fathers, incarcerated fathers, and other heretofore difficult-to-reach fathers, larger father peer groups will be better able to share an array of experiences and benefit from a greater diversity of life experiences.

Conclusion

Findings show that these peer-led support sessions are informative and rewarding for participants. Formative results of the online weekly facilitator feedback survey show that the facilitators perceived the model program intervention to be successful in engaging non-resident fathers in discussion and active learning sessions. More than 100 open-ended qualitative comments from session facilitators indicated that fathers were highly engaged and that the sessions were interesting and productive (e.g., "Another great session!"; "Excellent class"; "The guest presenter did an outstanding job!"; "Dads were able to receive a lot of new information").

Based on mean ratings and rankings, the session Dad as Part of the Solution: Overview of the Child Welfare System was ranked first in both overall ratings and engagement. In particular, this session included a presentation by a guest child welfare professional, and handouts consisted of extremely useful materials including a customizable map of steps of the child welfare system, a "Dictionary for Dads" of child welfare terminology, and a list of the "players" who work in the child welfare system. This session, as well as Dad as Planner: Service Planning in the Child Welfare System, provided fathers with father-friendly background information about the child welfare system, presented in an interesting and highly interactive medium.

From the facilitators' comments, guest experts' contributions are vital to the success of this program. Facilitators noted that fathers eagerly questioned these experts on their respective fields and received a rich array of valuable information.

Fathers' responses to some of the modules indicate where more work is needed. In particular, facilitators called for more attention to be paid to substance abuse and to employment for felons. They also indicated that the modules on co-parenting and child support brought up some deep emotions and acute distress. These authors feel that future iterations of peer-led support groups for fathers should further explore and develop ways to give emotional support to both mothers and fathers as they interact with each other for the good of their children.

Lastly, it became apparent that not all groups have equal needs or respond to material the same way. A flexible approach to facilitation and a cache of alternative exercises and materials will help meet the fathers "where they are" and support them in the nurturing of their children.

Appendix A. Group Session Topics

Bringing Back the Dads: A Model Program Curriculum for Non-Resident Father Engagement

1. **Introduction Session**
   Focus of Session: Dads will learn about the primary goals of the non-resident father program, the expectations and commitments related to the group, and the group guidelines. Dads will get to know one another's "stories" and be able to identify their individual needs and interests in the group content. Finally, dads will provide feedback and will help identify the order in which topics should be presented, based on their personal and learning needs.

2. **Dad as Part of the Solution: Overview of the Child Welfare System**
   Focus of Session: Dads will learn how the child welfare system works as well as where they and their children currently are in the phases of the system. They will meet a representative of the child welfare system and be able to ask questions.

3. **Dad as Planner: Service Planning in the Child Welfare System**
   Focus of Session: Dads will learn more about how the service- or case-planning stage of the child welfare system works and how they can be effective participants. Dads will meet a representative of the child welfare system and be able to ask questions relating to their experiences within the system.

4. **Dad as Provider: Supporting Your Children**
   Focus of Session: Dads will learn about the importance of providing financial support to their non-resident children and will discuss what this type of support means for their children and for their self-identification as a dad. Particular emphasis should be placed on the value of all types of support given by a dad (i.e., financial, emotional, and physical). Dads will meet a local child support enforcement office representative and will learn about child support enforcement and how to navigate the child support system.

5. **Dad as Team Player: Shared Parenting**
   Focus of Session: Dads will learn about shared parenting and why it is important to their children's healthy development. Dads will discuss productive ways to share the parenting of their children with the mothers, their extended families, foster families, and other important supports in the children's lives.

6. **Dad as Parent: Understanding Your Children**
   Focus of Session: Dads will learn about and discuss the developmental needs of children. Dads will also identify and discuss what children need from their dads and how dads can meet the needs of their children to promote healthy child development.

7. **Dad as Community Member: Identifying and Accessing Resources**
   Focus of Session: Dads will be able to identify and prioritize age-appropriate resources and activities for themselves and their children. Dads will be able to locate supportive resources available throughout their local communities that are free of cost or available at a reduced cost, and will learn to feel more comfortable in making inquiries for assistance.

8. **Dad as Part of the Court Process: Legal Advocacy and Court Etiquette**
Focus of Session: Dads will learn how the juvenile court legal process works and where they and their children currently are in the phases of the legal system. Dads will meet a parent attorney and be able to ask questions. The parent attorney will only be able to talk about general situations, since he or she cannot provide legal advice to non-clients.

9. **Dad as Part of Children's Placement: Visiting With Your Children**
Focus of Session: Dads will learn the purpose and goals of visitation (as identified by the child welfare system), what the child welfare system looks for to evaluate the success of visitation, and what dads can do to have successful visitations with their children.

10. **Dad as a Healthy Parent: Taking Care of You**
Focus of Session: Dads will learn why their health and well-being is important to their role as a dad. The session will address potential problem areas in the dads' lives and will provide them with some healthy principles for living. Dads will gain a better understanding of how their health directly affects their children. Dads will be able to identify the stressors in their lives and productive ways to reduce their stress and stay healthy.

11. **Dad as Cultural Guide: The Role of Culture in Parenting**
Focus of Session: Dads will learn about the importance of using their cultures as a foundation for parenting. Dads will explore what cultures they identify with, how their cultures influence the ways in which they act as dads, what parts of their cultures they want to share with their children, and ways in which they can share their cultures with their children.

12. **Dad as Worker: Workforce Readiness**
Focus of Session: Dads will learn about the importance of being gainfully employed and will discuss the balance needed to handle the demands of employment and parenting. Dads will meet a local career or workforce readiness expert and will discuss the issues and challenges related to finding and maintaining employment.

A copy of the curriculum is available at:

www.fatherhoodqic.org

Appendix B. Curriculum Feedback Questionnaire/Facilitator Feedback Survey

	Question	Response Set
1	Date:	6/22/2009
2	Week number of this session for the group:	The session number for that cohort
3	Enter the Group ID Number:	This format provided the indication of the site and cohort number (e.g., 2000-3)
4	Please select the session module:	Module title or topic specification ("Other" for weeks 13-20)
5	What was this week's topic?	Topic definition for weeks 13-20
6	How would you rate the session's facilitated discussions and activities as a whole?	Excellent Good Average Fair Poor
7	Please explain your rating:	Facilitators were invited to elaborate on their general rating
8	Did you have time to complete all of the session's facilitated discussions and activities?	Yes/No
9	For which activities would you have liked more time?	[Open-ended response]
10	How would you rate the level of engagement of the dads in the facilitated discussions and activities throughout the session?	Survey asked facilitators to choose among: Fully engaged Mostly engaged Engaged some of the time Slightly engaged Not engaged
11	For which facilitated discussions or activities were the dads' engagement particularly **HIGH** or particularly **LOW?**	[Open-ended response]
12	Did you have any special guest speakers for this particular session?	Yes/No
13		Name of guest speaker
14	Did a session participant exhibit any inappropriate or highly unusual behavior?	Yes/No
15	Please share any additional comments or feedback.	[Open-ended response]
16	**OPTIONAL:** If you would like to be contacted to discuss your comments further, please provide us with your email address and/or phone number.	Contact information

Helping Dads Be There for Their Kids: A Program Spotlight

Rich Batten and Maggie Spain

Rich Batten, Th.M., M.Ed., CFLE, is the director of technical assistance services for Public Strategies, where he manages the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (www.healthymarriageinfo.org). Prior to this, he served as the family and fatherhood specialist for the Colorado Department of Human Services. In this role, he oversaw a statewide federal community access grant and the development of collaborative relationships across community and government systems (www.coloradodads.com). Mr. Batten has been a certified family life educator since 1998. He has a bachelor's degree in speech communication from Northern Michigan University, a master's of theology degree from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a master's of education degree from Loyola University Chicago.

Maggie Spain is a senior member of The Bawmann Group—an integrated marketing communications agency in Denver—where she has led the Colorado Promoting Responsible Fatherhood (PRF) Initiative account for more than 4 years. Ms. Spain managed the development and launch of PRF's campaign website (www.coloradodads.com), which was awarded a Gold Pick Award for best website in 2008 from the Colorado chapter of the Public Relations Society of America. Since the launch of the PRF Initiative's Be There for Your Kids public awareness campaign, Ms. Spain has been responsible for the placement of four statewide advertising campaigns that received approximately $800,000 worth of value-added advertising, the placement of hundreds of media stories that have reached more than 35 million people, and the growth of the Colorado Dads website that has received more than 450,000 unique visitors and 5 million hits. Ms. Spain is a graduate of the University of Denver, magna cum laude, with degrees in biology and communications.

Change isn't an event; it's a process.

Life has been full of ups and downs for Larry Johnson. He is the proud, single father of a son, Deion. But it was an uphill battle to get to this point. When Deion was born, Larry was serving time in prison. After his release, Deion was in state custody and Larry was homeless and unemployed. He had to get himself sober and find a job and a place to live to even have a chance to be with Deion every day. Larry proved himself to his child welfare caseworker by passing every urinalysis test, attending each appointment, and participating in a local fatherhood parenting education program with an organization called The Road Called STRATE. He worked diligently for more than 5 months and was awarded full custody of Deion when he was 18 months old. Today, being able to watch Deion learn and grow every day is what inspires Larry to be the kind of dad that Deion needs him to be.

Larry shared his experience of working with child welfare during each of the Colorado Promoting Responsible Fatherhood (PRF) Initiative-sponsored fatherhood engagement trainings in 2010. His fresh perspective on the process provided new insight into the value of father engagement for caseworkers. Reaching and Engaging Colorado Fathers was a series of five regional trainings across Colorado in 2010

for county child welfare caseworkers. The series is illustrative of the many steps one state is taking to encourage and support healthy father involvement.

Colorado has just completed a 5-year, $10-million federal grant, awarded in October 2006, to strengthen father/child relationships and improve parenting. This grant helped accelerate a focus on the importance of fathers in the lives of children that has waxed and waned since 1996 when then-Governor Roy Romer convened a summit and appointed a task force with national experts to identify causes of and possible solutions to the problem of father absence. The ultimate goal of the 2006 grant was to improve the well-being of children by building community access across Colorado to fatherhood programs and services. This was accomplished through two primary objectives:

1. Strengthen and increase the involvement and parenting skills of fathers of at-risk children through community-based direct services.

2. Build system capacity and community awareness through state level coordination and public outreach activities.

The Colorado PRF Initiative addressed the first objective by funding 63 organizations over 5 years that provide direct services to fathers. The second objective took the form of a collaborative statewide fatherhood council that oversaw statewide trainings and facilitated relationships among state and county agencies, community- and faith-based programs, and domestic violence programs. The second objective also included the development of a statewide public awareness campaign that focused on increasing enrollment in grant-funded fatherhood programs and building awareness of the importance of paternal involvement through television, radio and online advertising, media relations, and online and community outreach activities.

This article will highlight progressive efforts of the Colorado PRF Initiative, including the public awareness campaign and some of the innovative strategies the state is implementing to engage non-resident fathers in the child welfare system.

Colorado Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative

The Colorado PRF Initiative was designed to increase the involvement and parenting skills of fathers of at-risk children through the funding of faith- and community-based organizations. These local organizations operated under state guidance and core requirements but with the flexibility to develop innovative programs and services that best matched the needs of their local citizens. This strategy for the delivery of services at the local level has been very successful in the delivery of other human services in Colorado, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Domestic Violence Program (DVP), and child welfare services. Under this model, the state agency sets policy, establishes standards, monitors delivery, evaluates performance, and acts in a consultative role to the local agencies (public and private community-based agencies) that provide the services within the context of state guidance.

Colorado is a state with great diversity, including a broad racial and cultural diversity and 64 counties that range in population size, geographic elements, and community characteristics. The model of providing state guidelines with a great deal of local flexibility allows for the development and transfer of models that meet the needs of different communities and target population groups.

The Colorado PRF Initiative typically funded approximately 25 to 30 faith- and community-based fatherhood programs that worked with at-risk fathers and families each year. Programs received up to $50,000 per fiscal year to provide a variety of services for fathers and their families, including individual case management, parenting

education, healthy relationships classes, and job readiness training. Seventy percent of this funding was earmarked for agencies with annual budgets of $300,000 or less and six or fewer employees. The focus on smaller agencies was a requirement of the federal community access grant that was designed to allow small agencies to utilize federal funds to provide direct services to fathers. A total of 63 different agencies were funded during the 5 years of the grant, and approximately 5,000 fathers were served. The majority of participants served faced significant disadvantages affecting their ability to financially and emotionally support their children (e.g., 53% were unemployed, 67% had a family income of $5,000 or less, 81% had a history of criminal conviction). Further, 78% of participants did not live with their children's other parents and 34% had not legally established paternity at the time of enrollment in the program.

Each community-based organization needed to have the following set of collaborations as part of their proposal for funds:

- A domestic violence provider in the community to provide consultation on issues such as the safety of all families' members and services for individual families as needed.
- The local workforce program to support helping fathers by providing employment-related services, such as job search, job training, and subsidized employment.
- A local mental health provider who offers services on a sliding fee scale basis to provide counseling-related services, such as marital counseling and premarital counseling.
- The local county department of social or human services for referrals of fathers and coordination for the variety of services fathers may need.

Keith Lewis, Father of One, Denver

When Keith's son Reese was born 7 years ago, he admits that he wasn't in the right mindset to be a good father. Communication with Reese's mother wasn't always easy and there were plenty of concerns about having enough money to pay the bills. But instead of taking the easy way out and leaving fatherhood behind, Keith became involved in the Urban Colors Arts & Mentoring fatherhood program in northeast Denver. He developed a stronger relationship with Reese's mother, learned valuable parenting skills, and found a network of men who would always support him. In turn, Keith now serves as a mentor to new fathers entering the program.

