

# **Supporting Responsible Fatherhood in Austin, TX: An Analysis of Current Programs and Opportunities**

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# Executive Summary

Children with supportive, involved fathers do better in school, are physically and mentally healthier, and engage in fewer risk behaviors.<sup>1</sup> As such, the fact that the majority of American children will spend some part of their childhood in a single parent household – typically without a father – is cause for concern. To address this issue, hundreds of ‘responsible fatherhood’ initiatives have emerged in cities across the United States.

This report analyzes the lessons learned from responsible fatherhood efforts thus far to suggest opportunities for programming in Austin, Texas. To this end, the researcher adopted a three-part qualitative research strategy:

- Reviewing existing research literature on fathers and fatherhood initiatives;
- Performing an environmental scan of the local service delivery system using Internet research and professional contacts; and
- Conducting informal interviews with practitioners, researchers, and fatherhood programming experts face-to-face, by phone, or through e-mail correspondence.

## Key Findings

The key findings of this analysis can be summarized as follows:

1. Responsible fatherhood goals are more likely to be acted upon when fatherhood holds a prominent position on the public policy agenda.
2. Most noncustodial fathers want to be involved in their children’s lives and take responsibility for their needs.
3. Noncustodial fathers face a variety of complex personal barriers.
4. Most fathers aren’t getting the services they need because they aren’t available, they don’t know they’re available, or they’re nervous about accessing them.
5. Fathers require comprehensive services from an array of health and social services, workforce development, and legal assistance organizations.
6. Fathers are easiest to engage during the first few years of their child’s life.
7. Multi-organization partnerships are the most promising approach to ensure comprehensive service delivery yet many initiatives struggle to establish effective collaborations.

8. Organizations must have the buy-in of staff at every level to effectively serve noncustodial fathers.
9. Fatherhood programs are experiencing a temporary period of disinvestment by private foundations.
10. The present lull in fatherhood programming provides an exciting opportunity to reflect on previous initiatives and strategize about the future.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were formulated based on the key findings, the recommendations offered by interview participants, and the researcher's evaluation of Austin's programming for noncustodial fathers. These recommendations are discussed at greater length in the full report.

### **Area One: The Public Policy Agenda**

*Objective: Establish an advocacy and education program that raises awareness about the importance of fathers, the needs of noncustodial fathers, and services available to fathers in Austin.*

#### *Policy Recommendations*

- Local organizations that work with noncustodial fathers should set up a permanent working group dedicated to advocating for responsible fatherhood programming.
- The working group should organize an annual PSA campaign to create and sustain public awareness about responsible fatherhood.
- The working group should develop curriculum to educate mothers and staff that work with fathers in local organizations about the potential benefits of father involvement.

### **Area Two: Understanding Noncustodial Fathers' Needs**

*Objective: Policymakers, advocates, and program designers will have access to reliable information on fathers' needs.*

#### *Policy Recommendation*

- Researchers at the University of Texas at Austin should conduct an in-depth survey of local noncustodial fathers to further explore their needs and characteristics.

### **Area Three: Service Delivery**

*Objective: Every noncustodial father in Austin will have access to high-quality services to help him become a responsible father.*

#### *Policy Recommendations*

- Local organizations that serve noncustodial fathers should develop a responsible fatherhood coalition to coordinate services. Coalition goals should include increasing outreach efforts to noncustodial fathers, making case management available to every father that needs it, and promoting the concept of the family as the unit of service intervention.
- Local schools and organizations that provide youth recreation activities should develop strategies to better engage fathers in parent-child activities.
- Local child support enforcement offices should produce a comprehensive pamphlet describing services available for noncustodial fathers in the Austin area and provide a copy to every father they work with.
- The Texas Office of the Attorney General should partner with the United Way to add a responsible fatherhood search category to 2-1-1 referral systems around the state.
- Volunteer Legal Services of Central Texas, Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid, the Lonestar Fatherhood Initiative, and the Texas Office of the Attorney General should work together to improve noncustodial fathers' access to legal counsel, especially regarding visitation disputes.
- The State Legislature should require the Texas Workforce Commission and Texas Office of the Attorney General to work together and develop a plan to increase low-income noncustodial fathers' access to workforce programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Juliane Baron and Kathleen Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals of 'Responsible Fatherhood' Policy: Voices from the Field in Four Cities* (Social Policy Action Network, December 2002), p. 5.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

Children with supportive, involved fathers do better in school, are physically and mentally healthier, and engage in fewer risk behaviors.<sup>1</sup> As such, the fact that the majority of American children will spend some part of their childhood in a single parent household – typically without a father – is cause for concern.

Over the past three decades nonprofit organizations, foundations, government agencies, and policymakers grew increasingly interested in finding ways to protect the well-being of children in single families. Initially, these efforts consisted primarily of policies designed to minimize the economic consequences of father absence, building on the classic American perception of fathers as providers. The best-known example of this kind of initiative is the federal child support program. In time researchers and practitioners came to recognize that fathers' non-financial contributions to their children's lives – activities like playing, helping with homework, and passing on cultural traditions – provide important benefits as well.

Today, there are hundreds of 'responsible fatherhood' initiatives in cities across the United States. Common goals include increasing child support collections, furthering understanding of the important roles fathers can play, and increasing fathers' participation in the lives of their children. These initiatives are diverse, ranging from informal support groups for fathers to comprehensive case management services for entire families. This report analyzes the lessons learned from efforts thus far to suggest opportunities for responsible fatherhood programming in Austin, Texas.

