

POSITION PAPER ON
FATHERHOOD
IN THE CHILD WELFARE
SYSTEM

January 10, 2001

Presented to

National Child Welfare Resource Center
for Family-Centered Practice

from

National Family Preservation Network
Priscilla Martens, Executive Director

POSITION PAPER ON FATHERHOOD

Introduction

The role of fathers has always been important but now, perhaps as never before, fathers are in the forefront of our national consciousness. Here are some factors implicated in fatherhood's prominence:

- ❑ Passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (federal welfare reform) has impacted families by bringing fathers back into the picture. Aid to Families with Dependent Children largely became Aid to Mothers with Dependent Children as it evolved over the years. The title of the new welfare reform act implies that fathers and mothers are responsible to meet the needs of their children and that they must do so by their own efforts and without long-term financial assistance from the government. The role of father as economic provider has thus been elevated.
- ❑ The high number of unwed mothers, single-parent families, and the high rate of divorce in America has alarmed and aroused both the private and public sectors:
- ❑ Private foundations, almost simultaneously with welfare reform, began funding fatherhood initiatives aimed at strengthening families and helping them become self-sufficient. The Ford Foundation, an early leader, established the Strengthening Fragile Families Initiative and helped create several organizations to provide an infrastructure for new fatherhood initiatives. Ford was joined by the Charles Stewart Mott, Annie E. Casey, and Hewlett Foundations. Numerous organizations have sprung up whose sole purpose is to promote responsible fatherhood.
- ❑ The federal government has provided funding for fatherhood initiatives and most states have fatherhood initiatives. The role of fathers is a common topic in both public and private life including schools, churches, and the workplace.

There is one sector that, ironically, appears to be only peripherally involved with fatherhood and that is the child welfare system. There has been little research on fatherhood in the child welfare system. Greif and Bailey's review of social work literature from 1961 to 1987 found only 21 feature articles on fatherhood. The three views of fatherhood emerging from the review were: fathers as perpetrators, fathers as missing, and fathers as embattled.¹

This comprehensive review of the literature suggests that fathers, when considered at all, are viewed in a negative way in the child welfare system. Indeed, the child welfare system, with perhaps the exception of child support, has made little effort to become involved with the fatherhood movement. The child welfare system has no identifiable models or written materials on engaging and involving fathers, and no training programs for child welfare workers. The purpose of this paper is to begin to address this huge void, discuss in greater detail what is known about fathers, and how this research and information might be applied to the child welfare system.

Research on Fatherhood

The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) at the University of Pennsylvania has a fatherhood research database with over 7,600 citations. In addition, the Center has sponsored Fathers and Families Roundtables where experts in the field share their findings. Most of the research references for this paper are taken from the NCOFF database and Roundtables findings.

The experts convened by NCOFF found that research literature on fatherhood has two crucial flaws: (1) The literature lacks a common definition of father presence and (2) it emphasizes father absence.² Some of the research on father absence was compiled in the Responsible Fatherhood Act of 1999 as reported by the U. S. Senate:

- ❑ Nearly 25 million children in the United States, or 36 percent, live apart from their biological father.
- ❑ Forty percent of children who live in households without a father have not seen their father in at least one year and 50 percent of such children have never visited their father's home.
- ❑ Children who live without contact with their biological father, in comparison to children who have such contact, are:
 - five times more likely to live in poverty,
 - more likely to bring weapons and drugs into the classroom,
 - twice as likely to commit crime,
 - twice as likely to drop out of school,
 - twice as likely to be abused,
 - more likely to commit suicide,
 - more than twice as likely to abuse drugs or alcohol,
 - and more likely to become pregnant as teenagers.³

The absence of fathers is due to unwed pregnancies, separation and divorce, incarceration, death, abandonment, domestic violence, and substance abuse.

It is much more difficult to define father presence according to the NCOFF Roundtable participants. It should be noted that the term “father” as used in this paper refers to biological father. There are other men who play the role of fathers including brothers, uncles, grandfathers, stepfathers, fictive kin, and mother's boyfriend. But most of the research focuses on a child's biological father and does not explore the role and benefits of a child's relationship with other men.⁴ Because there is an inadequate research and knowledge base of others assuming the role of father, they are not included in this paper.