Keith strives to be a father whose child feels that he can tell his father anything. It is most important that Reese come to Keith with his problems first.[1]

[1] All fathers highlighted gave permission to publish their stories and photographs. Additional fatherhood stories can be accessed at www.coloradodads.com.

Each organization needed to identify a strategy for a referral process and how it would engage fathers in the at-risk target population to become participants in its voluntary program. The organizations were required to jointly develop domestic violence protocol with a local victim services agency for their communities, including an assessment of participants for domestic violence.

Be There for Your Kids Public Awareness Campaign

Public awareness is an important component of the Colorado PRF Initiative. In October 2007, then-Colorado Governor Bill Ritter, Jr., announced the launch of the Be There for Your Kids public awareness campaign. The focal point of the campaign is the Colorado Dads website—www.coloradodads.com. With versions in both English and Spanish, the site is one of the most comprehensive fatherhood websites in the country. It serves to provide fathers with information on local fatherhood programs, parenting resources, free or low-cost activities, and testimonials from dads just like them. The website is also a valuable resource for fatherhood and family service practitioners with links to evidence-based fatherhood curricula, research on connecting with fathers, and national and international funding opportunities.

A unique feature of the Colorado Dads website is the Featured Fathers section. Here, the campaign profiles a different everyday or well-known Colorado father and his views of fatherhood each month. Forty fathers have been featured on the website to date, including such high-profile dads as former Governor Bill Ritter, Denver Nuggets coach George Karl, former University of Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins, former Colorado Avalanche player Ian Laperriere, and former Denver Broncos and current Houston Texans player Jarvis Green.

Richard Jama, Father of One, Aurora

What would you do if your child had been placed in foster care without your knowledge? That was a nightmare that came true for one father in Aurora, Colorado, in 2009.

Richard is an African immigrant and the proud father of a young daughter. He never married his daughter's mother, but, for a significant period of time, he saw her through an informal custody agreement every weekend. In 2009, though, things began to change. Richard's daughter and mom were suspiciously absent for weeks at a time. Excuses were made as to why he couldn't see his daughter, and then his phone calls weren't returned. By chance, Richard heard from his ex-girlfriend's cousin that his daughter, Nina Marie, had been placed in foster care due to concerns about her living environment. She'd been out of her home for almost a month. It was stunning news.

How could this have happened? Once Richard discovered this, he went immediately to his county's human services office. He was desperate to do whatever he could to get Nina Marie back in his life. At the human services office, Richard was told that his ex-girlfriend falsely reported that he was out of the country and had no contact with his daughter. But he had hope. A court hearing regarding Nina Marie's custody would take place the following week. Richard had to be there.

Nina Marie remained in foster care after the hearing, but Richard had an opportunity to obtain temporary custody of her. He didn't waste it. He began by participating in a court-ordered parenting program at the Aurora Mental Health Center and then, because he had never been a full-time father before, he enrolled in Aurora Mental Health's voluntary fatherhood program. In July of 2010, Richard was awarded full custody of Nina Marie.

According to Richard, "I have done nothing special. You bring a baby into the world, I was taught, it is your responsibility to care for her every day. It was never about me. It was always about my daughter."

Be There for Your Kids: By the Numbers

- Since the launch of the public awareness campaign, news stories on the PRF Initiative have reached more than 33 million people.
- During the month of June 2010 alone, 44 news stories on the PRF Initiative and responsible fatherhood ran statewide, reaching more than 3.7 million people.
- On a monthly basis, the Colorado Dads website receives approximately 10,500 unique visitors. Over the past 3 years, the site has received more than 5 million hits, 1.7 million page views, and 440,000 unique visitors.
- In 2008, the Colorado Dads website was awarded a Gold Pick Best Website Award from the Colorado chapter of the Public Relations Society of America.

Reaching Non-Custodial Dads

As previously stated, each program needed to establish a relationship with its local county department of social or human services for referrals of fathers and coordination for the variety of services fathers may need. Midway through the third year of the PRF grant, it was evident that, while the public awareness campaign and local program outreach had generated a growing number of fathers served, referrals from county social or human services departments were sparse. Dads were often engaged in the child welfare and child support systems, but they seldom learned of fatherhood services in their areas from these systems.

Upon discovering this, the Colorado Fatherhood Council convened a task force to consider options to address the issue. Representatives from state and county child welfare, TANF, child support, and The Bawmann Group—the integrated marketing firm contracted to administer the public awareness campaign—met to brainstorm ways to generate better collaborations and referrals, especially for non-custodial dads engaged in the child welfare system. The task force landed on a two-pronged strategy: 1) a series of regional trainings; and 2) a web-based incentive program.

Reaching and Engaging Colorado Fathers: Regional Trainings

In 2010, more than 200 caseworkers participated in free trainings that were funded by a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Welfare, and based on research compiled by the American Humane Association regarding working with non-resident fathers. Participation in the trainings was voluntary and promoted through flyers, e-blasts, and by encouraging county administrators to advocate for their caseworkers' attendance. Five-day-long trainings were conducted in five different regions of the state. Participants in all five trainings heard from fathers who faced and eventually overcame challenges in navigating the child welfare system, thanks to the assistance of local fatherhood programs. The trainings were media-rich and included interaction with local dads and fatherhood program staff. Presenters included staff from state and county child welfare, child support, and TANF offices. The topics discussed included male help-seeking behaviors, father engagement strategies, domestic violence, the value of father engagement, and partnering with local child support enforcement agencies.

These trainings were a critical first step in the development of our partnership with the Colorado Division of Child Welfare to better involve fathers in appropriate child welfare cases. Table 1 identifies the training sites and completed surveys by role in the child welfare system.

Table 1. Colorado Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative Training Sites and Completed Surveys

Role in the child welfare system	Grand Junction (n = 20)	Pueblo (n = 29)	Denver (n = 44)	Fort Morgan (n = 19)	Colorado Springs (n = 68)	Total (N = 180)
Supervisor of caseworkers	7%	25%	3%	6%	3%	7%
Caseworker	47%	60%	72%	56%	67%	64%
Other	47%	15%	25%	39%	30%	29%
Relationship between site and role is significant at .05.						

In addition to county child welfare staff, other participants included fathers, community organization staff, and staff from other county departments, such as child support and foster care. The item most often cited as a "major challenge" in surveys that were received immediately after the training was finding appropriate and affordable services for fathers. Just over half said that working with fathers without slowing case processing was either a "major challenge" or "somewhat of a challenge." Just over 60% said that convincing the father that his child needs him involved in the case is either a "major challenge" or "somewhat of a challenge."

Using the same items that might be challenges, the survey asked training program participants to rate how well the program performed in providing them with ideas and tools to work through these challenges. The lowest rating given to any item was "fair." Over 80% of those who completed surveys rated the program as "excellent" or "good" in giving them ideas and tools to deal with the following:

- Getting fathers involved in case planning
- Convincing the father that his child needs him to be involved

Keith Hall, Father of One, Colorado Springs

Keith Hall is just one of the more than 12,000 fathers who have participated in the Center on Fathering fatherhood program in Colorado Springs since the program's inception in 1995. The Center is nationally known for its work with fathers in the child welfare system and non-custodial dads. Keith is a young, single father of a daughter, Kiera. In his spare time, Keith helps out at an auto shop where Kiera loves to see—and work on!—the Mustangs. Keith has truly been committed to his daughter since her birth by participating in a parenting education program to better understand his role as a father.

Keith considers his most inspiring moment as a father to be when his own dad told Keith that he was proud of him for going after custody of his daughter. Today, he has full custody of Kiera.

- Finding appropriate and affordable services for fathers
- Keeping fathers engaged in services
- Working with fathers without slowing down case processing
- Getting other agencies involved to help with location and services for fathers

The lowest ratings were given to "getting information to locate the father" and "convincing family members that the father should be involved." Virtually all who completed a survey indicated that they felt more optimistic about their abilities to work with fathers following the training.

Web-Based Incentive Program

Child Welfare Portal: www.coloradodads.com/caseworkers

The task force recognized that child welfare caseworkers have difficult jobs. They work long hours, often dealing with very negative situations. With fewer resources and support available, asking caseworkers to perform one more task during the day isn't always an option. What kind of resource could be created that would both be easy to use and feature relevant, engaging content? The development of a fatherhood engagement portal for child welfare caseworkers stemmed from these issues.

As a natural extension of the regional trainings, the Colorado Child Welfare Portal (www.coloradodads.com/caseworkers) was created as a password-protected portal that was designed to be utilized primarily by caseworkers. The site includes tips on improving father engagement in agency settings, Father Friendly Check-UpsTM, links to Be There for Your Kids electronic newsletters, and a forum to share agency news. The Father Engagement Tips and Father Friendly Check-Up™ for Child Welfare Agencies sections also include short surveys for caseworkers to complete.

A wide variety of fatherhood engagement tips have been added to the site since its inception, including:

- Male help-seeking behaviors
- Bringing fathers into family decision making sessions
- Fatherhood-focused services and child welfare
- Engaging fathers in building relationships with their children's stepfathers

Users of the Child Welfare Portal receive automatic email notifications each time a new article is posted on the site.

The Father Friendly Check-Up™ for Child Welfare Agencies posted on the site was developed by the American Humane Association, National Fatherhood Initiative, and the American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law as a part of the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System. It allows caseworkers to examine all elements of their practice—materials presented, employee interaction with fathers, gender-neutral resources, etc.—to determine their "father-friendliness" as an organization. Its influence is already clear: Following Arapahoe County's completion of the Father Friendly Check-Up™, one of the county's caseworkers plans to talk with her supervisor regarding her perceptions and how their unit can make efforts to be more father-friendly in their practice. She specifically plans on asking for information on communication styles.

The Child Welfare Portal also streamlines the process of caseworkers referring fathers to local fatherhood programs. Now, they can do so once

they are logged into the portal by selecting the program to which they want to refer a dad, and by typing in a brief amount of information about him. The administrator of the PRF Initiative then follows up with the selected fatherhood program to ensure that the father has enrolled and is actively participating in the program.

The Agency News section is a unique component of the portal. Here, caseworkers are encouraged to share tactics they have implemented in their county agencies to improve father engagement, as well as why PRF should consider spotlighting their work in a Be There for Your Kids electronic newsletter. Caseworkers can also submit questions regarding their challenges to father engagement that are then answered by appropriate Colorado Division of Child Welfare employees or PRF representatives.

Incentives

By setting up an account on the portal, caseworkers become eligible to receive a variety of donated incentives—Be There for Your Kids hats and magnets as well as donated gift cards—through their use of posted articles and resources. These incentives can be accumulated as caseworkers complete specific portal tools. Each completion is worth the following points:

- Father Engagement Tips – 25 points
- Fatherhood Program Referrals – 5 points
- Follow up to confirm father is participating in selected program – 100 points
- Father Friendly Check-Ups™ for Child Welfare Agencies – 100 points
- Be There for Your Kids electronic newsletter subscriptions – 5 points
- Agency News – 10 points

Child Welfare Success in Durango

In October 2007, Ray (not his real name) was referred to the Advocacy for La Plata/Women's Resource Center fatherhood program in Durango by the county child welfare agency. The referring caseworker stated that this dad had been required to leave his home due to an inability to control his anger that resulted in him lashing out.

Ray arrived on time to his fatherhood class each week, constructively participated in group, and never missed a session of the 16 weeks required for a certificate of completion. He was also concurrently and actively engaged in mental health services and successfully completed another 24-week program focused on relationship/life skills. There were times when Ray struggled, and, at one point, was living in his car, yet he persisted in doing whatever was necessary to reunite with his partner and their children. He successfully completed all requirements of his treatment plan with child welfare and has reunified with his family. He has even asked child welfare to keep his case open because he values the benefits of family therapy.

Following his completion of the Advocacy for La Plata/Women's Resource Center fatherhood program, Ray served as a mentor for new group members and, most recently, has led the group as a co-facilitator. He now has a growing, healthy relationship with his children and their mother.

Every incentive distributed is worth less than $25. The goal is to positively encourage caseworkers to complete the tools found on the portal, not to bribe them to refer fathers to fatherhood programs.

State fatherhood and child welfare staff manage the allocation of points and distribute the incentives to caseworkers once they reach 350 points. Caseworkers are able to use the incentives themselves or donate them to local foster families.

Next Steps

The Child Welfare Portal has been slowly building momentum since its launch date in the summer of 2010. As of February 4, 2011, 78 caseworkers had created personal accounts. New fatherhood engagement tips are added to the portal by a member of the state fatherhood initiative team on a bi-monthly basis in order to increase interaction. PRF and child welfare have also begun adding light-hearted tips to the portal in an attempt to build awareness of fatherhood in all aspects of their practice and lives. For example, caseworkers can now complete a "Pops in Pop Culture" survey regarding their views of dads in the media and how they relate to their own fathers. A tip sheet on using the Super Bowl to better engage fathers has also been added.

An electronic newsletter promoting additions to the portal, fatherhood news, and incentive points is distributed to portal users and child welfare supervisors on a quarterly basis. This helps keep the site on the radar of child welfare employees. However, because the Colorado Division of Child Welfare does not have access to email addresses for all caseworkers across the state, we currently rely on supervisors sending out these electronic newsletters and do not have direct contact with caseworkers who have yet to create their own accounts. The plan is to continue to distribute

Kendall Davis, Father of One, Denver

Kendall has overcome numerous obstacles in order to build a relationship with his daughter, Kennie. Following a domestic violence call that resulted in Kennie seeing her father removed from their home by policemen, Kendall did not see his daughter for several years. When he was released from prison, Kendall, Kennie, and Kennie's mother enrolled in a Denver-based supervised parenting and fatherhood program—Central Visitation Program. Through their participation in this program, Kennie grew to rely on and forgive her father, her mother and father worked to rebuild a sense of trust, and Kendall was awarded unsupervised visitation time with his daughter. In 2010, Kendall received the Outstanding Fatherhood Reengagement Award from the Be There for Your Kids campaign.