## Relevance to Policy Development

This analysis has practical applications for a variety of audiences:

- **Policymakers and foundations** can use this report to learn more about the history and purpose of fatherhood initiatives as well as opportunities to formulate policies and fund programs that support the goals of responsible fatherhood.
- **Researchers** will find that this report presents a concise summary of current knowledge about the characteristics and needs of noncustodial fathers. This project may also serve as a model for analyzing opportunities to serve fathers in other communities.
- **Teachers and service providers** can use this report as an information resource to locate services available to fathers in Austin. The recommendations section of the final chapter points to several opportunities for collaboration between practitioners with different areas of expertise. Additionally, the findings of this report may be useful in formulating future grant proposals.
- **Advocates** will be able to use the information contained in this report to draw attention to local needs and opportunities.

## Organization of the Report

This study focuses on three key elements that shape responsible fatherhood initiatives: the public policy agenda, the understanding of noncustodial fathers' needs, and the service delivery system. The report begins by reviewing recent research literature on fathers and fatherhood programs across the nation. The succeeding chapters discuss how these findings relate to activities in Austin, Texas.

The report consists of six chapters and two appendices. Chapter 2 reviews the research questions, methodology, and limitations of report. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 discuss the rise of responsible fatherhood on the public policy agenda, the characteristics of noncustodial fathers, and findings about responsible fatherhood programming, respectively. An overview of local programs and analysis of Austin's strengths and weaknesses is provided in Chapter 6. The report concludes with a summary of findings and recommended actions to improve Austin's support for responsible fatherhood initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Juliane Baron and Kathleen Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals of 'Responsible Fatherhood' Policy: Voices from the Field in Four Cities* (Social Policy Action Network, December 2002), p. 5.



## Chapter 2. Research Design

### Rationale

The impetus for this analysis came from a recent evaluation of the Texas Fragile Families Initiative's Bootstrap Project. The Texas Fragile Families Initiative (TFF) helped community-based organizations in 11 cities increase their capacity to serve young, low-income noncustodial fathers.<sup>1</sup> Bootstrap, a supplementary program at four TFF sites, offered enhanced services to fathers to help them become responsible parents, primarily through a cash stipend in exchange for registering with child support enforcement and participating in job skills training activities.

One Bootstrap evaluation, *Factors Affecting Participation in Programs For Young Low-Income Fathers: Findings from the Texas Bootstrap Project*, examined possible reasons for lower-than-expected enrollment rates at the four Bootstrap sites.<sup>2</sup> Staff at the Austin site reported difficulties establishing relationships and coordinating services with other local organizations. They argued that this situation complicated their efforts to engage fathers because potential participants weren't interested in enrolling in the program – and thus agreeing to establish paternity and a child support order – if there were no guarantees that there would be services available to address their individual needs.<sup>3</sup>

Funding for the Bootstrap Project ran out in the fall of 2003, leaving Austin without a formal responsible fatherhood initiative. Given the challenges encountered by Bootstrap staff and the current lull in programming, this is an opportune time to evaluate current activities and opportunities in Austin for restructuring services for noncustodial fathers.

### Research Questions

This report addresses the following research questions:

1. How did “responsible fatherhood” garner attention on the public policy agenda?
2. Does it continue to rank high on the public policy agenda today?
3. What are the common needs and characteristics of noncustodial fathers?
4. What kinds of organizations make up the existing service delivery system?
5. What kinds of services do they provide?
6. What are the most promising practices for working with noncustodial fathers?  
Common challenges?
7. What do we know about noncustodial fathers in Austin, Texas?
8. Where does responsible fatherhood rank on the local policy agenda?

9. How do organizations in Austin serve noncustodial fathers?
10. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these programs?
11. How do local activities compare with the best practices and challenges described by the national research literature?
12. What steps should Austin take to ensure the highest-quality services for noncustodial fathers and their children?

## **Methodology**

The following qualitative research methods were used to address the research questions:

- Reviewing existing research literature on fathers and fatherhood initiatives;
- Performing an environmental scan of the local service delivery system using Internet research and professional contacts; and
- Conducting informal interviews with practitioners, researchers, and fatherhood programming experts face-to-face, by phone, or through e-mail correspondence.

## **Limitations**

This report was prepared as a student project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Public Affairs degree at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. As such, significant time and financial constraints limited the scope of this research.

This report is not a comprehensive needs assessment. Rather, it provides a '40,000-foot view' of key local programs and the services they offer. Priority was given to organizations that already target fathers, to workforce intermediaries, and to programs that address legal issues related to child support and paternity. Among these organizations, time constraints precluded the possibility of following-up with organizations that did not respond to initial requests for information.

In addition to these targeted programs, a preliminary exploration of supplementary programs found that more than 60 other local organizations may have services appropriate for young, low-income, noncustodial parents. Additional research is needed to clarify the capacity of these organizations to serve this population. A list of potential providers is included in Appendix A.

Finally, a comprehensive evaluation of local needs would ideally solicit input from fathers' themselves. Time limits and human subject regulations precluded such an endeavor at this juncture.

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<sup>1</sup> Texas Fragile Families Initiative (TFF), *TFF Final Evaluation Report* (Austin, TX: Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2004), pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Looney and Deanna Schexnayder, *Factors Affecting Participation in Programs For Young, Low-Income Fathers: Findings from the Texas Bootstrap Project* (Austin, TX: Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, April 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Interviews with selected staff, Austin Bootstrap site, August 2003.

## **Chapter 3. Responsible Fatherhood and the Public Policy Agenda**

Why do policymakers turn their attention to one issue rather than another? Policy development theory contends that there is a public policy ‘agenda:’ a “list of subjects or problems to which [policymakers] are paying some serious attention at any given time.”<sup>1</sup> In the universe of problems policymakers could consider, prominent items on the public policy agenda are more likely to be acted on.

The 1990s experienced a surge of interest in responsible fatherhood as a public policy issue due to a peculiar collision of social science research, politics, and popular culture. The roots of this phenomenon reach back several decades. The first section of this chapter describes the historical context for fatherhood’s emergence as a policy issue. The next section examines how ‘responsible fatherhood’ rose from oblivion to prominence through key actors and timely opportunities. The third section discusses implementation and the final part of the chapter looks at the current status of responsible fatherhood issues on the U.S. public policy agenda.