It is difficult to define father presence because it includes more than physical presence. It also involves economic support; emotional relations, including nurturing; and expressive roles which include interactions and activities with children.⁵ Lamb, et. al., reviewed research on fathers' roles in school-aged children's development and concluded that involved fathers contribute to children's confidence, competence, and emotional, intellectual, and social well-being.⁶ Amato also conducted an extensive review of the literature and a 12-year longitudinal study, and concluded that fathers' education, income, the quality of the co-parental relationship, and the quality of the father-child relationship were all positively associated with children's well-being. The longitudinal study showed that fathers influence their adult children's well-being as expressed in the children's social networks, psychological well-being, and educational achievement.⁷

Research on fatherhood, as noted earlier, is lacking in the field of child welfare. The U.S. Senate report stated that children who have no contact with their biological father are twice as likely to be abused as children living with their father. The reason for this may be related to statistics gathered annually on child abuse and neglect which show that 55 percent of all substantiated abuse and mistreatment is related to single parent coping/resource issues.⁸ The theory implicit in this finding is that single parents, the majority of whom are mothers, face far more stress in raising children without the father and also lack the income

and other resources which help mitigate against child abuse and neglect. Studies in Lamb's, et. al., review of the research found that the strongest link to child abuse was poverty.

Not only is there little research but there is little data on which to base research in the child welfare system. There is no breakdown in national child abuse/neglect statistics on father's presence or absence in the home, no data on the number of children abused or neglected by fathers, and no data available on the number of fathers or men involved with foster care, kinship care, and adoption. Basic data on fathers must be identified and tracked before undertaking extensive research on fatherhood in the child welfare system.

Key Defining Issues in Fatherhood

Fathers play numerous roles in the lives of their children, not all of which have been thoroughly examined. This paper will look at three defining issues on why fathers matter for children and families where there has been more extensive research:

The Father as Nurturer

The father as nurturer begins when the child is born. Lamb's review of the research found that:

- Fathers can and do become as attached to infants as mothers
- Fathers are not inept or uninterested in interaction with newborns
- Fathers and mothers differ in their interactions with children, which causes infants to react differently to fathers and mothers
- The quality of the marital relationship affects mother-child relationships, father-child relationships, and the child's general well-being

Fathers and mothers interact with infants in different ways with play being an especially noticeable component of a father's interaction with the infant. Playful and socially engaging interaction with fathers and verbal stimulation from mothers help children build positive peer relationships.⁹

Following infancy, the second defining issue is the father's involvement in childhood and teen years:

The Father as Involved Parent

- Fathers' level of engagement with children is roughly two-fifths that of mothers and their accessibility is approximately two-thirds of mothers
- Fathers' levels of engagement and accessibility are higher with young children than with adolescents
- Fathers' share of responsibility for children is lower than mothers
- Father engagement and responsibility have increased in recent decades, although it is not large
- Contact and involvement with fathers reduce boys' aggressive behavior
- Continued contact with nonresidential fathers who are loving, supportive, and nurturing improves girls' emotional well-being.¹⁰

The nurturing and involvement role of fathers have been addressed and the final defining issue is the traditional role of fathers, that of economic provider:

Father as Economic Provider

There are strong relationships between employment or income and family formation. Men who are unemployed may be less likely to form family relationships or become actively involved in their children's lives:

- ❑ One study on teen fathers found that the most important predictor of an absent father's involvement with his children was his employment status.¹¹
- ❑ Joblessness can lead to increased criminal activity; subsequent incarceration further reduces the number of men available to form and support families.
- ❑ Without role models for gaining legitimate employment, low-income youth have a hard time developing motivation for work and connecting the concept of work with the idea of forming a stable family.¹²

All of these research-based findings on key defining issues are thought-provoking but, to be useful, they must be applied to the child welfare system. Here are some suggestions:

1. Future fathers should understand a father's role and responsibilities before becoming a father. While the child welfare system does not have primary responsibility for addressing this issue, there are areas where the system impacts future fathers. For example, boys who are aging out of the foster care system should be educated on a father's roles and responsibilities. Otherwise, they will likely continue the behaviors of their own fathers which contributed to the break-up of the family.
2. A father's nurturing begins at childbirth. Services to at-risk pregnant mothers should include the father, whether married or unmarried to the child's mother. In many cases, fathers are not now identified. The father should always be identified and the father and his family should be involved in contributing care and resources for the child to the greatest extent possible. Both fathers and mothers need to understand that the child's current and future well-being is dependent on the active involvement of both parents. Young, unmarried fathers should be referred to fatherhood programs for support and training in how to be a good father.
3. Services provided to families in the child welfare system should include the father. This includes fathers not married to the children's mother, divorced fathers, abusive fathers, and incarcerated fathers. Certainly, wisdom must be used when the father is the perpetrator of domestic violence and child abuse. But, new research is showing that there is evidence that programs for men who batter decrease the potential for child abuse.¹³ Many fathers and the father's family can contribute support, resources, and a positive relationship with children if they are included in case planning and case services.
4. Social services provided to fathers should be closely linked to employment services. Fatherhood programs have quickly discovered that fathers respond better to their roles as nurturer and involved parent if their employment needs are met. The child welfare system should establish cooperative ties to employment programs.

More recommendations for the child welfare system will be discussed in a later section.

Fatherhood and ASFA

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) was aimed at moving children more quickly into permanency. Early indications from states and organizations tracking the impact of ASFA are that states have increased termination of parental rights and adoptions to a greater extent than they have reunited

families. For example, the state of Georgia more than doubled the number of adoptions in the past two years but reunification as the case plan for families dropped by 25 percent.¹⁴

According to Pam Day at the Child Welfare League of America, in general states have increased the number of adoptions since passage of ASFA but kinship placements may not be considered in adoptive placements even though federal law encourages them. Even more significantly, the rate of foster care caseloads continues to increase in many states. The intent of ASFA was to reduce caseloads. Sarah Greenblatt of the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning believes ASFA is “compliance driven,” that is, states are moving to meet the time deadlines and documentation requirements of ASFA. The federal government is beginning child and family service reviews in each state. The focus on quality and outcomes may help end “compliance driven” casework. Meeting timelines and regulations flow from quality casework and services and should be reflected in them, not driven by them.

ASFA is a “double-edged sword.” The negative aspects of the sword have been set forth but there are also positive aspects. ASFA still requires states, except in highly specific circumstances, to make reasonable efforts to keep families together. States must also work towards family reunification when it is safe and appropriate to do so. If family reunification is to take its rightful place in ASFA, fathers and kinship families must be identified and utilized in case planning. With one-third of fathers currently absent in their children’s lives, there is a huge, untapped resource that must be addressed by the child welfare system. Here are two ways to tap into that resource:

1. Provide training to everyone in the child welfare system (administrators, supervisors, caseworkers) about the benefits of identifying and involving fathers in their children’s lives. Some of the benefits include:
 - Considering placement with father or father’s family in concurrent planning
 - Stopping the ASFA clock by using fathers to provide substitute care while mother receives treatment
 - Providing treatment and services to the father to stop the cycle of abuse and allow the family to be reunited
 - Developing materials that appeal to men as foster and adoptive fathers
2. Provide training for family preservation workers who generally focus on the family unit as it currently exists. Asking family preservation workers to identify and involve the father provides another resource for the family and lifts some of the burdens from the mother. All workers will have to be trained in how to work with mothers to help them see the benefits of the father’s involvement to the greatest extent possible. Fathers are gaining custody of their children after lengthy battles in some high profile child abuse and neglect cases but fathers are still largely viewed as a problem, rather than a resource.