According to Kendall, fatherhood gives him the chance to be a positive role model and provide his daughter with a stable, safe environment to grow up in. He did not have that as a child. Kendall believes that it's very important that Kennie is able to become her own person while having both parents involved in her life.

these e-newsletters on a quarterly or bi-monthly basis to increase awareness of updates to the portal.

As a direct result of the initial success of the child welfare website, the Colorado Child Support Enforcement (CSE) Program requested that the PRF Initiative develop a mirror portal for technicians. This portal launched on September 30, 2010, and is just beginning to grow.

In their book, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* (2010), Chip Heath and Dan Heath identify three surprises about change:

1. What looks like a people problem is often a situation problem.
2. What looks like laziness is often exhaustion.
3. What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity.

At first blush, it might have been easy to blame child welfare workers for not engaging fathers or making referrals to fatherhood programs across the state. However, by choosing instead to provide creative opportunities for growth, highlighting successes, and appealing to caseworkers' own senses of identity and purpose, while at the same time giving the utmost priority to child safety and adding a bit of competition, change has begun to emerge. While the PRF Initiative recognizes that it has a long way to go before it can consider the recent innovations for collaborating with child welfare departments in engaging non-residential fathers a success, it has made some giant steps in the right direction by providing clear and engaging information in creative and innovative ways, and that is worth celebrating.

References

Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2010). *Switch: How to change things when change is hard*. New York: Broadway Books.

www.coloradodads.com/caseworkers

be there FOR YOUR KIDS

cdhs

User Login

Register Today Earn Program Points!

In an effort to improve father engagement among child welfare caseworkers, supervisors and county agencies, the Colorado Division of Child Welfare and the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood (PRF) initiative have joined together to develop the Child Welfare Incentive Program. This website features relevant tips and resources to be used when working with fathers. Users who establish accounts are eligible to receive a variety of incentives through their use of the articles and resources posted on the site. The incentives can be used by caseworkers directly or we encourage you to give them to local foster families. Incentives will be distributed to participants once they reach 350 points.

Please fill out the following form to obtain access to this website:

CREATE NEW ACCOUNT

USERNAME/PASSWORD	USER INFORMATION	AGENCY/ORGANIZATION	SITE USAGE/SUBMIT
USER NAME *	FIRST NAME *	AGENCY / ORGANIZATION*	Have you previously accessed the Colorado Dads website for:
PASSWORD *	LAST NAME *	NAME OF UNIT/DIVISION	☐ State information
RE-ENTER PASSWORD *	TITLE	TYPE OF POPULATION SERVED	☐ National information
	SUPERVISOR	- Select -	☐ Programs
		ADDRESS	☐ Fathering articles
			☐ Fatherhood events and trainings
			Your information will be reviewed by

Father Engagement Tips

- Home
- Father Engagement Tips
- Pops in Pop Culture Survey
- Fatherhood Program Referrals
- Father Friendly Agency Check Up
- Newsletters
- Agency News
- Contact Us

Why is it important to engage fathers in child welfare cases? How can caseworkers reach and connect with non-custodial dads? A change in agency practice does not happen overnight.

Each month, participants in the Child Welfare Incentive Program can visit this section of the site to download a new article/tip sheet on father engagement strategies. It is our hope that these articles will provide you with practical tools that you and other members of your agency can use in your daily practice. All articles are selected based on their relevance to caseworkers, fathers in the child welfare system and the development of healthy familial relationships.

[Previous Page | 1 2 | Next Page]

Posted: January 24, 2011

Dads and the Super Bowl

We've finally reached the pinnacle of the football season! As the Packers and the Steelers prepare to play each other on February 6th, many fans are gearing up to plan parties and wagers for the game. The Super Bowl also provides another opportunity for Child Welfare caseworkers to connect with fathers. Check out this brief history of our national pastime.

Download File (pdf) Submit Review

Posted: January 13, 2011

Steps in the Right Direction: Your Child's Other Father

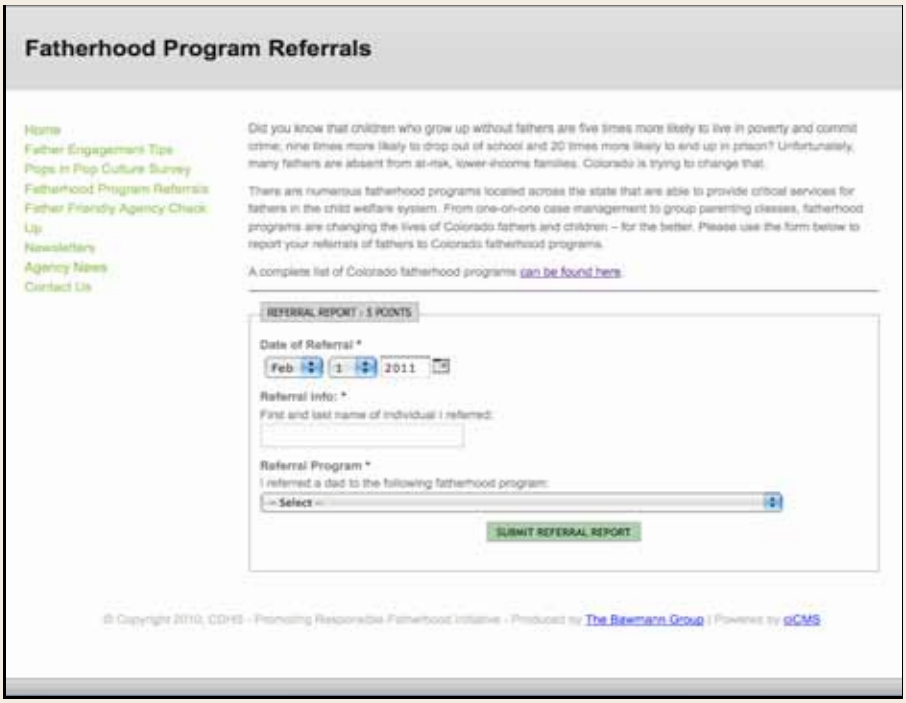
In the United States, nearly half of all children will live with a step-father, foster father, uncle or a man other than their biological father sometime during their childhood. Yet, many fathers are concerned when a new man enters the life of their children's mother. This article, from the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, outlines tips for biological fathers to develop relationships with their child's "other" father as well as a list of selected resources.

Download File (pdf) Submit Review

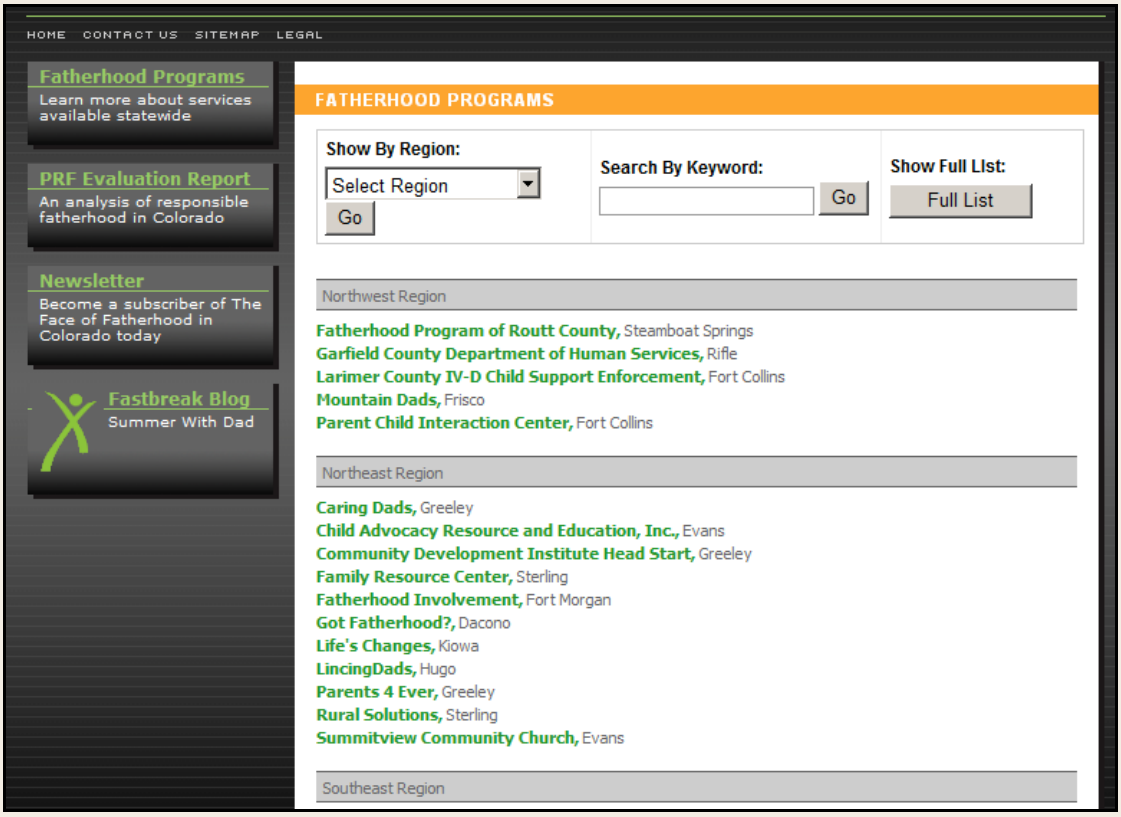
Posted: January 6, 2011

Grandparents as Parents - Consumer Series

Increasingly, grandparents are playing key roles in divorce involving their adult children, particularly with regard to caring for grandchildren. Whether it be in terms of offering temporary child care, gaining visitation rights after the divorce or seeking custody over grandchildren who have been abandoned or abused, today's grandparent is more



Fatherhood Programs Searchable by Region and Key Word



Fathers in Child Welfare and Legislative Policy

John Sciamanna

John Sciamanna is the director of policy and government affairs, child welfare, for the American Humane Association. In this role, he oversees the organization's efforts in Washington, DC, working with the Administration, Congress, and other children's groups. For close to 20 years, he has been working on children's issues with an emphasis on child welfare financing and its impact on a range of child welfare services. Mr. Sciamanna has been involved in legislative efforts to advance upfront and prevention services. He worked on the authorization or reauthorization of numerous child welfare bills, including the Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) and, more recently, the enactment of the Fostering Connections to Success Act. Mr. Sciamanna has been a regular contributor to publications on the issues of Temporary Assistance of Needy Families (TANF), child care, teenage pregnancy prevention, and child welfare. He has testified before Congress and written and developed congressional testimony, legislative agendas, and policy statements.

The increase in the number of single-parent families and the potential impact on child development has been the subject of debate for many decades now. The vast majority of these families are headed by women. In 2002, more than 16 million children were living with single-parent families headed by a woman. An additional 3.3 million were living with single-parent families headed by a father (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Some of the most dramatic change in the prevalence of single-parent families took place in the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, between 1970 and 1990, the number of female-headed families with children under 18 increased by 146% (Committee on Ways and Means, 1992). This dramatic change in the second half of the twentieth century has shaped the way that we view fathers in today's society.

As this debate has continued, it has become more complex, as it has involved the growth in single parenthood, interaction with public assistance programs, possible resulting poverty, and, ultimately, the well-being of children growing up in these families. Since so many of these families are headed by women, much of the debate has focused on the mother, but, in recent years, the debate has shifted somewhat toward the role of fathers and how they may or may not be involved in their children's lives. This is an examination of our changing attitudes and policies through the lens of public assistance policy, including our child welfare policy.

National Policy Over Time

A great deal of our attitudes and policies toward non-custodial fathers have been influenced, if not driven, by our public family support policies. Federal cash assistance welfare was created by the Social Security Act of 1935. That program began as Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) and was targeted toward widows with children. Later, it was renamed as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as its role and families changed. Most recently, in 1996, welfare was remade and renamed the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

Cash assistance for the first 25 years was limited to single-parent families, and, between 1935 and 1960, states were prohibited from covering two-parent families. As ADC evolved from that 1935 law, the program was about supporting children who had been deprived of parental support, usually because one of the parents (the father) was absent. With its heavy emphasis on helping only single-parent families, as well as the fact that these families were headed by women, the father was not viewed as someone who was contributing to the family and to the child's well-being. In 1950, Congress amended ADC to require states to report to local law enforcement when a child was benefiting from ADC and a parent had abandoned the family. The assumption was that local law enforcement may want to pursue the father for recovery of public assistance.

The possibility of extending ADC to two-parent families that were impoverished was not even allowed until Congress amended the law in 1961, giving states the option of extending assistance to children who resided with two "able bodied parents living in the home, but who had been deprived of parental support or care by reason of the unemployment of a parent" (*King v. Smith*, 1968). Regardless, few states provided support to families where two parents were present and, by 1968, only 21 states even offered the possibility of supporting two-parent families (*King v. Smith*).

By 1962, Congress changed the name of the ADC program to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). But the change in name did not translate into a change in policy. Many states not only sought ways to limit coverage to families headed by single women; they also enacted policies that attempted to cut off support to qualified children.

Some states started creating policies that would cut off assistance to otherwise eligible children because the state determined that the children were living in unsuitable living conditions. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare issued what became known as the "Flemming Rule"—a ruling to states that they continue payments to these families while either providing services to improve living conditions or by finding a more suitable living arrangement for the children. Cash assistance became a child welfare funding source. Congress adopted the rule into law in 1961 and mandated that all states have such programs to receive new federal foster care funding and allowed funding to follow the child into private nonprofit institutions if it had been based on a court determination.