### **Background**

The number of children living in single-parent households has increased dramatically since the 1960s. Approximately 9 percent of children under 18 lived with a single parent in 1960; by 2000 this rate increased to nearly 27 percent.<sup>2</sup> The largest growth occurred between 1970 and 1985, when the growth of single-mother families leveled off.<sup>3</sup> Today, most American children will spend part of their childhood in a single-parent household.<sup>4</sup>

This shift is attributed to a variety of widely recognized social changes that occurred in American society in the 1960s and 1970s: changing sexual mores increased the prevalence of extramarital sexual activity and decreased the stigma surrounding out-of-wedlock births; American attitudes about marriage and divorce changed; and women made economic gains that increased their independence and ability to leave unhappy marriages.

While the social science community of the 1960s and 1970s initially regarded single-mother households as “just another alternative family form,” evidence began to surface in the late 1970s demonstrating that children raised in households where the father was absent were disadvantaged relative to other children.<sup>5</sup>

### **Increasing Prominence**

Organizations and individuals play an important role in the agenda-setting process by helping (or hindering) the ascendance of one issue relative to another. This section discusses key actors in the emergence of responsible fatherhood issues on the U.S. public policy agenda.

## **The Social Science Research Community**

Social science researchers and their financial supporters laid the groundwork for responsible fatherhood policy. The mid 1970s saw the emergence of new research into fathers' contributions to child and family well-being. Michael Lamb, James A. Levine, and others argued that fathers play an important role in socializing children for life outside the home.<sup>6</sup> Other researchers – such as William Julius Wilson, Sara McLanahan, and Irwin Garfinkel – focused on the economic consequences of father absence.<sup>7</sup>

By the early 1980s the research community had also become interested in the efficacy of services designed to help men become good fathers. Researchers, foundations, and social service practitioners partnered to carry out a number of demonstration projects around the nation during the 1980s and 1990s. These initiatives are discussed further in Chapter 5.

## **Activists**

Father advocates also played an important role in bringing attention to responsible fatherhood issues. An informal 'men's movement' gained momentum from the 1970s through the 1990s in response to both the effects of feminism on male roles and the increasing prevalence of father absence. While the political orientations and goals of factions of this movement varied, they shared a common appreciation of the importance of fatherhood.

Child custody and visitation policies have consistently been key issues for men's rights activists. Until the 1970s, mother custody by default was automatically assumed to be in the best interest of children. A "groundswell of voices of fathers" that protested "being disenfranchised from their parental roles and rights" led to the development of joint custody statutes beginning in 1979.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, activists also pushed for expanded visitation rights and enforcement. As a result of their efforts, the 1988 Family Support Act provided funding for visitation demonstration projects in six states.<sup>9</sup>

Another significant portion of men's movement activism focused on self-change and personal responsibility, the latter of which was a particularly salient issue with conservative activists during the 1980s and 1990s. This part of the movement peaked in the mid-1990s with the 1995 Million Man March for African-American men and the 1997 national rally for the Promise Keepers, a conservative Christian men's movement.

The 'men's movement' significantly advanced responsible fatherhood goals by dramatically increasing public awareness of fathers' contributions to child well-being and by encouraging fathers to be more involved in their children's lives. Additionally, many of the key leaders in responsible fatherhood policy today wet their feet as fatherhood activists.

## **Policymakers**

The third set of key actors who helped elevate responsible fatherhood issues were policymakers themselves. This group includes both elected officials and government employees with policy-making authority.

Given the popular perception of fathers as primarily financial providers, it is hardly surprising that the first major governmental responses to child well-being and fatherhood issues were economic. The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) was established in 1975 within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services with the goal of reducing federal assistance to families.<sup>10</sup> Around the same time the U.S. Census Bureau and OCSE significantly increased data collection on child support, child custody, divorce, and alimony trends.<sup>11</sup>

Fatherhood issues continued to gain momentum in the 1980s. Congressional representatives, Reagan administration officials, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services sponsored several hearings and conferences in the nation's capitol. Legislation passed in 1984 (the Child Support Amendments) and 1988 (the Family Support Act) strengthened and expanded the scope of child support enforcement.

The research community, activists, and policymakers all played an important role in establishing a case for responsible fatherhood programming, increasing awareness about fatherhood issues, and developing strategies to help men become good fathers. Fatherhood, as a public policy issue, had gained a place at the table but had not yet risen to prominence. Two events in the early 1990s would capture the attention of a fourth – and more powerful – actor: the American public. It was, arguably, Vice President Dan Quayle's commentary about a popular television sitcom, *Murphy Brown*, that thrust what was widely considered a private family matter into public discourse:

Bearing babies irresponsibly is, simply wrong. Failing to support children one has fathered is wrong. We must be unequivocal about this. It doesn't help matters when prime time TV has *Murphy Brown* -- a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid, professional woman -- mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another 'lifestyle choice.'<sup>12</sup>

Despite a strong initial backlash, Quayle's comments stimulated substantial public interest in father absence. Liberals and conservatives disagreed about the morality of single-parenthood but there was widespread consensus that more should be done to protect the well-being of children in low-income, single-parent families.

Interestingly, it was Bush and Quayle's challenger, Bill Clinton, who kept the issue of father absence aloft on the public policy agenda during the 1992 campaign season. Clinton capitalized on Quayle's remarks by connecting the public's newfound interest in the topic to concrete policy issues near and dear to his own heart (and political instincts): welfare reform. Repeatedly vowing to "end welfare as we know it," Clinton made welfare reform a key element of his platform and successfully captured the White House.<sup>13</sup>

## **Implementation: From Agenda to Action**

The benefit of a prominent place on the public policy agenda is the increased likelihood of support – financial and political – for implementation of related proposals. Many responsible fatherhood goals were acted upon in the 1990s for several reasons. First, responsible fatherhood issues were addressed within the context of two larger issues that enjoyed broad, bi-partisan support: child well-being and welfare reform. Second,

fatherhood advocates were reasonably well organized by the time their window of opportunity came along with welfare reform. Because the social science community had taken an interest in father absence, they were also armed with convincing data. Finally, the strong performance of the economy in the second-half of the 1990s made more funding – both federal and private – available to support responsible fatherhood initiatives.