Public Policy and Funding

At the federal level, the Clinton Administration’s budget proposal for FY 2001 provides \$255 million for responsible fatherhood proposals, including a Fathers Work/Families Win initiative to help 40,000 low-income fathers work and support their children. In 1999, the House passed the Fathers Count Act which provides funding for community-based groups. In 2000 the bill has largely been incorporated into a child support measure, HR 4678. Grants totaling \$140 million would be available to community organizations in addition to establishing a national clearinghouse of information on fatherhood projects and a multi-city demonstration project. The Senate is considering the Responsible Fatherhood Act which includes funding for a media campaign and block grants to the states to promote responsible fatherhood. No action was taken on these measures prior to Congress adjourning for the elections.

Almost all of the states have programs in place to promote fatherhood. State initiatives include public awareness campaigns, child support programs, grants to communities, parenting skills training, and other resources for fathers.

Private foundations continue to fund numerous programs and are finally beginning to look at developing the tools necessary to create coherent and replicable approaches to engage and involve fathers in their children's lives. The most comprehensive approach underway is the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families' year-long effort to create program standards and best practices. Preston Garrison, Director, reports that they will be conducting focus groups with researchers and practitioners for the first six months of 2001. The standards and best practices will then be developed based on their findings. The fatherhood arena and the child welfare system will both be beneficiaries of this important project.

Best Practices/Model Program

The biggest challenge to enacting fatherhood programs in the child welfare system is that there are so few tools available. There are no known written models or training curricula. Leaders in the fatherhood field are charismatic and often have excellent programs but they train staff based on their knowledge and experience, rather than through the use of written materials they have developed. Information on fatherhood programs and their effectiveness must generally be based on interviews or site visits. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that the child welfare system will continue to ignore the fatherhood movement until the necessary tools and training for engaging and involving fathers are widely available.

For this paper, some best practices from the federal Head Start program and Family Group Conferencing and a best practice model in the child welfare system will be presented. In 1993, J. A. Levine identified four factors that constrain Head Start programs from encouraging father involvement:

- Fathers' fears of exposing inadequacies
- Ambivalence of program staff members about father involvement
- Gatekeeping by mothers
- Inappropriate program design and delivery¹⁵

To its credit, the Head Start program has addressed these issues. In partnership with the National Center for Strategic Planning, Head Start developed a "Father-Friendliness Organizational Self-Assessment for Early Childhood Education Programs." This tool lays out in great detail the factors that affect fathers' involvement, ranging from the physical environment and staffing to services and communication. The tool could easily be adapted for use in the child welfare system. One local Head Start program demonstrates how the tool has been implemented:

The Macon-Bibb County, Georgia, Head Start program has been targeting non-custodial fathers since 1997. The program offers employment assistance, a 12-week parenting program, fathers' support group, forum for moms, and client follow-up. This Head Start program has helped find employment for 42 men, established 10 paternities, and facilitated child support payments from 25 fathers.

Another best practice comes from Family Group Conferencing (FGC) programs that promote involving the extended family in decision-making on cases of child abuse and neglect. Early indications are that FGC involves the father and his relatives to a far greater extent than does traditional child welfare practice. One FGC program site in Washington State with 57 conferences reported an average of five maternal relatives

and three paternal relatives per conference. In addition, placements with the father or paternal relatives, while not equal to, were fairly comparable to placements with the mother or maternal relatives.¹⁶

The program selected as a best practice model in the child welfare system is unique in that it attempts to serve fathers involved in four areas: child support, TANF, child welfare (abuse and neglect), and court child custody cases. Brian Hawkins, Director of the Fathers in Training Program in Virginia Beach, VA., says that his 20-week program has been in existence for five years. The program's goal is to help the nonresidential father obtain employment and make child support payments to allow the mother and children to go off welfare. The program also works directly with fathers in child welfare cases where the father is the abuser. Services provided include parenting skills and anger management. Courts make direct referrals to the program on disputed child custody cases, and the program provides mediation services, including cases where domestic violence is involved. However, as might be anticipated, one of the biggest problems is that mothers distrust the program. Mr. Hawkins hires staff with college degrees and then provides intensive training to teach them how to work with fathers. The program provides services to fathers during evening hours.