The role of men and fathers became much more prominent in the mid 1960s when states started pursuing "man-in-the-house" rules. A number of states not only did not provide support in instances when both parents were in the home, but some also sought to cut off assistance if a man was present in the house, even if that presence was occasional. It did not matter if the man was the father and, in fact, states were attempting to discourage partnerships. A family could be cut off if the mother had a relationship, if a man spent occasional time in the home, and, in some instances, if the mother met the man in a different location. In 1968, in the ruling King v. Smith, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the practice that had been instituted by the state of Alabama. Alabama had argued that its practice was merely a way to discourage "illicit sexual relations and illegitimate births" and a way to treat informal married couples like married couples—ineligible for support (King v. Smith. 392 U.S. 309 [1968]).

While there was reluctance to extend AFDC to married couples, there was increasing interest in pursuing absent fathers as a way to reimburse federal and state governments that were sharing the cost of the AFDC program. In 1975, Congress amended the law and created child support enforcement (Part D of the Social Security Act).

The new law (PL 93-647) had four main purposes: to locate absent parents, to establish paternity, to obtain a support order, and then to collect that support. The main purpose was to recoup AFDC benefits that had been paid out and to return some of those funds to federal and state governments that were splitting the cost of public assistance. The same collection provisions applied to the cost of foster care and Medicaid.

By 1988, Congress was making major changes to the AFDC program, as states were directed to take specific actions to receive federal funds, such as directives to establish paternity for all children under 18 (Family Support Act, 1988). States were also mandated to have an AFDC Unemployed Parent program, or AFDC-UP. States had to provide a time-limited amount of AFDC to two-parent families where the principal wage earner in the family is unemployed but has a history of work.

When AFDC was converted into the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant in 1996, child support enforcement, unlike the debate over welfare reform, became an area of consensus and states were given more flexibility, as well as some new mandates. States were directed to establish higher rates of paternity and to use a number of child support enforcement techniques, such as the denial of drivers and professional licenses, withholding tax refunds, and to use a new Federal Parent Locator Service. These tools and new information could assist states and combine federal and state information to track parents with child support orders. States were allowed to tap into technical assistances funded by a $10-million fund created as part of TANF. States were given greater flexibility in deciding how much of the collected child support would be passed through to the family.

While the new law placed a greater emphasis on child support enforcement, greater attention was being paid to two-parent families. While support for two-parent families was allowed under AFDC, TANF placed a greater emphasis on allowing two-parent families to receive assistance and adjusted the new working requirements according to whether or not the family was single-parent or two-parent. Two-parent families were eligible for child care and, when not available, work requirements were adjusted. TANF also included as one of its four purposes, “encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.” (Section 401. Purpose (a) (4), Title IV-A, Social Security Act, P.L. 74-271, Title 42 U.S.C.)

Shortly before TANF became the new law, states had been participating in demonstration projects. States were allowed to enact changes without federal approval and, as a result, new approaches where being tried in the collection of child support and in strategies to connect fathers with their children. The Parents’ Fair Share demonstration project, carried out between 1994 and 1996, attempted to collect more child support, increase fathers’ ability to pay by using job training and peer support programs, and encouraged greater interaction between absent fathers and their children. With TANF, states began expanding these experimental approaches by passing through more child support to families, and allowed fathers some reduction in payments if they participated in programs that might involve job services or mediation between parents.

TANF provided $10 million annually for state grants to fund access and visitation programs. Between 1998 and 2010, over 500,000 non-custodial parents and their families have been helped by these access and visitation efforts (Solomon-Fears, Falk, & Fernandes-Alcantara, 2011). Things had come a long way from the enforcement of the man-in-the-house rule.

Policy in More Recent Years

The federal government assists in funding for state child support collection by providing a 66% match rate for general state administrative costs (one state dollar spent is matched by two federal dollars). In addition, the federal government provides incentive payments to states that are based on a state's performance.

According to the Administration for Children and Families:

> [C]hild support provides about 40 percent of income for the poor families who receive it, and 10 percent of income for all poor custodial families. As a result of federal legislative changes in 1996 and 2006, the program distributed 94 percent of collections directly to children and families in 2009; federal and state governments retained less than $1.7 billion. In families that have never received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the program forwards collections directly to the custodial family. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2011a)

The Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program underwent a program assessment by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in 2003. They determined CSE to be one of the most effective government programs. In FY 2009, states collected a total of $26.4 billion as support payments (USDHHS, 2011b). For every dollar spent on child support enforcement, $4.78 was collected. All of these changing policies have turned CSE into an important resource for families (USDHHS).

Changes, especially after the 1996 reforms, have had an impact on collections and, as a result, an impact on families. But the policy changes that have developed over the past 10 years or more have also shifted in a direction that pays more attention to fathers. It is both an economic strategy as well as a child well-being strategy—a strategy not without a great deal of controversy. The Bush Administration saw the TANF program as at least one tool to promote marriage and fatherhood. The next reauthorization of TANF in 2005 would include $100 million for the promotion of marriage through grants to state and local programs. It also included an additional $50 million annually for programs that promoted fatherhood.

Some of these approaches have continued through the Obama Administration. In the federal budget proposed for 2012, the Administration advanced a number of changes. The Administration asked Congress for $570 million over 10 years to support increased access and visitation services and to more strongly integrate these services into the core child support program. The Administration argued that the "services not only improve parent-child relationships and outcomes for children, but can also lead to greater, more regular payment of child support. Research shows that when fathers spend time with their children, they are more likely to meet their financial obligations" (USDHHS, 2011b).

The Administration was also seeking policy changes to require states to establish access and visitation responsibilities in all initial child support orders, as well as to encourage states to undertake activities that support access and visitation, implementing domestic violence safeguards as a critical component of this new state responsibility.

The budget also proposed a continuation of a policy that had been enacted in 2011 to continue to provide a $150-million fund to be split equally among Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood activities. The $75 million in Responsible Fatherhood funds could be used for fatherhood activities intended to promote or sustain marriage, responsible parenting, economic stability, and media campaigns that reach families with important messages about responsible fatherhood.

In a change from previous policy, the Obama Administration was also asking to change how child support was dealt with in cases where the child is in foster care or the family is covered by the Medicaid health insurance program. They were asking Congress to change the law in a way that would allow child support payments made by fathers on behalf of children in foster care to be used in the best interest of the children, rather than as general revenue for the states and federal government. The same would be true of Medicaid.[1]

Things have changed dramatically since 1935 when the Social Security Act was created. We no longer view families as all fitting the model of the two-parent family, where the father is the sole wage earner. We have also, at least to a small degree, moved away from the model that sees fathers as solely a way to recover tax dollars to offset the cost of public assistance. Clearly, our policies and attitudes have not been finalized. One thing we can say, however, is that we are taking a more serious look at how children can interact with both of their parents, and we are struggling to determine the best policy choices to encourage that interaction while meeting the needs of the parents, and, hopefully most important of all, the children.

References

Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives. (1992). 1992 Green Book. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Family Support Act, P.L. 100-495 (1988).

King v. Smith. 392 U.S. 309 (1968).

Solomon-Fears, C., Falk, G., & Fernandes-Alcantara, A. (2011). *Child well-being and noncustodial fathers: Summary of the Title IV-E waiver demonstrations*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2003). *Children's living arrangements and characteristics.* Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2011a). *Budget in brief.* Washington, DC: Author.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of the Secretary. (2011b). *Congressional budget justifications and online performance appendices: FY 2012 congressional budget justification.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.hhs.gov/about/hhsbudget.

[1] At the time of this article, it was not clear whether Congress would include these changes in a FY 2012 budget or as free-standing non-budget legislation.

The Role of Child Advocates in Engaging Non-Resident Fathers and Their Families in Child Welfare Cases[1]

Lara Bruce

Lara Bruce, M.S.W., is currently a child welfare knowledge and program specialist at American Humane Association. In this role, she assumes many responsibilities, including training and coaching coordination, curriculum development, and information dissemination. During her tenure at American Humane Association, Ms. Bruce has been the coordinator for the Migration and Child Welfare National Network and for the New York family assessment response (FAR) project. In addition, Ms. Bruce assisted with the development and initiation of the Bringing Back the Dads: A Model Program Curriculum for Non-Resident Father Engagement curriculum, as well as several additional training components. Ms. Bruce received her bachelor's degree in social work from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Plattsburgh. Ms. Bruce received her master's degree in social work from the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work, concentrating in community practice and completing her internship with the American Humane Association.

Introduction

What about the dads? This question has been repeatedly asked over the past few years by the team working with the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF), including American Humane Association, the American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law, and the National Fatherhood Initiative. This question is also being asked by child welfare agencies and community partners throughout the country as they work to provide more opportunities to involve and engage non-resident (non-custodial) fathers whose children are involved with their agencies. Each year, thousands of fathers are excluded from making decisions regarding the well-being of their children when the government has intervened in their lives through a child protection case. These fathers are often viable options for placement, family resources, and lifelong connections with their children. Luckily, there is hope. The QIC NRF, made possible through grant funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, has been working over the past 5 years to construct resources, materials, curricula, research, and evaluation that consider the very question posed above. The project has examined the child welfare system's interactions and involvement with:

- Dads and paternal relatives;
- Male help-seeking behaviors and learning styles;
- Relationships among mothers, fathers, and their families, and the complexities of co-parenting; and,
- Other aspects of father involvement and engagement in the child welfare system.

[1]Portions of this article are adapted from Kendall and Pilnik (2010).

The QIC NRF has also focused specific attention on the important role that child attorneys, court appointed special advocates (CASAs), guardian ad litems (GALs), and other child advocates play in including non-resident fathers, their families, and their children in the responses of the child welfare system. Members of the QIC NRF team developed a resource titled *Engaging Noncustodial Fathers in Child Welfare Cases: A Guide for Children's Attorneys and Lawyer Guardians ad Litem*, which offers attorneys guidance and practical tools to involve fathers and advocate for children (Pilnik & Kendall, 2010). That same team developed *Engaging Nonresident Fathers in Child Welfare Cases: A Guide for Court Appointed Special Advocates*, which provides an in-depth examination into many of the areas presented in this article (Kendall & Pilnik, 2010). The team has also been invited to present at the National CASA Association's annual conference and at several state CASA conferences over the past few years. This is an issue that many child welfare agencies, the courts, and community-based organizations are paying close attention to and are craving resources to better address.

This article defines a few types of child advocates that might be involved with the child welfare system and the specific roles they can play in identifying and locating non-resident fathers; tips for engaging non-resident fathers; and the importance of paternal kin and their inclusion in decision-making processes for children when a child welfare agency is involved in their lives. For the purposes of this article, "kin" includes paternal, maternal, extended family, or others who are defined by the family as having a close supportive personal relationship (American Humane Association, 2010).

What is an Advocate?

An advocate is "a person who speaks or writes in support or defense of a person or cause or a person who pleads the cause of another in a court of law" (National Court Appointed Special Advocates [National CASA], 2011). Child advocates vary in the types of cases that they assist with and programs often vary from state to state. Some advocacy programs may be administered at a state level, while others are implemented at a municipal, county, or regional level. Despite the differences in the focus or administration of the program itself, the role of the advocate stays the same to make important recommendations regarding the placement options and well-being of the child(ren) they represent and to speak on behalf of these children in case decisions and court actions. Attorneys for both children and parents can help to ensure that laws protecting fathers' rights and interests are complied with, and that children are aided, throughout the court process, in securing the legal right to have their fathers involved in their lives. While only children's advocates are discussed in this article, it is crucial to acknowledge the important role that parent attorneys and advocates play in ensuring that fathers' legal rights are adhered to in child welfare cases.

The National CASA organization describes CASA volunteers as "everyday citizens judges appoint to advocate for the safety and well-being of children who have been removed from their homes due to parental abuse and neglect. They stand up for these children and change their lives" (2011). CASA volunteers have helped more than 2 million children find safe, permanent homes. In some states, non-lawyer advocates serve as guardians ad litem, fulfilling a similar role to CASAs. Although each state or CASA/GAL program uses the term differently, the terms CASA and GAL are used here interchangeably to refer to volunteer child advocates appointed

by the court to make recommendations about children who have allegedly been abused or neglected (Chiamulera, 2009).

CASAs and GALs play the following vital roles for children and youth in care (National CASA, 2011):

> **Information gatherer:** Collects all pertinent information and interviews family, foster parents, teachers, and other persons involved in the child's life.
>
> **Community advocate:** Works with community partners (e.g., mental health providers or schools) to ensure that the child is receiving the assistance and support needed to succeed.
>
> **Courtroom advocate:** Based on information gathered, makes independent recommendations to the court, communicating the best interest of the child to all involved.

There is another group of advocates that can be very helpful to child welfare agencies in effectively engaging fathers in child welfare cases. Fatherhood programs and father support organizations are increasing in communities across the nation and can support child welfare agencies as they tackle this important issue. These programs have resources specific to the unique needs of fathers, their learning styles, and their help-seeking behaviors. Services often include legal and financial consultation, assistance completing forms or applications for government-sponsored programs and services, GED review or study classes, assistance with navigating the child welfare system, support groups and parenting classes, and case management services, among other services. Many child welfare agencies have partnered with their local fatherhood program in order to better meet the unique needs of fathers and their families.

Advocate Roles When Working with Non-Resident Fathers

Children's attorneys, CASAs, and GALs are charged with conducting an independent investigation and assessment of each child's case when that case becomes court-involved. These advocates can play a crucial role in:

- Assisting the child's caseworker in identifying and locating non-resident fathers;
- Ensuring that fathers engage in the child welfare process and with their children; and
- Working to help overcome agency and worker bias against men and fathers (e.g., recommending that more effort be made to locate non-resident fathers before a case moves forward in court). (Kendall & Pilnik, 2010)

Working with Caseworkers

Caseworker bias is viewed as "the most widely researched barrier to fathers' participation in child welfare case planning" (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). In one study, "caseworkers were found to require that fathers demonstrate their connection to the child whereas the mothers' connection was taken for granted" (Sonenstein, Malm, & Billing, 2002). By making an independent assessment of the father's capacity to be a resource for his child and sharing it with the caseworker and the court, the advocate can counteract bias against the father.