Although promoting responsible fatherhood was a goal of the Clinton administration from day one, implementation was gradual, largely due to gridlock that prevented the speedy passage of President Clinton's welfare reform proposals. In 1993 the U.S. Congress passed a law requiring states to allow unwed fathers to voluntarily declare paternity at the hospital.<sup>14</sup> David Gray Ross was appointed as the head of the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement the same year; Ross later went on to expand the OCSE's mission to include father involvement.<sup>15</sup> On June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1995 President Clinton issued an Executive Memorandum directing the heads of executive departments and agencies to review every program, policy, and initiative related to families in order to:

- Ensure, where appropriate, and consistent with program objectives, that they seek to engage and meaningfully include fathers;
- Proactively modify those programs that were designed to serve primarily mothers and children, where appropriate and consistent with program objectives, to explicitly include fathers and strengthen their involvement with their children;
- Include evidence of father involvement and participation, where appropriate, in measuring the success of the programs; and
- Incorporate fathers, where appropriate, in government initiated research regarding children and their families.<sup>16</sup>

The most significant changes occurred when President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) on August 22, 1996. This legislation made nearly 50 changes to the child support enforcement system. Examples include the establishment of the National Directory of New Hires to track noncustodial parents with child support arrears, more streamlined paternity establishment procedures, and uniform interstate child support laws.<sup>17</sup>

PRWORA also gave states the right to mandate that noncustodial parents participate in work activities if their children received TANF and they were behind on child support payments. These activities included job search, job readiness training, on-the-job training, community service, and subsidized and unsubsidized employment.<sup>18</sup> Policymakers were well aware that fathers' financial contributions to their children would be crucial to lifting many families out of poverty once public assistance became time limited.<sup>19</sup> Because some welfare recipients and noncustodial parents either did not qualify for work activities under existing federal guidelines or required extra assistance to secure employment, Congress authorized the Welfare-to-Work (WtW) grants program in 1997. The program provided over \$3 billion in matching (2:1) funds to states to provide intensive services to welfare recipients and noncustodial parents. The program was modified in 1999 to further expand access for noncustodial parents.<sup>20</sup> Welfare-to-Work

was the first (and only) federal workforce program to specifically target noncustodial parents.

In addition to federal programs, a variety of public-private partnerships also emerged during the same era. The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement and dozens of private foundations made funding available to nonprofit service providers around the nation to host responsible fatherhood demonstration projects. These initiatives are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

## **Conclusion**

Over the course of 40 years, U.S. public policy on noncustodial fathers has evolved dramatically. Although father absence was once thought insignificant, by 1996 79.1 percent of Americans told a National Center for Fathering/Gallup poll that they agreed "the most significant family, or social problem facing America is the physical absence of the father from the home."<sup>21</sup> Additionally, fathers have gone from being virtually ignored by government-sponsored programs to being a target constituency.

Today, responsible fatherhood continues to greatly interest policymakers and funders but occupies a less prominent position than a few years in the past. Most notably, the economic downturn and September 11, 2001 tragedies shifted the focus of the U.S. public policy agenda away from social issues.

Additionally, the social policy agenda itself shifted following the election of President George W. Bush in 2000. As a Democrat, Bill Clinton focused on issues related to poverty in order to appeal to his supporters. Likewise, as a Republican George W. Bush focuses more on issues of morality and "family values." Responsible fatherhood programming continues to be connected to welfare reform but the most recent TANF reauthorization has stalled, in part because it ties father involvement and child well-being goals to controversial marriage promotion initiatives proposed by the current administration. Though TANF has received several extensions, WtW funding is exhausted and has not received a temporary extension. It is unlikely that there will be any new responsible fatherhood initiatives at the federal level until these programs are reauthorized.

Finally, many private funders have also deemphasized responsible fatherhood initiatives for the time being. For some, this move comes as they follow the federal government's lead and shift their priorities to other policy areas. Many other foundations simply lack the resources to support new initiatives at this time as they recover from financial losses incurred during the recent economic downturn.

Despite these hurdles, child well-being was historically a major priority of American social policy and continues to be today. Given the strong evidence that good fathers offer their children important advantages in life, it seems likely that responsible fatherhood issues will remain on the public policy agenda. As discussed in the previous chapter, the current leveling-off of funding and momentum provides an excellent occasion to reflect on achievements thus far and strategize about how to proceed when the next window of opportunity comes along. To this end, the next chapter examines current research knowledge about the characteristics and needs of noncustodial fathers.