Success of the program is measured by the number of new complaints on fathers in the child welfare system and by the collection of child support. Only 10 percent of the men have any further complaints lodged against them regarding child abuse. However, 60 percent of the men stop working when their wages are garnished for child support. Mr. Hawkins attributes this high percentage to the child support system keeping the money for payments in arrear. If the money is used to reimburse welfare payments, the father's children may not receive any of the funds.

The strengths of this model are:

- Outreach and services to fathers with many different needs
- Sensitivity to fathers' specific service issues: male role model, services during evening hours, advocacy on behalf of fathers
- Intensive training for staff
- Establishing measurable goals to determine effectiveness of the program

The weaknesses of the model include:

- Not linked to research base
- Program appears overbroad—trying to do too much
- Fathers' employment goals to contribute to children's welfare and conflicting child support system goals for past debts to be repaid need to be reconciled
- System changes needed to reconcile conflicting goals have been identified but not addressed
- No written policies, guidelines, or training curriculum so it is difficult to fully understand or replicate program
- No identified methods of training staff to help mothers understand the benefits of the father's involvement

Mr. Hawkins appears to be one of the charismatic leaders in the fatherhood movement, and his program appears to be helping fathers. But there is really no way to adequately understand, describe, evaluate, and replicate fatherhood programs unless the programs' goals, objectives, standards, training, evaluation, etc. are in written form.

Controversies and Barriers

As has been stated repeatedly, the lack of research, models, and training curricula on fatherhood in the child welfare system is a significant hindrance to engaging and involving fathers in their children's lives in this system. There are other barriers as well.

In the context of investigating child abuse/neglect complaints, the family is already disposed to respond with hostility, suspicion, and unwillingness to cooperate. In this atmosphere, a mother questioned about the identify and involvement of a nonresidential father may view it as a threat to her own role and rights or have valid fears about re-involving the father in the family's life.

Fathers, too, face barriers to becoming involved with their children under these circumstances. They may face negative stereotypes, lack of role models, inadequate parenting skills, and consequences related to the collection of child support. Fathers may feel rejected by their family members and by the institutions supporting the family in their absence.

One example of the barriers to involving fathers is the area of domestic violence. Some of the factors opposing working with abusers include:

- Men who batter are at a fairly high risk to physically abuse their children
- Consequences of domestic violence for children include severe depression, anxiety, and aggressive acting out
- Men who batter are often able to manipulate their image in positive ways to gain child custody and visitation rights.¹⁷

On the other hand, there are factors supporting the involvement of abusers:

- Providing no services to abusers may contribute to the half of men who batter going on to batter in another relationship, thus exposing children in that relationship to violence;
- Research shows that programs for men who batter decrease the potential for child abuse;
- Visitation centers are being successfully used to help fathers maintain some contact with their children;¹⁸
- While much of the research referred to is new and not conclusive, it does point towards engaging and involving fathers in domestic violence cases in services and contact with their children, rather than just confining them or, worse, ignoring them.

This paper recognizes that domestic violence is a sensitive issue that requires a great deal of care in devising treatment programs. Dr. Joan Pennell, a leading researcher on domestic violence from North Carolina State University, recommends that any treatment follow two guidelines: 1) safety of the child and adult survivors is the priority, and 2) reinforcing or building constructive connections for all family members. In one treatment study involving Family Group Conferencing, Dr. Pennell found that indicators of child maltreatment and domestic violence fell for participating families while they rose for the comparison group.¹⁹

The child welfare "culture" itself presents a significant barrier to engaging and involving fathers because of practices that have become ingrained over the years. Administrators have no system in place that they can employ to implement fatherhood policies. Schools of social work have not developed the theory and practice skills needed to work with fathers. Current child welfare policies overemphasize the mother and ignore or perhaps even disparage the father's involvement. There are no standards, training, or outcome criteria available. Even if the administrator is a strong proponent of engaging and involving fathers, the cost of developing policies, procedures, training, and outcome measures will be huge. And, even if all these things are in place, there is still likely to be resistance from supervisors and caseworkers. As was

mentioned earlier, the timelines and other requirements of ASFA impose additional burdens on already-burdened caseworkers. Supervisors do not have any policies or available training to help caseworkers learn how to involve fathers in case plans and services. Caseworkers may have a personal bias against the father for his behaviors or for abandoning his family. They also lack skills in confronting hostility towards the nonresidential father and in promoting the benefits of the involvement of the absent father and his family.