Child advocates can also work collaboratively with caseworkers to actively engage fathers, serving as a valuable resource for an already overburdened caseworker. With fewer cases to manage than the child's caseworker, advocates can spend time developing relationships with the child and relatives and independently assess the potential for support and caring that the

father and paternal relatives bring to the family dynamics.

Working Directly with Fathers and Paternal Kin

Child advocates can meet with the child's father and paternal relatives to assess their interest in and ability to participate in the child's life. Advocates should have a conversation with the child's caseworker or the agency attorney regarding the amount of information that can legally be provided to fathers upon contact with them, so as not to disclose case-sensitive information. Non-attorney advocates should also discuss these issues with their program supervisors and should review information related to case-specific information sharing from their CASA, GAL, or advocate training programs.

Advocates should clearly explain their role and responsibilities to non-resident fathers and their families to avoid role confusion between advocates and the caseworkers or other professionals involved with the case. They should emphasize their role and explain that they will base their recommendations to the agency and the court on their own independent investigations and on discussions they are having with all parties involved in the case, as well as on the views of the child(ren) involved (Kendall & Pilnik, 2010).

Working with Mothers

Mothers are often referred to as the "gatekeepers" when it comes to accessing information related to non-resident fathers (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). They may withhold information related to a father's identity and location for various reasons. In some cases, the mother may not want the father to be viewed as a placement resource for her child or may not see the benefit in his involvement. In other cases, the mother may be protecting the father if he has, for example, pending criminal charges or immigration issues. Furthermore, mothers may not want fathers involved because they believe the fathers present a danger to them and to their children because of past domestic violence.

Child advocates can assist caseworkers with helping to educate mothers about the importance of father involvement, not just for immediate placement options but for lifelong connections as well. Children's attorneys, CASAs, and GALs are advocating for the child, not for the mother, father, or child welfare agency. This child-centric focus, if explained properly to both parents, can be a useful engagement tool. It can also help advocates form relationships with both parents, allowing them to acquire pertinent information and support positive father-child relationships early on and throughout the case.

Identification and Location Tips

Many times, the identification and location of absent parents occur during the initial phases of the case and only much later become the focus again when adoption and/or termination of parental rights is being considered (Merkel-Holguin, 2003). Child advocates should encourage the child welfare agency and the court to continue reaching out to fathers and paternal kin throughout every phase of case planning, decision making, and case review to ensure that ongoing efforts are being made to identify and involve the non-custodial father as new information becomes available. There are many ways in which an advocate can assist in these efforts. Child welfare agencies currently use various tools and resources to find missing parents. The use of new technology extends the lengths to which agencies and advocates can go in their search, both nationally and internationally.

Advocates can explore and recommend several avenues for the child welfare agency, such as:

- Consult the state's Department of Revenue or child support case files;
- Hire private investigators;
- Check the Federal Bureau of Prisons and any state inmate or detention locators through online databases, and immigration detention and deportation centers through the Department of Homeland Security;
- Search public records (DMV, social security, courts), including through Westlaw or LexisNexis;
- Check the State and Federal Parent Locator Services;[2]
- Ask the court to require the agency to use family-finding strategies;[3] and
- Use online people search engines, such as peopleprofileusa.com, usatrace.com, whitepages.com, social security death index, myfamily.com, and intelius.com.

As mentioned previously, child advocates can also assist caseworkers in locating fathers by conducting their own searches. Some ways they can get started include:

- Ask the mother, other relatives, and the child about the father's identity and location, and have courts order the mother to disclose this information (Thompson, 2009);
- Consult the phone book both in the child's home area and online;
- Review the agency's file for details that could lead to the father or other information sources; and
- Send a letter with your contact information and a request to get in touch to the father's last known address and to the address of any of his relatives.

Once a father is located, advocates should encourage a swift resolution of any paternity issues. Paternity testing and confirmation can be a long process and can delay case progress. Paternity can be established through a parental agreement in an open court of paternity (the mother and father agree that he's the father) or through, if necessary, an order of the court that the child welfare agency pay for such testing. Once paternity is established, an advocate can further explore and assess whether the father, or his relatives, could be a placement or other resource for the child. Advocates can assess a father's interest and capacity by doing the following:

- Discuss what he and his family want for his child's future and how he fits into that picture;
- Discuss with the child, when age appropriate, how he/she feels about living with or having regular contact with his/her father;
- Meet the father in his home to get a sense for where the child may live. Respect the father's cultural background and economic status;
- Ask the father whether he currently or previously has cared for the child or other children; ask the father about his daily routine, employment, and family and friend resources;
- Ask the father about child care options and his plans for the child's education, and physical and mental health care, including health care coverage;

[2] On December 29, 2010, the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement issued a rule (75 FR 81894) indicating that child welfare agencies must have access to Parent Locator information to help find parents, relatives, and siblings of children in foster care, in order to help fulfill agency obligations pursuant to Titles IV-B and IV-E (amending 45 CFR §§ 303.70 and 307.13). To best accomplish this, the agency should develop a close working relationship with its child support enforcement (IV-D) agency.

[3] To learn more about family finding, visit the Center for Family Finding and Youth Connectedness's website: www.senecacenter.org/familyfinding.

- Document how the father provides support to his child (including non-monetary support); and
- Observe a visit between the father and child or ask the monitor (when visits are supervised) how visits have gone. (Kendall & Pilnik, 2010)

The father may hesitate to engage with an advocate for various reasons. Most notably, the gender differences may be a barrier, given that many attorneys for children and most CASA volunteers or lay GALs are female, especially for men who are strongly influenced by traditional gender roles (Kiselica, 2009). This might create an uncomfortable situation for fathers unless their feelings are recognized and validated by the advocate. In some cases, a male advocate may be preferred and a request by the current advocate can be made to the advocacy program for a male advocate, depending on the advocate's length of time on the case and the availability of a male advocate. There are many things that both a male and female advocate can do to make a father more comfortable and engaged in the process. Advocates should validate the father's involvement and experiences with the child and recognize that the father may also feel that his duty is to protect and provide for his child. Support these notions by helping him identify and implement approaches to support the child. Advocates could consider sharing a little about their own lives and experiences with their own fathers and families to help put the father at ease.

When conversing with fathers, advocates should sit side-by-side and not face-to-face, and should focus on solutions and active problem solving. Advocates should avoid allowing negative biases related to fathers to play a role in their abilities and efforts to identify and locate fathers. The stereotype of a man unconcerned with his child's life or well-being because he has been absent for many years is often far from the truth. Being open-minded about a father's involvement can play a key role in creating a positive outcome for kids (Kiselica, 2009).

Engaging Incarcerated Fathers

Advocates should not let the child welfare system or court ignore incarcerated fathers. During his incarceration, a father can still provide important information about the child's medical and social history, suggest relatives who can be placements or provide other resources, and maintain a relationship with the child. This gives the child an additional adult connection, and helps identify people who care about the child. After release, fathers may themselves be placement resources, enrich the children's lives with frequent visits, or provide financial or emotional support (Creamer, 2009).

Advocates can help children whose fathers are incarcerated by taking the following steps:

- Learn about the father's situation, including past lifestyle and current reason for incarceration, and his relationship to his child before incarceration, and find out how much contact he has had with his child from the correctional facility.
- Identify positive ways the father can continue to interact with his child (e.g., regular phone calls or visits and letter writing).
- Ask agencies and the courts to develop case plan goals or concurrent planning that includes the father and his relatives, with the child's best interests at the center of planning.
- Learn about classes the correctional facility may offer to help a father become a better resource for his children, such as parenting classes, literacy assistance, or educational or vocational training. These can often meet

agency requirements, such as improved parenting, job security, and support during and upon release from prison.

Other Ways Fathers May be Involved

Following the identification and location of non-resident fathers who have been absent from a child's life, an advocate may find that a father may not be interested in being a caregiver or even in having a connection to his child(ren). There may also be cases in which it is determined (by the caseworker, courts, and not solely by the child advocate) that a father cannot or should not have contact with his child(ren). There may still be a role for the advocate and the father in these situations. A child advocate can help a caseworker determine if there are barriers to his involvement that can be overcome over time (e.g., lack of confidence in parenting abilities, inadequate housing issues, or large arrearages in child support that inhibit his involvement).

Child advocates can also continue to ensure that fathers have competent legal counsel at each and every court hearing or agency meeting by requesting that a judge appoint an attorney for the father, if he does not have one, or by requesting that the attorney be present and prepared for the hearing before proceeding with any decisions. As with an incarcerated father, child advocates should work to maintain, unless inappropriate based on the child's needs, regular communication between the father and the child welfare agency, the courts, and the father's child(ren). In cases in which fathers are deceased, unwilling to be in touch with their child(ren), or cannot be found, advocates can gather information about the father and his family related to family medical history, information related to public benefits that the father is (or was) eligible for and that could be passed along to his child, the father's most recent contact information, and/or a picture of the father and information related to his work, interests, hobbies, etc. This information can be included in the child's case file and shared with caregivers and the child, as appropriate.

Speaking to Children About Their Fathers

The main role that child advocates can play in the inclusion of non-resident fathers in the child welfare and court processes is through having frank, open, and honest conversations with children about their desires and what they want their relationship to look like with their fathers, and then working with them to ensure that their needs are met. This could include exploring the child's relationship with his or her father before entering the system or as far back as the child can remember his involvement. This might also include educating children about the importance of involving their fathers and paternal families in the process (Kendall & Pilnik, 2010).

Child advocates should ask the child about the source of any negative information he or she may have regarding the father and his family and dispel any known misconceptions before attempting to strengthen the relationship between father and child. Even a child who does not currently want to have contact with his or her father may change his or her mind in a few years. Collecting as much information as possible on non-resident fathers and their families will help children and youth make informed decisions moving forward and may someday create a connection.

Paternal Relatives

Paternal relatives can also play a crucial part in creating long-term options and connections for children in the child welfare system (Kendall & Pilnik, 2010). The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 requires that all relatives be notified when children enter care, and encourages placement of children with relatives before considering non-family foster homes. Relatives, particularly

grandparents, provide homes for hundreds of thousands of children each year, particularly among racial and ethnic minority families (42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(19), 2008). Working with the extended family may better allow the child to remain connected with siblings, reduce the trauma that a child may experience when separated from parents, and provide a sense of belonging to a biological family (42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(19)). Children and youth may yearn for this connection to family culture and history and may spend a significant portion of their adult lives trying to rediscover who they are within the context of their families.

Child advocates can talk with non-resident fathers and/or their attorneys about the importance of including their families as a source of support and resources for their children and for them, as fathers. Critical decisions are made about service delivery and permanency options for children and families at agency case planning meetings and family group decision-making (FGDM) meetings. These more natural settings and experiences for families allow individuals and agencies involved in the case to have an in-depth dialogue about the family's needs and how to overcome barriers. These are crucial meetings for fathers and paternal family members interested in being supports and resources for their children, as they are often led by the family itself. By allowing the family private time during these meetings, the family is able to develop a plan for the child and other family members that meets their collective needs. Children and youth should also be invited and included in these decision-making processes. This allows children to see first-hand the immediate and extended family members interested in seeing them do well, and working together to make that happen through a facilitated process. By allowing the opportunity for this inclusive process, real commitments can be made by the family with accountability for those commitments coming from the family, as opposed to the agency or court. For more information, visit www.fgdm.org.

In their courtroom advocacy and at agency and court meetings, child advocates can also recommend that a child or youth have regular visits with their extended family when this would be in the child's best interests and consistent with their daily routines; that the family members be notified to participate in agency meetings and court hearings; that the extended family receive support services; that the extended family host the child during holidays or family gatherings; and/or that the extended family become kinship caregivers or guardians for the child (Kendall & Pilnik, 2010).

Conclusion

As child welfare agencies begin to tackle the question, What about the dads?, so too do the advocates for children. Fathers and their relatives may have an abundance of resources and supports to offer children involved in the child welfare system. Child attorneys, CASA volunteers, and GALs have a responsibility to do more to identify, locate, engage, and involve non-resident fathers and their families, and to remind other professionals involved in their cases to do more to support fathers and their families. To truly advocate for a child means to be inclusive and mindful of the non-resident father and his family as the child and family move toward permanency outside of the system.

Other Professionals' Responsibilities to Fathers[4]

By Howard Davidson, Director, ABA Center on Children and the Law

Child welfare cases involve numerous professionals and volunteers who each have responsibilities that may involve the non-custodial father.

The father's attorney must advocate for the father, and ensure that he understands his rights and responsibilities and that they are fully protected. The father's attorney makes sure that the father's voice is heard in the proceedings. He or she also has all of the legal and ethical obligations imposed by the attorney-client relationship, such as keeping client confidences. The father may also have a volunteer parent advocate whose job is to help him understand and navigate the child welfare and court system and achieve his case goals.

The attorney representing the agency should ensure that the caseworker and other agency staff are respecting the father's constitutional rights (discussed in detail later) and meeting their reasonable efforts requirements. This includes ensuring that the father is identified and located early, receives proper notice of proceedings, and is included in the case plan and offered appropriate services (Sankaran, 2009).

Judges are responsible for ensuring that fathers are able to meaningfully participate in the court process, and that their rights are respected (Edwards, 2009). This can include ensuring that the agency is doing its best to identify and locate the father and including him in the case plan, requiring that the father receive proper notice of proceedings and effective legal representation, and ensuring that the father is able to visit with his child (unless it would be harmful to the child). In cases where there is not yet a legal father, the judge also must ensure that paternity is established as quickly as possible, ordering paternity testing at state expense.