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- <sup>1</sup> John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 3.
- <sup>2</sup> Wendy Sigle-Rushton and Sara McLanahan, *Father Absence and Child Well-being: A Critical Review* (October 2002), p. 2. Online. Available: <http://www-cpr.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan-smeedingconference/mclanahan-siglerushton.pdf>. Accessed: June 7, 2004.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>4</sup> Paul Legler, *Low-Income Fathers and Child Support: Starting Off on the Right Track* (Policy Studies, Inc., 2003), p. 1. Online. Available: [http://www.aecf.org/publications/data/right\\_track.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/publications/data/right_track.pdf). Accessed: June 7, 2004.
- <sup>5</sup> Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "Dan Quayle Was Right," *Atlantic Monthly* vol. 271, no. 4 (April 1993); Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan, *Low-Income Fathers and Child Support*, pp. 1-2.
- <sup>6</sup> Kathleen Sylvester and Kathleen Reich, *Making Fathers Count: Assessing the Progress of Responsible Fatherhood Efforts* (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2002), p. 4.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- <sup>8</sup> Joan B. Kelly, *The Determination of Child Custody in the USA*. Online. Available: <http://www.islandnet.com/~wwlia/us-cus.htm>. Accessed: July 29th, 2004.
- <sup>9</sup> Children's Rights Council, *Info4Parents Welcome*. Online. Available: <http://www.info4parents.com/about.html>. Accessed: July 29th, 2004.
- <sup>10</sup> Sylvester and Reich, *Making Fathers Count*, p. 7, 58.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Tobin Beck, "Quayle 10 Years After Murphy Brown," *Insight*, (May 10, 2002). Online. Available: <http://www.insightmag.com/news/2002/05/27/DailyInsight/Quayle.10.Years.After.Murphy.Brown-251671.shtml>. Accessed: August 2, 2004.
- <sup>13</sup> Cable News Network, *Clinton Signs Historic Welfare Legislation* (August 22, 1996). Online. Available: <http://www.cnn.com/US/9608/22/welfare/>. Accessed: August 5, 2004.
- <sup>14</sup> Sylvester and Reich, *Making Fathers Count*, p. 62.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> Memorandum from William J. Clinton, President, United States of America to Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, June 16, 1995. Online. Available: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/pclinton95.htm>. Accessed: August 2, 2004.
- <sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child Support Enforcement, *HHS Fact Sheet on the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996* (Washington, D.C. 1996). Online. Available: <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/new/prwora.htm>. Accessed: July 31, 2004.
- <sup>18</sup> Elaine Sorensen, "States Move To Put Low-Income Noncustodial Parents in Work Activities," *Public Welfare*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Winter 1997).
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> Lynne Fender, Alan Hershey, and Demetra Smith Nightingale, *Welfare-to-Work Grant Programs Tackle Recruitment Challenges: The National Evaluation of the Welfare-to-Work Grants Programs*. Occasional brief, series no. 0001 (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, November 2000), p. 2.

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<sup>21</sup> The National Center for Fathering, *1996 Gallup Poll on Fathering*. Online. Available: <http://www.fathers.com/research/gallup.html>. Accessed: July 31, 2004.

## Chapter 4. Getting to Know Noncustodial Fathers

This chapter provides an overview of current knowledge about the common characteristics and needs of noncustodial fathers in the United States. The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) has developed a useful framework for summarizing knowledge about this population. The Seven Core Learnings About Fathers were identified by NCOFF through a series of surveys and focus groups they conducted with the Philadelphia Children's Network.<sup>1</sup> Each 'learning' was developed by formulating a hypothesis based on practitioners' experiences and testing the theory against published research. NCOFF's Seven Core Learnings are:

- **Fathers care** even if that caring is not shown in conventional ways.
- **Father presence matters** in terms of economic well-being, social support, and child development
- **Joblessness** is a major impediment to family formation and father involvement
- **Systemic barriers** – Existing approaches to public benefits, child support enforcement and paternity establishment operate to create obstacles and disincentives to father involvement. The disincentives are sufficiently compelling as to have prompted the emergence of a phenomenon dubbed 'underground fathers' – men who acknowledge paternity and are involved in the lives of their children but who refuse to participate as fathers in the formal systems.
- **Co-parenting** – A growing number of young fathers and mothers need additional support to develop the vital skills needed to share parenting responsibilities.
- **Role Transitions** – The transition from biological father to committed parent has significant development implications for young fathers.
- **Intergenerational Learning** – The behaviors of young parents, both fathers and mothers, are influenced significantly by intergenerational beliefs and practices within their families of origin.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to this framework, this chapter also highlights **personal barriers** that face noncustodial fathers such as inadequate transportation, mental health issues, and substance abuse.

### Fathers Care

Despite stereotypes to the contrary, there is substantial evidence that most noncustodial fathers care about the well-being of their children and want to be involved in their lives.<sup>3</sup>

A variety of barriers prevent fathers from being involved or cause their involvement to decline over time. Conflicts with the child's mother and/or her family over financial matters, child-rearing habits, and the mother's romantic relationships with other men cause some men to disengage.<sup>4</sup> Child support policies can have the unintended effect of alienating fathers when they accrue large past-due arrears.<sup>5</sup> Overwhelming personal issues such as substance abuse or poverty can make parenting a low priority.<sup>6</sup> Other fathers believe that their children won't be interested in spending time with them if they don't have money to pay for entertainment.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, research has found fathers who do not live with their children see them less often, which decreases the likelihood that they will develop a close relationship.<sup>8</sup>

Misunderstandings about the way fathers demonstrate concern for their children is an underlying cause of negative stereotypes about noncustodial fathers. There is a tendency to equate good parenting with good caretaking skills (such as bathing and feeding). Noncustodial fathers who spend less time with their children are unlikely to engage in as many caretaking activities; their interactions are more likely to consist of play and entertainment – activities that also play an important role in child development yet often are unappreciated.<sup>9</sup>

Another gendered measure of parental concern – fathers' financial contributions – provides further evidence that noncustodial fathers are interested in their children's well-being. Low-income fathers often contribute financially to their children's upbringing even though they have limited means to do so.<sup>10</sup> Many low-income noncustodial fathers who do not meet their child support obligations are, in the words of those familiar with this phenomenon, 'dead broke, not deadbeat.' As of 1998, one-third of low-income noncustodial fathers in the U.S. paid their child support obligations despite the financial burden.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, most fathers who do not participate in the formal child support system provide other informal supports such as diapers, food, gifts for the child, and cash assistance to the mother.<sup>12</sup>