Finally, partnering agencies and organizations also need education and training. This extends to courts, law enforcement, jails and prisons, family preservation and support services, medical and mental health services, substance abuse services, community-based programs, and employment programs.

Family-Centered Practice

Four essential components of family-centered practice in the child welfare system and their impact on fathers include:

- ❑ The family unit is the focus of attention. Everyone in the family contributes to the family's well-being. Children's needs must be addressed in the context of the whole family. Thus, an overemphasis on the mother's role, especially if the father is not in the home, results in failure to view the father as an essential component of the family and a resource. Both parents are necessary and each plays a unique role in the life of a child.
- ❑ Strengthening the capacity of the families to function effectively is emphasized. The idea expressed here is to "help families to help themselves," with the perspective that families have strengths rather than just problems. Personal responsibility is the key to strength-based services. Fathers also have strengths and responsibilities which must be identified and strengthened in order for them to function effectively in the family.
- ❑ Families are engaged in designing all aspects of the policies, services, and program evaluation. Families are viewed as partners rather than clients. They are involved in establishing goals and making decisions. Their input and involvement helps to ensure that the services will be appropriate, culturally-responsive, and effective. Fathers must be identified and engaged early on in order for them to participate in the planning and service delivery process.
- ❑ Families are linked with more comprehensive, diverse, and community-based networks of supports and services. One service or program cannot be expected to do it all. This is an especially critical factor in involving fathers in the child welfare system because research has already shown that a key link to a father's involvement with his children is employment. Fathers are also responding well to programs specifically tailored to men and their needs. The child welfare system will have to establish close ties to employment and fatherhood programs in order to effectively engage and involve fathers.

Family-Centered Approach to Involving Fathers

Based on all of the research and information garnered for this position paper, a family-centered approach that targets fathers would include the following:

1. Engaging and involving fathers:
 - ❑ A discussion with the family of the father's role or potential role in the family and the benefits to the

- family of his involvement
- Identification of the father in all child welfare cases and assessment of father's and father's family potential contributions
 - Outreach to the father and his family to the greatest extent appropriate; development of outreach materials that appeal to fathers
 - Involvement of the father in case plan and service delivery
 - Referral of the father to employment and fatherhood programs as appropriate
2. A family-centered approach which includes fathers is based on an organization or agency having in place:
- Recruitment of more males to work in the child welfare system
 - Hours of service to reflect availability of fathers
 - Materials and resources that appeal to fathers
 - Policies and procedures for engaging and involving fathers
 - Staff training to engage and involve fathers
 - Staff training to help mothers and children understand the father's role and benefits of his involvement
 - Identification of and development of cooperative working relationships with fatherhood programs and employment programs
 - Utilization of fatherhood programs for assistance in developing policies and procedures, staff training, and how to approach and involve fathers

Resource Center Implementation

Engaging and involving fathers with their children in the child welfare system will likely be a slow, arduous, and expensive process. That is because there are no policies, resources, or training curricula in writing. The system itself has expressed indifference, at best, and hostility, at worst, to engaging and involving fathers. Nevertheless, this paper has taken the position that it is a necessary, beneficial, and worthy goal to involve fathers in their children's lives.

The starting point is to link the fatherhood movement and resources with the child welfare system. This can be accomplished on both a macro and micro level. One of the best ways to accomplish it on a macro level is passage of the legislation awaiting congressional approval. Federal funding and accompanying policies and guidelines will raise the consciousness of the child welfare system and encourage involvement in fatherhood initiatives. In the meantime, almost all states have fatherhood initiatives and child welfare agencies can request technical assistance and support from these programs.