Legal Issues for Incarcerated or Out-of-State Fathers

Although fathers who are incarcerated or do not live in the same state as their child still have parental rights and the potential to be valuable resources for their children, extra efforts may be needed to engage them in the child welfare agency case plan and court proceedings, as discussed elsewhere in this article. These fathers' cases are also impacted by a number of legal considerations:

- Many states have laws that affect how incarceration is factored into termination of parental rights determinations (e.g., in some states, a long sentence is grounds for TPR, or it is only a factor to be considered, or it is a reason to extend the amount of time a child can be in care without moving to TPR) (Creamer, 2009). Different jurisdictions also have different rules and practices regarding children visiting fathers in correctional facilities. State law and practice may also differ on whether the father's right to participate in court proceedings requires being physically present, participating by phone, or just being represented by an attorney.
- Depending on how the state interprets the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, an out-of-state non-resident father may be required to pass a home study, even if he is not alleged to be unfit, which can delay permanency (Sankaran, 2006).
- If the father lives in another country, this adds a layer of complexity to the case. However, child welfare agencies do place children, temporarily and permanently, with parents or relatives who reside in other countries. National consulates can help in this process, also helping to secure assistance from other nations' child welfare agencies

[4] Source: Kendall and Pilnik (2010).

Fathers' Legal Rights in Child Welfare Cases

Assuming the father has established himself as the legal father of the child, according to your state's requirements, he has the right to the following during the child welfare court process:

- Notice of proceedings;
- Attend and be heard at court proceedings;
- Admit or deny allegations made against him;
- An interpreter if he doesn't understand English or is hearing impaired;
- Visit his child, unless there are safety concerns or it would harm the child;
- Have the child welfare agency make reasonable efforts to reunify him with his child.

Most states also give non-resident fathers the right to a court-appointed attorney, if he cannot afford one.

References

42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(19). (2000). *Report to the Congress on kinship foster care*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau.

Allen, S. M., & Hawkins, A. J. (1999). Maternal gatekeeping: Mothers' beliefs and behaviors that inhibit greater father involvement in family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61*(1), 199-212.

American Humane Association. (2010). *Guidelines for family group decision making in child welfare*. Englewood, CO: Author.

Bellamy, J. L. (2009). A national study of male involvement among families in contact with the child welfare system. *Child Maltreatment, 14*, 255-262.

Breshears, E. M., Yeh, S., & Young, N. K. (2004). *Understanding substance abuse and facilitating recovery: A guide for child welfare workers*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Chen, H., Malm, K., & Zielewski, E. (2008). *More about the dads: Exploring associations between nonresident father involvement and child welfare case outcomes*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

Chiamulera, C. S. (Ed.). (2009). *Advocating for nonresident fathers in child welfare court cases*. Washington, DC: American Bar Association, American Humane Association.

Creamer, K. (2009). Representing incarcerated nonresident fathers in child welfare cases. In C. S. Chiamulera (Ed.), *Advocating for nonresident fathers in child welfare court cases* (pp. 135-145). Washington, DC: American Bar Association, American Humane Association.

Edwards, L. P. (2009). Engaging fathers in the child welfare process: The judicial role. In C. S. Chiamulera (Ed.), *Advocating for nonresident fathers in child welfare court cases* (pp. 71-100). Washington, DC: American Bar Association, American Humane Association.

Enos, S. (2008, Spring). Incarcerated parents: Interrupted childhood. In T. LaLiberte & E. Snyder (Eds.), *CW360o: A comprehensive look at a prevalent child welfare issue: Children of incarcerated parents* (p. 18). St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota, Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare.

Florida Guardian ad Litem Program. (2004). Retrieved January 14, 2011, from http://www.guardianadlitem.org/

Franck, E. J. (2001). Outreach to birthfathers of children in out-of-home care. *Child Welfare, 80*(3), 381-399.

Freundlich, M., et al. (2003). *Kinship care: Meeting the needs of families of color.* Position paper presented at The Race Matters Consortium, Chicago, IL.

Geen, R. (2003, April). Finding permanent homes for foster children: Issues raised by kinship care. In *New federalism: Issues and options for states*, series A, no. A-60. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Greif, G. L., & Zuravin, S. J. (1989). Fathers: A placement resource for abused and neglected children? *Child Welfare, 68*(5), 479-490.

Horn, W., & Sylvester, T. (2007). *Father facts* (5th ed.). Gaithersburg, MD: National Fatherhood Initiative.

Kendall, J. R., & Pilnik, L. (2010). *Engaging nonresident fathers in child welfare cases: A guide for court appointed special advocates.* Washington, DC: Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System. Retrieved from http://fatherhoodqic.org/casa_brief.pdf

Kiselica, M. (2009). Understanding male help-seeking behaviors. In C. S. Chiamulera (Ed.), *Advocating for nonresident fathers in child welfare court cases* (pp. 15-28). Washington, DC: American Bar Association, American Humane Association.

Malm, K., Murray, J., & Geen, R. (2006). *What about the dads? Child welfare agencies' efforts to identify, locate and involve nonresident fathers*. Washington, DC: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

Mauer, M., Nellis, A.,. & Schirmer, S. (2009). *Incarcerated parents and their children: Trends 1991-2007.* Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project.

Merkel-Holguin, L. (2003, September). Fathers and their families: The untapped resource for children involved in the child welfare system. *Child Protection Leader*, 1-2.

National Court Appointed Special Advocates. (2011) Retrieved January 14, 2011, from http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPIsE/b.5301295/k.BE9A/Home.htm; see also http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPIsE/b.6350721/k.112A/What_Does_It_Mean_To_Be_a_CASA_Volunteer.htm

Pilnik, L., & Kendall, J. R. (2010). *Engaging noncustodial fathers in child welfare cases: A guide for children's attorneys and lawyer guardians ad litem*. Washington, DC: Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System.

Rosenberg, J., & Wilcox, W. B. (2006). *The importance of fathers in the healthy development of children*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Sankaran, V. S. (2006). Out of state and out of luck: The treatment of non-custodial parents under the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children. *Yale Law & Policy Review*, 25, 63.

Sankaran, V. S. (2009). *Advocating for the constitutional rights of nonresident fathers in child welfare cases*. In C. S. Chiamulera (Ed.), Advocating for nonresident fathers in child welfare court cases (pp. 1-14). Washington, DC: American Bar Association, American Humane Association.

Schmid, J. (2006). The business of engaging fathers (and other male relatives) in the FGC process. *Protecting Children, 21*(1), 20-29.

Sonenstein, F., Malm, K., & Billing, A. (2002). *Study of fathers' involvement in permanency planning and child welfare casework*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/CW-dads02

Testa, M. F. (2004). When children cannot return home: Adoption and guardianship. *The Future of Children, 14*, 114-129.

Thompson, K. (2009). *A tool for reducing barriers to finding fathers through mothers*. Englewood, CO: Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System.

The Court's Role in Engaging Fathers: Resources from the QIC NRF

Lisa Pilnik and Jessica Kendall

Lisa Pilnik, J.D., M.S., is a consultant focusing on child welfare policy and practice. She previously served as a staff attorney at the American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law, where she worked on issues related to father involvement in the child welfare system, juvenile status offenders, and the health of court-involved children. She has authored numerous publications on issues affecting children and families involved with the child protective and juvenile justice systems. Ms. Pilnik received her law degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School and a master of science degree from the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice.

Jessica Kendall is currently a consultant for the American Bar Association, managing grants relating to father involvement in the child welfare system, central registries, and differential response. Ms. Kendall was previously an assistant staff director at the American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law, where she managed a variety of federal and private grants relating to child welfare issues. She has represented numerous children in the foster care system in the District of Columbia and has been a CASA volunteer and supervisor in Pennsylvania and Florida. She has written articles and books on numerous topics, including juvenile status offenders and father engagement, and she has spoken at local, state, and national conferences on many child welfare topics.

Introduction

Each year, hundreds of thousands of children become involved with child protective services due to suspected or confirmed abuse or neglect. Many of these children were not living with their fathers when the alleged child maltreatment occurred (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). For these children, their biological fathers are often left out of court hearings, caregiver search efforts, case planning, and family team meetings.

Failing to engage noncustodial ("non-resident") fathers harms children by robbing them of potential placement, emotional, financial, and other resources (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2011). Judges can help remove barriers and promote father involvement in legal proceedings impacting children. Courts can assess how friendly their administrative and case-specific activities are in order to better welcome fathers into the court process.

Tips in this article are more thoroughly addressed in several special judicial bench cards and in a Father Friendly Check-Up™ (FFCU) for courts, developed by the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers (QIC-NRF) and available at www.fatherhoodqic.org.

The Judge's Role in Engaging the Father

Judges have a tremendous responsibility and opportunity to heighten the level of father participation in legal proceedings that impact children. This responsibility includes setting expectations for father involvement with the child welfare agency and directly with fathers. By doing so, judges create a culture of inclusion where expectations about father involvement are known by all parties. Below is a series of tips for judges that stem from judicial bench cards that are available through the QIC-NRF website and elsewhere.

Identifying and Locating the Father Early

Judges should help find fathers early so that children can maintain or establish important connections with their fathers and paternal kin. Judges can advance this goal by explaining to the parties the importance of finding the father and asking the mother and relatives about his identity and whereabouts at the first hearing. At each subsequent hearing, the judge can request information about the progress that the parties have made in finding the father, and, once he is located, move quickly to establish paternity, if necessary. The judge can also ensure that the father's relatives are identified and notified of proceedings, citing the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.[1]

Engaging Fathers

At the first court hearing, the judge can tell the father about the importance of his involvement in court proceedings and in his child's life, taking time to explain the proceedings, timelines, and permanency options. The judge should consider a non-resident father as an immediate placement option (absent a finding of unfitness) and encourage frequent visitation. The judge can also encourage or require the agency to involve the father in case planning meetings and require a service plan to be developed for both parents.

Judges can also use the "no reasonable efforts" finding to ensure that the father and his kin are appropriately involved. For example, the judge can inquire about the whereabouts of any "missing" father at the initial hearing. This initial inquiry can help the agency and parties learn critical information about the father and help identify and locate him. If efforts to identify or locate are insufficient over time, the court can consider whether making this finding is appropriate. For cases that were previously open for some time with the agency before petitioning, the judge can also consider the agency's efforts to involve the father and paternal kin in its initial reasonable efforts finding.

Understanding Male Styles of Seeking Help and Learning

Historically, the child welfare system has supported mothers more than fathers and services are often geared toward women's learning styles. Judges can better engage fathers by understanding how men seek help and learn differently (e.g., not dwelling on emotions and focusing on the future rather than past actions). The judge can support positive impressions about the father by focusing on strengths and getting a complete and accurate picture of his ability to parent. The judge can also encourage the child welfare agency to offer the father services that respond to male learning styles, such as those that offer concrete guidance and focus on resolving problems (see Edwards, 2009; Kiselica, 2009).

[1] The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act requires that relatives be notified of proceedings when children first enter foster care.

Assessing Your Court's Friendliness to Fathers

The Father Friendly Check-Up™ for Child Protective Courts is an adaptation of a series of assessments of father friendliness created by the National Fatherhood Initiative. The discussion below explains some of the areas addressed by this tool and how they enhance father engagement.

Engaging Fathers Through Case Management and Courtroom Functions

Judges and judicial officers can set the tone for how fathers are viewed and treated in a child welfare case in many ways, including:

- Communicating that fathers are an important resource for their children and requiring that all parties are respectful of all parents, both in and out of court.
- Asking questions of the child welfare agency and other parties to ensure that substantial effort is devoted to identifying, locating, and contacting fathers.
- Ordering that fathers are included in case plans and receive the services they need to strengthen their relationships with their children and fully engage in their families' court cases (including practical services like transportation to visits and job training).
- Ensuring that fathers receive quality legal representation and understand their rights and responsibilities.

Taking these steps ensures that everyone involved in the case, including the fathers themselves, understands that fathers are an essential part of their children's lives and in the child protection proceeding.

Ensuring that Administrative Court Functions Support Father Involvement

From gender neutral intake forms to including information on father engagement in orientation and training sessions, decisions that are made at the administrative level of the court also impact the experience fathers have in child welfare cases. For example, including diaper changing facilities in the men's restrooms shows that the court recognizes that fathers take care of their children's daily needs. Ensuring that information and services geared toward fathers are included in courthouse self-help centers, that father-

Examples of Questions from the Father Friendly Check-UpTM for Child Protective Courts

1. Does your court have written court rules that encourage early and ongoing efforts to identify and locate fathers?
2. Does your court include information about local fathers' programs in listings or compilations of services for parents?
3. Do judges explain to fathers, in court, their rights and responsibilities while also emphasizing the importance of their involvement in child protection agency and court processes?
4. Do judges expect everyone in the courtroom to avoid using language that is divisive and that stereotypes men/fathers and women/mothers?

Legal and Judicial Resources on Engaging Non-Resident Fathers

The QIC-NRF has produced many other resources, available at www.fatherhoodqic.org:

- Advocating for Nonresident Fathers in Child Welfare Court Cases (resource for parents' attorneys, and companion training curriculum)
- Engaging Nonresident (Noncustodial) Fathers in Child Welfare Cases (series of guides, each for a specific audience; e.g., Children's Attorneys and Lawyer Guardians ad Litem; Court Appointed Special Advocates, Government Attorneys)
- Finding Your Way: Guides for Fathers in Child Protection Cases
- QIC News: A Special Issue on Engaging Non-Resident Fathers in the Court Process

focused brochures are available in courthouse waiting areas,[2] and that judges and judicial officers are aware of the fathers' programs in their community sends a message to fathers and to the public that the court values and welcomes fathers and wants to see them succeed. Court administration can directly increase father involvement by having written court rules regarding identification, location, and notification of noncustodial parents. Finally, courts can become more father-friendly by engaging with the larger community on fatherhood issues, such as enabling judges to serve on local fatherhood coalitions or to hold, and participate in, workshops on father engagement at judicial education conferences.