## **Father Presence Matters**

The involvement of caring, responsible fathers offers many positive benefits for children. Typically, children who grow up with an involved father do better in school, are less likely to drop out, have higher self-esteem, experience fewer emotional and behavioral problems, are less likely to engage in criminal behavior, and are less likely to engage in high risk behaviors such as drug use and early sexual activity.<sup>13</sup> Mothers who receive financial support from their children's fathers during pregnancy are less likely to have low birth weight babies – a risk factor that can contribute to lifelong health problems.<sup>14</sup> Despite economic gains for women, children with disengaged fathers are five times more likely to live in poverty.<sup>15</sup>

There is some evidence that there are gender-based responses to father absence as well. Daughters of uninvolved fathers are more likely to begin childbearing at a younger age and bear children outside of marriage.<sup>16</sup> Some researchers have suggested that father absence has stronger negative psychological effects on boys than girls.<sup>17</sup>

## Joblessness

Although the NCOFF Core Learnings focus specifically on joblessness, responsible fatherhood initiatives have recently expanded the breadth of their interest in fathers and work to include both *unemployed* and *underemployed* men. As previously mentioned, disputes over finances can create substantial barriers to father involvement. Additionally, research indicates that many noncustodial fathers' views of themselves as parents are strongly tied to their ability to provide financial support.<sup>18</sup> In one study, lack of money was one of the top reasons fathers and caseworkers gave for limited involvement.<sup>19</sup>

A lack of steady employment creates instability for fathers, further endangering their relationships with their children. As of 1999, 41 percent of low-income, noncustodial fathers had been unemployed for at least one year.<sup>20</sup> The impact of the recent economic downturn on low-income men is not yet understood but likely to further complicate these issues.

## Systemic Barriers

Systemic barriers create substantial challenges for both noncustodial fathers who are trying to be responsible parents and the programs that strive to serve them. Research has found that fathers – and men in general – access services at much lower rates:

- The Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study found that 43 percent of mothers received welfare, food stamps, or other forms of public assistance versus only 8 percent of fathers.<sup>21</sup>
- A report on the Parents Fair Share Demonstration found that fathers had “little access to public assistance or employment and training programs.”<sup>22</sup>
- In 1999, the Urban Institute found that 20 percent of mothers reported getting job search assistance compared with 6 percent of fathers.<sup>23</sup>

Historically, social services and parenting programs in the United States have targeted women and children.<sup>24</sup> The names of some programming – Women, Infants, & Children (WIC) and Mother’s Day Out, for example – continue to bear out this legacy. To date, some caseworkers still do not consider men to be a part of their caseload.<sup>25</sup> Stereotypes about low-income fathers are still common among social services providers.<sup>26</sup> Teenage fathers, in particular, are sometimes treated as outcasts by social service providers.<sup>27</sup> Many caseworkers also lack training on how to work with men, reducing their effectiveness.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, staff attitudes may interfere with fathers’ ability to access services.

Fathers are reluctant or sometimes even afraid to ask for help.<sup>29</sup> This is likely the result of cultural norms which stigmatize men who turn to others for help. Distrust of government – a widespread phenomenon among low-income fathers, likely due to their experiences with the child support enforcement and criminal justice systems - may also play a role.<sup>30</sup>

Many low-income fathers view the child support enforcement system as unfair, insensitive, and punitive.<sup>31</sup> This is understandable given fathers' complaints that the system is more diligent in enforcing child support orders than enforcing their visitation rights.<sup>32</sup> Researchers speculate that ill feelings towards child support enforcement are further compounded by grievances against the criminal justice system, of which it is widely considered a component.<sup>33</sup> This makes sense when one considers the high percentage of low-income men who have been involved with the criminal justice system.

## **Co-parenting**

Parenting is always a challenge but co-parenting by unmarried parents is especially complicated. Parents need to be able to come to agreement on a variety of important points including who will have what time with the children (including holidays), how to address issues such as education, religion, and healthcare, how to resolve disputes, and which parent will take responsibility for specific material needs. Limited parenting skills are another commonly-cited reason why fathers withdraw from their children's lives.<sup>34</sup>

## **Role Transitions**

Role transitions can be defined as "the process of changing from one set of expected behaviors in a social system to another."<sup>35</sup> For young fathers in particular, the role transition into fatherhood – a challenging experience for any man – is further complicated by the identity crises typically experienced during adolescent development.<sup>36</sup>

Psychological distress related to this role transition is a growing area of interest for researchers. Fathers' willingness to take on parental responsibilities is related to both self-image and role expectations.<sup>37</sup> One study found that fully 48 percent of young, low-income noncustodial fathers reported "being scared" when they learned their partner was pregnant.<sup>38</sup> Depression, anxiety, and substance abuse are not uncommon experiences for young fathers.<sup>39</sup>

## **Intergenerational Learning**

Psychologists believe that parents play a primary role in the transmission of beliefs and practices about gender roles and expectations, including parenting practices.<sup>40</sup> Fathers who, for instance, view their primary role is financial may influence the importance their sons place on the provider role when they become fathers.<sup>41</sup> A significant number of noncustodial fathers experienced father absence during their own upbringing, disrupting this transmission of information.<sup>42</sup> Cultural values and peer influences also shape how fathers understand their parenting roles.<sup>43</sup>

## **Personal Barriers**

Personal barriers influence men's capacity to be responsible parents and ability to access services to help them improve their fathering. The literature indicates that noncustodial fathers confront a diverse array of barriers including:

- **Poverty** - Approximately 2.5 million noncustodial fathers are poor.<sup>44</sup>

- **Limited Education** – Nationally, an estimated 40 percent of low-income noncustodial fathers have not completed high school or earned a GED.<sup>45</sup>
- **Limited Work History** – Many fathers have little or no work experience, making it difficult for them to obtain well-paying jobs.<sup>46</sup>
- **Mental Health & Behavioral Issues** – Fathers may experience feelings of depression, anxiety, and hopelessness.<sup>47</sup>
- **Substance abuse** – Some fathers have drug or alcohol addictions that prevent them from becoming responsible parents.<sup>48</sup>
- **Insufficient access to transportation** – The lack of reliable transportation makes it difficult for fathers to secure and retain good jobs.<sup>49</sup>
- **Transience** – Many low-income noncustodial fathers move frequently, have no stable home setting, and are difficult to contact.<sup>50</sup>
- **Criminal Backgrounds** – Research indicates that up to 70 percent of all low-income, noncustodial fathers have had contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>51</sup> Criminal backgrounds create serious obstacles to securing employment.