On the micro level, local child welfare agencies should contact local fatherhood programs and request that they assist in staff training. Because it is highly unlikely that fatherhood programs will have any written policies or training materials, agencies should consider using some of their own training funds to develop written policies and a training curriculum based on information from the fatherhood program and with their permission. If fatherhood program staff are extensively involved with these efforts, they will need to receive compensation.

Child welfare agencies will have to recruit and hire more male staff, adjust hours of operation and services to meet the needs of fathers, develop materials that appeal to males, and develop working relationships with employment programs. Child welfare agencies will also need to develop policies and training that demonstrate

to mothers and children the importance of a father's involvement. Fatherhood programs may be a resource in this area but agencies will likely have to develop resources based on their own extensive involvement with mothers and an understanding of her motives and needs.

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice must advocate for inclusion of data on fathers in the three major data systems of the child welfare field: NCCNDS, AFCRS, and SACWIS. The Center must also develop some materials for the child welfare field. The first priority is data about the effect on children of a father's absence and presence in the home. A foundation must be laid which establishes the critical role fathers play in their children's lives. The second is a fact sheet on the importance and benefits of engaging and involving fathers with their children in the child welfare system. The Center should actively work with national fatherhood programs to develop and distribute this information to child welfare agencies nationwide. At the same time the Center should either develop or work jointly with other organizations to develop a training curriculum to engage and involve fathers in their children's lives in the child welfare system. The Center can then develop technical assistance protocols for the field.

Given the response of the child welfare system thus far to fatherhood initiatives, it is unlikely that any significant change will be seen until there are policies, training curricula, and technical assistance widely available. National fatherhood organizations, especially those that receive government funding and ongoing private foundation funding, should be asked to help develop the necessary resources to carry out this huge task. Key players include the National Practitioners Network for Father and Families that is developing standards and best practices and the Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization which has staff in six cities recruiting young, unwed fathers into a welfare-to-work program funded by the Department of Labor. Smaller organizations can also play a role: National Family Preservation Network has received funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to conduct an assessment of child welfare and fatherhood programs at four sites. The Network plans to develop a model and training curriculum for the child welfare field based on its findings from the assessment.

Key Contacts/Consultants

The following organizations/people have expressed interest in helping to develop fatherhood resources for the child welfare field:

Name of Organization	Key Person	Area of Expertise
Child Welfare League of America	Pam Day	Disseminate best practices
Children's Defense Fund	Mary Lee Allen	National advocacy
Natl Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families	Preston Garrison	Developing best practices for practitioners
National Family Preservation Network	Priscilla Martens	Developing model, training curriculum
NRC for Foster Care/Perm. Pl	Sarah Greenblatt	Development of assessment tool
Natl Center on Fathers and Families	Vivian Gadsen	Research, database
Inst. for Responsible Fatherhood	Charles Ballard	Best practices model
Am. Public Human Services Assoc.	Gretchen Test	Access to policy makers

Summary

This position paper is “sounding the alarm” in the child welfare system by calling upon it to join the fatherhood movement. The child welfare system supports the well-being of children, and fathers, without doubt, contribute to their children’s well-being. The research on fatherhood is extensive and all points in the direction of engaging and involving fathers in their children’s lives to the greatest extent possible. While the goal is clear, the tools to accomplish it are sadly missing. There are no models, training curricula, training protocols, or technical assistance for engaging and involving fathers with their children in the child welfare system. All of these must be developed and are urgently needed both to help families and to successfully implement new federal and state laws on permanency planning. The child welfare system should start with what is available:

- Emphasizing the importance of fathers and their contributions to the well-being of children
- Applying research on fatherhood in general to the child welfare system
- Establishing links to national, state, and local fatherhood initiatives and programs
- Utilizing fatherhood programs as resources for developing policies, training, and technical assistance
- Networking with the public and private sector to increase the resources for fatherhood initiatives in the child welfare system

Accomplishing this huge task will not be easy, cheap, or quick. But the child welfare system dare not let another five years pass without doing anything. The need is urgent and the time is now.

Notes

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