Conclusion

The extent to which individual judges and courts as a whole encourage father involvement and welcome fathers as essential participants in their children's cases and lives can have a tremendous impact on child welfare outcomes. The Father Friendly Check-Up™ for Child Protective Courts allows courts to assess the extent to which their operations encourage father involvement in the courtroom and through the court's administrative functions, and the judicial bench cards developed by the QIC-NRF provide individual judges with practice tips for engaging fathers in their cases. Together, these products enable courts to improve their efforts to include fathers and, therefore, to achieve better outcomes for children.

References

Edwards, L. (2009). The judge's role in engaging nonresident fathers in child welfare court cases. *In Representing Nonresident Fathers in Child Welfare Court Cases*. Washington, DC: American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law.

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Public Law 110-351. (2008).

Kiselica, M. S. (2009). Reaching nonresident fathers in the child welfare system: Understanding male help-seeking behaviors. *Child Law Practice, 27*, 161-170.

[2] The QIC-NRF has also developed a series of guides for fathers that can be distributed by courts, fathers' programs, and other organizations. Electronic copies can be obtained at www.fatherhoodqic.org and hard copies can be requested through the Child Welfare Information Gateway.

National Fatherhood Initiative. (2011). *Father facts 6*. Gaithersburg, MD: Author.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2010). *Child Maltreatment 2009*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#can

Valuing Fathers: Strategies to Enhance Father Engagement

Carol Harper and Natasha Grossman

Carol J. Harper, M.P.A., is a faculty and research member at the University of Washington School of Social Work. She has more than 20 years of experience conducting research and evaluation studies as well as engaging in program implementation, curriculum development, and training, with a focus in the child welfare, human services, and juvenile courts. She also serves as a board member on the National Association of Social Workers, Child Welfare section.

Natasha Grossman, M.S.W., is a faculty member and program director at the University of Washington, School of Social Work. She has more than 20 years of experience in direct service, policy advocacy, and project management. She founded Walk a Mile, which educates policy makers about issues facing their most vulnerable constituents, and was the project director for Washington state's Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers (QIC-NRF). She serves on the Social and Economic Justice Specialty Practice Committee of the National Association of Social Workers.

Introduction

Professionals working in the child welfare system have as great a responsibility to be educated about and competent in their ability to engage fathers in the cases they manage as they have to be educated and skilled to work with various cultural groups, persons with disabilities, and other populations.

Having made the commitment to increase the involvement of fathers in the child welfare system in the state of Washington, a cross-system team of professionals there sought best practice options to enhance father engagement efforts. With funding available through the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers (QIC-NRF), the team developed the Washington State Fathers Engagement Program (FEP). The overall goal of the program is to enhance the opportunities for fathers of children in the child welfare system to be engaged in both the lives of their children, for those fathers who might have been less involved in recent years, and the child welfare system process from the beginning of the case.

This article provides an overview of the state of Washington's efforts to engage fathers in child welfare cases and offers recommendations for child welfare social workers in other communities to consider as they work to enhance their own engagement of fathers. Although public child welfare systems and social workers are targeted in this article, these recommendations could apply equally to professionals employed by other systems and organizations, such as courts, child support programs, and private child welfare agencies that provide services and legal support to fathers. The recommendations presented are based on the FEP staff's experience from their close working relationships with, and listening to, the 40 fathers enrolled in the FEP program.

Reasons Supporting Father Engagement Efforts

The child welfare system has a responsibility to enhance father involvement while remaining child-centered in its practices, not only because children have a right to know all members of their family, per the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also because

parental involvement is considered of sufficient importance that the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)[1] specifically addresses this issue. The CFSR lists eight specific expectations, requiring that states work toward: (1) achieving permanency through reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement of children with relatives; (2) facilitating visitation of children in care with fathers, mothers, and siblings; (3) preserving family connections; (4) placing children with relatives; (5) supporting the relationship of children in care with both father and mother; (6) involving children, fathers, and mothers in case planning; (7) assessing and meeting the service needs of children, fathers, and mothers; and (8) ensuring visitation of social workers with children, fathers, and mothers. It is important to note that the CFSR assesses the relationship of the child welfare system to each parent separately. An analysis of how well child welfare agencies in 32 states had done in meeting federal benchmarks in 2007-2008 (Administration for Children and Families [ACF], 2009) revealed that:

- Mothers were 26% more likely to be involved in case planning than fathers.
- Frequency of sufficient visits between social workers and mothers occurred in 69% of the cases compared to only 42% of cases involving fathers.
- Adequate quality of visits between social workers and mothers occurred in 70% of cases and 50% in cases involving fathers.
- Concerted agency efforts to promote, support, and maintain a positive and nurturing relationship between the child in foster care and the mother was 19% more likely than those efforts with the father.
- Children's visits took place with 73% of mothers compared to 54% of fathers.
- Mothers were 27% more likely to have their needs assessed compared to fathers.
- Mothers were 26% more likely to have their needs addressed, in contrast to fathers. (Administration for Children and Families, 2009b)

Additionally, a review of research studies on father engagement conducted by Malm and Zielewski (2009) found:

- Children with unidentified nonresident fathers were more likely to be adopted and less likely to be reunified, compared to children of nonresident fathers who were either identified but not contacted or identified and contacted.
- Children whose nonresident fathers were contacted by child welfare had shorter periods of time in the child welfare system, compared to children with unknown nonresident fathers or children whose nonresident fathers were known but not contacted.
- Children with highly involved nonresident fathers had cases open for less time than children with nonresident fathers who were less involved or not involved.
- Children with involved nonresident fathers were reunified more quickly than were children with uninvolved nonresident fathers.
- Children with involved nonresident fathers were more likely to be reunified and less likely to be adopted compared to those with uninvolved nonresident fathers.

Moreover, general research regarding the involvement of fathers, which was not limited to

[1]In 2000, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued a rule establishing a new approach to monitoring state child welfare programs. Under the rule, the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) assess states for substantial conformity with certain federal requirements for child protective, foster care, adoption, family preservation and family support, and independent living services.

child welfare populations, revealed the following positive outcomes for children:

- Father involvement in schools is associated with the higher likelihood of a student getting mostly A's. This was true for fathers in biological parent families, for stepfathers, and for fathers heading single-parent families (Nord & West, 2001).
- Youth are less likely to engage in first-time substance use and ongoing use of alcohol, cigarettes, and hard drugs (Kosterman, Haggarty, Spoth, & Redmond, 2004).
- Teen girls are two times less likely to engage in early sexual activity; seven times less likely to get pregnant (Ellis et al., 2003).

Children have a right to know their fathers and their paternal relatives. Social workers should be well informed about the benefits and value of fathers' involvement and be willing to share that knowledge with mothers and maternal relatives. In those situations where children and youths have been exposed to negative messaging about the father from mothers or others, the social worker may need to encourage the children to engage with their fathers. Similarly, professionals should interact with fathers to help them internalize their importance and responsibility to their children by imparting an understanding of the vital role that they play in their children's lives.

Project Overview

FEP is a collaborative effort between the University of Washington School of Social Work, Children's Administration Region IV (now Region II), and Divine Alternatives for Dads Services (D.A.D.S.). Several key agencies (child support, legal and court systems, and advocacy agencies) made available representatives from their organizations to present information and to co-facilitate sessions on specific topics at the father peer-support and educational groups and/or serve as board representatives to the project. The success of this project was born out of a strong relationship between the team members and partner agencies and their coordinated efforts to identify, locate, contact, and engage nonresident fathers whose children had been placed in out-of-home care. The partnership between the child welfare agency, other systems, educational institutions, and community agencies was key, with each organization bringing its own expertise to the program, which exemplified the need for a cross-systems approach to father engagement. The partnership was able to support fathers as they navigated their way through the child welfare system. According to Cohen (2008) the child welfare system can be cold, unforgiving, and filled with roadblocks for nonresident fathers; the goal of FEP is to change that reality.

FEP is a 20-week facilitated father educational and support group. The first 12 weeks follow a structured curriculum that educates fathers on the child welfare system and the child dependency process. Fathers also learn about the legal and child support systems and are provided information and skills training focused on helping them to be the kind of involved fathers they would choose to be. During the remaining 8 weeks, fathers, with input from the facilitator, select topics of interest to them. Enrollment is voluntary. As funded through the QIC-NRF, the program served only fathers who were not living in the home at the time their children were removed and placed in foster care due to child maltreatment. These fathers were not part of that allegation. To participate, these nonresident fathers had to live within King County, Washington (the greater Seattle area). Current funding (provided through Region II) provides a modified 12-week curriculum and is open to all fathers with any type of child welfare involvement.[2]

[2] In March 2011 FEP was modified. The current 12-week structured curriculum covers the topics included in the initial 12-weeks with additional information regarding domestic violence and mental health, and supports greater flexibility to dialog on topics of interest to the fathers.

Fathers were initially identified and contacted by a male lead at the child welfare agency; they were then referred proactively to the group facilitator at D.A.D.S., an existing local nonprofit father support and advocacy organization that has operated in the community for 10 years. The University of Washington provided project management and evaluation. Rather than seeing themselves as an organization providing a discrete service, the professionals involved in this project worked as a team, coordinating, collaborating, and guiding the project together. Members owned the project as theirs and believe this teamwork is reflected in the outcomes of the project.

During a 3-year implementation process, staff collected recommendations from fathers using feedback provided to the group facilitator and written surveys about those practice approaches that fathers appreciated. While the staff gained many insights, the following are the top 10 items that fathers said they needed and valued most.

Recommendations for Designing a Father-Engaging System: What Fathers Value

1. Engage the father before the initial court hearing—early and consistent contact reduces a father's sense of frustration and feeling left out.

Social workers should make immediate identification of and contact with fathers a top priority. In fact, research shows workers were able to contact almost 80% of the fathers who were identified and located when the case was opened, compared to only 13% of the fathers identified more than 30 days after case opening (Malm, Murray & Green, 2006). Thus, it is essential for supervisors to examine caseload flow to determine what additional supports and resources can be made available to workers (e.g., family-finding unit, training on family finding) and to encourage workers' efforts to ensure that contact with fathers occurs within the first 30 days. An added benefit of early father identification and contact is that the father and the paternal relatives can be involved in the initial case planning for the child.

The project's experience and what fathers shared during father group meetings is that they came to the table already disadvantaged, being the nonresident parent. Additionally they did not understand the child welfare system and what their role was or what social workers expected from them. Fathers reported that it seemed to them that mothers knew how the system works, because they watched their friends' and family members' involvement with the child welfare system; however, as one social worker put it, "Men don't talk about CPS [child protective services] at the barber shop" (Bujnoch, 2011). This leaves men feeling alone and clueless. The more time that passes between the child's placement and the time the father is contacted, the more frustrated and isolated he will feel. Thus, best practice would be for fathers to be given timely and regular information and updates regarding the status of their child and the opportunity to be involved in the case planning and court hearings.

2. Provide fathers with an opportunity to share their stories.

It takes time and patience, but the time spent listening to a father's story at the beginning will save time and grief for both fathers and social workers in the long run. All fathers want to tell their stories. They need social workers to understand why they no longer live with their children; why they are no longer living with the mother; and in some cases, why the maternal side of the family might not speak highly of them. "There is long-run benefit when social workers take the little extra time at the beginning of their relationship-building with fathers to listen to their stories" (Harper and Idczak, 2010). Relationships are complicated and, as is the

story of any divorce or breakup, the children are often placed in the middle of that conflict. Thus, the first contact with a father will set the foundation for both the social worker's relationship with that man and the ability of the social worker to better understand the historical context of the child and his/her family, and for the social worker and father to understand each other. Slowing down and taking the time to listen will make all the difference in their ongoing working relationship.

When a father learns that his child has been placed in care he is often angry, frustrated, frightened, and feeling some sense of failure for not having been there for his child during the situation that led to the child's placement. Mothers often are resistant to sharing information regarding the father's identity or whereabouts or may not be the only or best source (Malm, Murray & Green, 2006). In the Urban Institute's 2006 "What About the Dads?" study, 84% of social workers interviewed (N=1,222) reported the child's mother was asked to identify the nonresident father. However, the social workers reported the mother actually provided information on the father's identity less than one-third of the time. Other research notes that "gatekeeper" behavior or "boundary setting" by mothers limits the father's involvement with his children and is sometimes based on her anger with him, or on perceptions that he has not been a financially or otherwise responsible father (McBride, et al., 2005; Fagan & Barnett, 2003).

> "I can't explain the feeling. There was joy in it and then there's confusion, because if you're not prepared, you're just like, okay, well, what do I need to do? And then there's a lot more confusion and frustration and stress, which comes from—I found—'he's my child, but he's at CPS because of what his mother's done but I'm gonna have to pay these consequences.' "
> – *Nonresident father*

Fathers in the program reported that they believed negative reports had been provided to the social worker about them. Fathers felt threatened and were fearful that they were not on a level playing field with the mothers, since the social worker had already heard the mother's perception of him, whether based on relevant factors or not; how he had not been there for his child or did not love his child; or about real or alleged domestic violence (Harper & Idczak, 2010). They were fearful that social workers would begin their interaction with them believing all that had been said about them was true, without checking out the facts themselves. Some fathers also had had problems in the past (e.g., criminal record or documented substance use/abuse) and were fearful that social workers would not take time to learn how they might have changed: that although a fact then, it was no longer true or they were now willing to be more engaged and available for their children. What they were seeking was a chance, like the mother, to be a part of the service-planning and decision-making process and not to be excluded based on what the mother shared or what might have been historical information about them.

3. Provide fathers an opportunity to address their frustrations of being required to work with the child welfare system and the court even though they were not responsible for the maltreatment.

Some fathers reported that they felt they were being found guilty for another person's crime. Even though they were not responsible for the maltreatment, they felt that they had to prove they were fit parents.