## Conclusion

Based on the literature, it is clear that those who attempt to support the goals of responsible fatherhood face significant challenges. Noncustodial fathers face an assortment of challenges and many are likely to require intensive services. Further complicating efforts to help these men is the fact that the needs of every noncustodial father are unique.

While the complexity of the challenges facing fathers may be daunting, understanding the needs of this population is the first step to effective service provision. The next chapter evaluates some of the common strategies used to address these barriers to date.

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<sup>1</sup> National Center on Fathers and Families, *The Seven Core Learnings*. Online. Available: <http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/core.htm>. Accessed: June 3, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Kathleen Sylvester and Jonathan O'Connell, "What about fathers?" *The Washington Times* (July 27, 2003) p. B04; Juliane Baron and Kathleen Sylvester, *Keeping Fathers in Families: Austin's Opportunities* (Social Policy Action Network, 2002), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> James Earl Davis and William Eric Perkins, *Fathers' Care: A Review of the Literature* (National Center on Fathers and Families). Online. Available: <http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/litrev/fclr.htm>. Accessed: June 16, 2004; Baron and Sylvester, *Keeping Fathers in Families*, p. 5; TFF, *TFF Final Evaluation Report*, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Sylvester and O'Connell, "What about fathers?"

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- <sup>6</sup> Angela Dodson, *Bringing Fathers Back Into the Fold*, Ford Foundation Report (Ford Foundation, Winter 1999).
- <sup>7</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, p. 8.
- <sup>8</sup> Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan, *Father Absence*, p. 22.
- <sup>9</sup> Davis and Perkins, *Fathers' Care*; Baron and Sylvester, *Keeping Fathers in Families*, p. 7.
- <sup>10</sup> Joelle Hervei Sander and Jacqueline L. Rosen, "Teenage Fathers: Working with the Neglected Partner in Adolescent Childbearing," *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 19, no. 3 (May/June 1987), p. 107.
- <sup>11</sup> Hillard Pouncy and Jeffery Marvin Johnson, "Developing Creative Ways to Address the Needs of Fathers and Fragile Families: A View from the Field," *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*, vol. 4, (1998), p. 6.
- <sup>12</sup> Dana Reichert, *Broke But Not Deadbeat: Reconnecting Low-Income Fathers and Children* (Washington, D.C., National Conference of State Legislatures, July 1999), p. 11. Online. Available: <http://www.calib.com/peerta/pdf/broken.pdf>. Accessed: July 15, 2003; Virginia Knox and Cynthia Miller, *The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children: Final Lessons from Parents' Fair Share* (New York, NY: MDRC, November 2001. Online. Available: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/104/overview.html>. Accessed: July 15, 2003.
- <sup>13</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, p. 5; Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan, *Father Absence*, pp. 7-13.
- <sup>14</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, p. 5; Pouncy and Johnson, "Developing Creative Ways," p. 10.
- <sup>15</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, p. 4.
- <sup>16</sup> Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan, *Father Absence*, p. 11; Angela Boyd, *Fatherhood Fact Sheet* (Social Policy Action Network, October 2003). Online. Available: [http://www.span-online.org/father\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.span-online.org/father_fact_sheet.pdf). Accessed: June 5, 2004.
- <sup>17</sup> Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan, *Father Absence*, p. 10.
- <sup>18</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, p. 8.
- <sup>19</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, pp. 7-8.
- <sup>20</sup> Boyd, *Fatherhood Fact Sheet*
- <sup>21</sup> Mary Parke, *Who are 'Fragile Families' and What Do We Know About Them?* Couples and Marriage Series, no. 4. (Washington, D.C.: Center for Law and Social Policy, January 2004), p. 2. Online. Available: [http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1073679033.53/Marriage\\_Brief4.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1073679033.53/Marriage_Brief4.pdf). Accessed: January 14, 2004.
- <sup>22</sup> Knox and Miller, *The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers*, p. 7.
- <sup>23</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, p. 9.
- <sup>24</sup> Dodson, *Bringing Fathers Back Into the Fold*
- <sup>25</sup> Sylvester & O'Connell, "What about fathers?"
- <sup>26</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, p. 21.
- <sup>27</sup> Sander and Rosen, *Teenage Fathers*, p. 107.
- <sup>28</sup> Sylvester & O'Connell, "What about fathers?"