As nonresident fathers, many men already feel a lack of control over the situation and the circumstances that their children face. Combined with the intrusion of the child welfare and court systems into their lives, this can lead to significant frustration for the father. It is important that social workers give fathers the opportunity to communicate these frustrations and address them.

Social workers must also be compassionate with men, as men display their worries and frustrations differently from women. Women's frustration is more likely to appear as tears and withdrawal (sometimes depression), while frustration among fathers might take the form of anger, shutting down, and walking away. Social workers should be prepared to listen when a man raises his voice and presents as angry, recognizing that this behavior may be a natural way for him to display his emotions of fear and frustration and not a personal attack on the social worker (Bujnoch, 2011). It is important that social workers look beyond the angry man to see the commitment and love for the child that lies under the layers of frustration expressed by the father.

4. Engage in honest dialogue about fathers' rights and responsibilities to their child(ren).

More than anything, fathers want and need the truth. They need for social workers to be straightforward about both their rights and their responsibilities to their child. Fathers need and want to understand how the child welfare system works, from knowledge about timelines to agency expectations. They also want and have the right to know policies and laws regarding legal representation, visitation, notice of legal proceedings, services, and participation in making important decisions about their children's lives. The more forthcoming with information a social worker is with a father, the better their working relationship. In addition, social workers should understand how males have to be culturally socialized to ask for and accept help and support. This awareness will help social workers decide how to present information to males, understand how fathers might process information differently from mothers, and relate to the actions fathers take. However, it is important for social workers to remember that just as one should not generalize about an individual based on cultural background, the same applies to not generalizing based on gender differences.

5. Provide fathers access to information about public and community services and supports, and ensure fathers are eligible for the resources to which they are referred.

Fathers often need information about services and access to resources that will help them to provide for and be a resource to their child(ren). Also, if fathers have another adult partnership or relationship and children as part of that relationship, they will most likely welcome and need information, services, and resources that allow them to meet the needs of these individuals as well. Fathers will be processing how to meet and balance the needs for all those for whom they have a responsibility. Forcing fathers to "choose" will not lead to engagement.

> "They would give me a list of resources. Right before the court day, I would get an envelope in the mail full of resources. Okay, that's true, they did provide it to me; but 'Your Honor, none of these are even applicable for men.' "
> *– Nonresident father*

Father-friendly written materials are crucial to fathers' understanding of systems and supports. Men interpret any written

information that does not include the word "father" as information not intended for them. To them the word "parent" is viewed as a code word for "mother." Therefore they assume the information does not apply to them. (Bujnoch, 2011). Father-friendly materials and environments include language that refers specifically to fathers and displays images of fathers. This includes photographs of men with their children in written materials as well as on the walls of agency lobbies and public areas.

Social workers also should be educated about whether, and the extent to which, the policies and practices of the various public and community services and supports apply to fathers. It is not safe for them to assume that those services that have served mothers will also serve fathers, especially nonresident fathers. Nothing is more frustrating to fathers than having a need and asking for assistance, only to discover that the services are not available to them. This situation may be especially difficult for men who define their role traditionally, as providers, and have had to, in their view, put aside their pride to ask for help.

> "One [social worker], she told me, 'God's not gonna put too much on your plate.' I took that as a confirmation that I was gonna get my child, I just didn't know when. But I took that as my confirmation."
> – *Nonresident father*

6. Create a seamless referral process and provide access to concrete services (e.g., housing, financial, employment/job training, legal support).

Access to concrete services might also stand between a father and his being a resource or even a viable placement option for his child. Ideally, social workers and child welfare agencies will have a strong working relationship with a representative or a point of contact within public and community agencies who has information about their policies related to serving fathers. In addition, it is ideal when these systems and agencies have approved information-sharing agreements and memorandums of understanding.

Fathers shared how hard it is for males to ask for help and then have to tell their stories over and over; providing the same information again and again was painful. The creation of a seamless referral process would reduce the likelihood they would need to repeat their stories again. Additionally, a few of the 32 social workers and 40 study fathers reported that fathers found themselves in a Catch 22 when seeking services such as housing support: The father was required to find housing before his child could be placed with him, yet the housing programs would not accept him until his child had been placed in his care.

7. Explain paperwork and requirements, provide support in prioritizing them, and assist with navigating the child welfare system when needed.

Social workers should not assume that fathers understand the requirements they must meet to receive unsupervised visits or have their child placed with them (potentially the ultimate goal for some nonresident fathers) or understand the paperwork given to them. Fathers most reported needing legal support to understand the documentation associated with their child's case and the system itself; this was especially true for those fathers who were not responsible for the maltreatment and whose social worker did not give them the opportunity to share their stories. Social workers also should not assume that any prior social worker or other professional in the dependency process (e.g.,

lawyers) took the time to address the fathers' concerns, feelings, and lack of knowledge. Thus, it is important for the next or new social worker to ask fathers about their concerns, understanding, and needs.

Social workers can have a central role in helping fathers understand the process and how to navigate the system as well as how to prioritize all the activities required of them. Not all fathers are able to read and comprehend; 18% of the fathers in the Washington project self-reported issues with reading and writing. Additionally, the Washington project discovered that many of the fathers had been struggling with multiple pressures and demands prior to learning their children were in care. For example, more than 50% of fathers participating in the FEP reported problems in the following areas: financially supporting their families (68%); some level of depression or other mental health concern (58%); finding a job (57%); and permanent housing (56%). (It's important to note that these fathers' issues were not more challenging than those of the mothers; in factor in some case less challenging). Fathers may become immobilized by these many demands, not sure what to do first; or they might fear their actions will be viewed as the incorrect decision. Thus, listening to and empathizing with fathers while helping them prioritize can be valuable steps the social worker can take toward increasing father engagement.

> "Well, I grew up in foster care, you know. I got taken from my parents when I was 6. And I know what it's like to grow up in the system, in numerous group homes, foster care placements; it's the worst thing, because the only thing you think about is you want your real family. I know that's what my son wants, and I'm going to do whatever I can to get him back."
> *– Nonresident Father*

8. Accommodate his work schedule when setting meetings, appointments, and visits with his children.

Another Catch 22 experience reported by fathers in the program was the requirement to have a job and to balance that need with the demands of a schedule filled with court hearings, court- or agency-required appointments, and their desire to visit their children regularly. These multiple demands made it difficult for them to keep a job. Some fathers reported that they felt that they had a limited number of choices and lost or quit their jobs because they could not accommodate the amount of time they needed to take off to attend required services, meetings, and court dates. And if they were not available, they felt that they took the chance of being viewed as uninterested, uncommitted fathers. This is a terrible position for fathers to find themselves in, and it can be even more difficult when they have other children or another family for whom they are providers. In the worst case they might feel their only choice is to walk away, which results in an emotional, forever wound in both the fathers and their children.

> "Now I see that maybe there was just a lack of resources, a lack of men who actually are social workers; they're not used to the numbers of men attempting to gain custody of their children. I feel that the reason I'm going to school for this now [to become a social worker] is because I'm going to have the understanding of the book, the knowledge, but I've been through it myself."
> *– Nonresident father*

9. Provide opportunities for fathers to give back and offer their insights: Allow them to serve on father advisory panels and review documents, policies, practice approaches, and training materials.

Many of the fathers who received support through FEP want to give back. They are aware of the difference the support has made to them and, in the case of the fathers in the Washington State FEP, the difference their peers have made for them. After receiving this crucial peer support, they want to do the same for others and pave the way for fathers who will come after them. Several fathers reported growing up without their own fathers, and expressed their heartfelt desire that their own children and other children would not have to experience the same sense of loss they lived with even today.

> "Just 'cause we're fathers doesn't mean we can't show love to our kids; and we are just as important in our kids' lives as the mother."
> *– Nonresident father*

Fathers who successfully complete educational and support groups and who have demonstrated through their participation on father panels that their goal is not about "getting back at the system" but a commitment to support other fathers—without payment being the central goal (although compensation for time is always important to provide)—should be given an opportunity to be a mentor, to serve on advisory panels, and to review materials, policies, and practice approaches. Central to this recommendation is recognition of the fathers' need to give something back and provide problem-solving insights to the system and to others. After completing FEP all fathers who were asked, agreed to participate in local and statewide advisory committees and video productions, and sit on panels for conferences and dependency classes, and at subsequent FEP groups. At a minimum all fathers should be asked to provide feedback regarding their experience with agencies and programs.

> "He [a social worker] gave me a lot of confidence and he understood exactly what I was saying. He didn't know my case at that time, but he had seen me and my child's interactions, and he heard my child say 'Daddy, I wanna come home with you.' "
> *– Non resident father*

10. Train professionals and the community at large to understand the importance of, and value the role and benefits of, having fathers involved in the lives of their children, regardless of their residency.

Many fathers reported feeling society does not value the role of fathers. They also repeatedly received the message that they were unimportant from their children's mothers', relatives', and professionals' perspectives. Among some nonresident fathers, these nonsupportive messages resulted in the fathers electing not to "fight" to remain in their children's lives for their own or their children's well-being. For a few fathers, their own sense of being unessential may have been wrongly connected to their inability to provide financially for their children, a measure often, if incorrectly, regarded as the definition of what it means to be a father. Now that their children have been harmed these fathers feel additional guilt and question their value as fathers. Some also struggled with how to be a father, because they did not have a good role model in their own childhoods. When social workers do not demonstrate by their actions that they believe

in the value of father involvement, they can further affirm the negative messaging fathers have received.

Conclusion

The Washington state team found that when fathers who participated in FEP were provided with the information and support they needed in a respectful way and in a language they could understand, they were much more likely to step up and take responsibility for the changes they needed to make in their lives to meet the department's recommendations. Receiving concrete services and resources they required to achieve these changes was key to their success.

Ideally, child welfare agencies will ensure that fathers have access to father support and educational groups and they will hire father specialists who can be a resource to fathers in addition to social workers. Furthermore, it is important for child welfare systems to provide social workers and supervisors with access to specialized training that supports their understanding of and enhances their skills with identifying, locating, contacting, and engaging fathers. If some of these resources are currently lacking, information is available at www.fatherhoodqic.org.

Finally, child welfare systems should consider the following actions and implement them to support their workers' efforts to engage fathers:

- Enhance family-finding skills among staff, develop family-finding units, and strengthen the working relationship with child support systems with the goal of involving fathers early in the process.
- Work closely with the dependency court system to gain its support in establishing paternity via timely paternity testing and encouraging mothers to share information regarding who the father is and his whereabouts.
- Review policies and practices and language to ensure father-friendliness while remaining child-centered.
- Incorporate father-focused information in both line staff and supervisory core and postcore training.
- Ensure that supervisors and administrative staff engage in ongoing monitoring of efforts to identify, locate, contact, and engage fathers.

> "The first thing they're gonna do is inform you. You're gonna know your roles. You're gonna know the phases, the processes. You're gonna know some of the biases that you're gonna come against, and you get direct experience from hearing it from other men. And you can get down and you can be frustrated when you're talking with other men and you can get realistic answers."
> *– Nonresident father*

References

Administration for Children and Families. (2009, Aug. 28). State progress towards child welfare improvement—findings from round 2. Washington, D.C.: Children's Bureau, ACF, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Source: http://www.ncsl.org/documents/cyf/cw_permanency.pdf

Administration for Children and Families. (2009, Aug. 29). Results of the 2007 and 2008 Child and Family Services Reviews. Agencies and Courts Meeting Plenary Session Presentation. Washington, D.C.: Children's Bureau, ACF, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Source: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/results/agencies_courts.pdf

Bujnoch, T. (producer, director). (2011). Including Fathers [DVD]. Available from

http://www.uwtv.org/video/player.aspx?mediaid=2055300379

Cohen. A. (2008). Representing nonresident fathers in dependency cases. Child Law Practice, 27, 147-155.

Ellis, B., Bates, J., Dodge, K., Fergusson, D., Horwood, L., Pettit, G., Woodward, L. (2003). Does father absence place daughters at special risk for early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy? Child Development, 74(3), 801-821.

Fagan, J., & Barnett, M. (2003). The relationship between maternal gatekeeping, paternal competence, mothers' attitudes about the father role, and father involvement. Journal of Family Issues, 24, 1020-1043. doi: 10.1177/0192513x03256397.

Harper, C., & Idczak, J. (2010). Where are the dads? How might their engagement be increased? Challenges and factors impacting the engagement of non-resident fathers with the child welfare system. Presentation to Wyoming's Children's Justice Project. Source: http://www.courts.state.wy.us/CJP/Father_Convening_Presentation_WYl.ppt

Kosterman, R., Haggerty, K., Spoth, R., & Redmond, C. (2004). Unique influence of mothers and fathers on their children's anti-social behaviors. Journal of Marriage and Family, 66(3), 762-778.

Malm, K., Murray, J., & Green, R. (2006). What about the dads? Child welfare agencies' efforts to identify, locate and involve nonresident fathers. Washington, D.C.: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

Malm, K. E., & Zielewski, E. H. (2009). Nonresident father support and reunification outcomes for children in foster care. Children and Youth Services Review, 31, 1010-1018. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.04.016

McBride, B.A., Brown, G., Bost, K., Shin, N., Vaughn, B., Korth, B. (2005). Paternal identity, maternal gate keeping, and father involvement. Family Relations, 54, 360-372.

National Fatherhood Initiative. (2004). Family structure, father closeness, & drug abuse. Gaithersburg, MD: National Fatherhood Initiative, 20-22.

Nord, C.W., and West, J. (2001). Fathers' and mothers' involvement in their children's schools by family type and resident status. (NCES 2001-032). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

United Nations. Convention on the rights of the child, art. 7 and 8, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3.

Yeung, W. J., et al. (2000, August). Children's time with fathers in intact families. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Chicago, IL.