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- <sup>29</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, p. iv.
- <sup>30</sup> Sylvester & O'Connell, "What about fathers?"
- <sup>31</sup> Fred Doolittle and Suzanne Lynn, *Working with Low-Income Cases: Lessons for the Child Support Enforcement System from Parents' Fair Share* (MDRC, May 1998), p. 59.
- <sup>32</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, p. 19.
- <sup>33</sup> Doolittle and Lynn, *Working with Low-Income Cases*, p. 59.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 5.
- <sup>35</sup> NCOFF, *The Seven Core Learnings*
- <sup>36</sup> Sylvester and Reich, *Making Fathers Count*, p. 26.
- <sup>37</sup> Maxine L. Weinman, Peggy B. Smith, and Ruth S. Buzi, "Young Fathers: An Analysis of Risk Behaviors and Service Needs." *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, vol. 19, no. 6 (December 2002), pp. 437–453.
- <sup>38</sup> Ron Mincy, Hillard Pouncy, Dana Reichert, and Phil Richardson. *Fragile Families in Focus: Executive Summary* (Baton Rouge, LA: TANF Executive Office of Oversight and Evaluation, January 2004), p. ES-4.
- <sup>39</sup> Weinman, Smith, and Buzi, "Young Fathers," pp. 437-453.
- <sup>40</sup> Vivian L. Gadsden and Marcia Hall, *Intergenerational Learning: A Review of the Literature*. Online. Available: <http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/litrev/iglr.htm>. Accessed: June 5, 2004.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Keeping Fathers in Families*, p. 8.
- <sup>43</sup> Gadsden and Hall, *Intergenerational Learning*
- <sup>44</sup> Boyd, *Fatherhood Fact Sheet*
- <sup>45</sup> Elaine Sorensen, "States Move To Put Low-Income Noncustodial Parents in Work Activities." *Public Welfare*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Winter 1997b), pp. 17–23; Baron and Sylvester, *Keeping Fathers in Families*, p. 6.
- <sup>46</sup> Sylvester and O'Connell, "What about Fathers?"
- <sup>47</sup> Weinman, Smith, and Buzi, *Young Fathers*, pp. 437–453.
- <sup>48</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, p. 8, 12.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10.
- <sup>50</sup> Doolittle and Lynn, *Working with Low-Income Cases*, p. 59.
- <sup>51</sup> Reichert, *Broke But Not Deadbeat*.

## Chapter 5. Programs for Fathers

This chapter reviews information on program design, best practices, and continuing challenges as recorded in the research literature.

### What do fatherhood initiatives do?

Fatherhood initiatives promote child well-being by helping fathers meet their financial, emotional, and legal obligations to their children.

The structure of these initiatives varies widely. Projects target different subpopulations of noncustodial fathers (e.g. young, urban, incarcerated), select different partner organizations, provide different services, and even have different goals (e.g. meeting child support obligations v. marriage promotion). Figure 5.1 describes a few of these initiatives.

Fatherhood initiatives are typically structured as collaborations between funders, technical advisors, public agencies, and/or community-based organizations. The types of organizations that make up the collaboration determine the types of services offered by a particular initiative. Popular models include:<sup>1</sup>

- School-Based – A school or school district provides on-site services to students.
- Health Providers – Services are coordinated through health care facilities such as hospitals or clinics.
- Family-Centered – The family, rather than the father, is the targeted service delivery unit.
- Workforce Intermediaries – Fathers receive services from their local workforce investment board or one-stop center.
- Child Support Intermediaries – Child support enforcement or the courts connect fathers with programming and/or provide enhanced services.
- Nonprofits, Faith-Based, and Community-Based Organizations – Organizations offer programming targeting fathers in their own communities.
- Home visits – A caseworker works with a father at home, often with the child present.

**Figure 5.1**

## **Sample Fatherhood Initiatives**

### **Teen Fathers Collaboration (1983-1985)**

Eight-site national demonstration designed to help teen fathers support their children's social, emotional, and financial wellbeing. Programming included parenting classes, vocational training, job placement, tutoring, counseling, and family planning services.

### **Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project (1991-1993)**

Six-site national demonstration. This project explored the effects of introducing responsible fatherhood programming into workforce programs. All sites provided education and employment assistance, case management, and fatherhood programming. Some sites also provided legal services.

### **Parents' Fair Share (1991-2001)**

Seven-site national demonstration. Goals included increasing the employment and earnings of low-income noncustodial parents of children receiving welfare, increasing child support payments, and supporting/improving parenting behavior. Services included employment and training, flexible child support enforcement, mediation, and peer support.

### **Partners for Fragile Families (1996-Present)**

Ten-site national demonstration designed to help noncustodial fathers assume legal, financial and emotional responsibility for their children, increase the number of services available through community-based organizations, and aid in the development of family-friendly policies, programs and cooperative agreements between service providers and public agencies. Services provided include job readiness, job placement, counseling, and parenting skills.

Sources: Pouncy, Hillard and Jeffery Marvin Johnson, "Developing Creative Ways to Address the Needs of Fathers and Fragile Families: A View from the Field," *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*, vol. 4, (1998); U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Ongoing Work* (February 26, 2004). Online. Available: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ongoing.htm#parent>. Accessed: August 3, 2004; Knox Virginia and Cynthia Miller, *The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children: Final Lessons from Parents' Fair Share* (New York, NY: MDRC, November 2001). Online. Available: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/104/overview.html>. Accessed: July 15, 2003.

Programs often fall into more than one of these categories. Fathers may access services through integrated or segregated models.<sup>2</sup> In an integrated or "community collaborative" model, community organizations, workforce providers, and child support enforcement agencies collaborate to provide comprehensive services. In the segregated approach, the separate components operate independently.

A review of literature on recent responsible fatherhood programs indicates that popular services include workforce development programming, case management, counseling, basic needs assistance (such as food and housing vouchers), mediation, child support and paternity assistance, transportation vouchers, parenting and life skills education, GED classes, basic adult education, pastoral counseling, guided play groups, home visits, and substance abuse treatment. Some programs offer stipends for participation or employ participants as peer educators.

## Promising Practices

The fatherhood research field has matured significantly in the past decade, providing the policy community with a rapidly expanding body of literature about best practices for responsible fatherhood initiatives. Promising strategies include:

- **Early Intervention** – The Fragile Families and Child Well-being study found that the majority of parents are highly committed to one another and their children at the time of birth.<sup>3</sup> The “magic moment” from birth to three years is an ideal time to engage fathers.<sup>4</sup> Targeting younger fathers is a promising way to connect with them during this crucial period.
- **Comprehensive Programming** – One of the earliest demonstration projects – the Teen Fathers Collaboration in the early 1980s – quickly discovered that disadvantaged noncustodial fathers required comprehensive services.<sup>5</sup> Because every father’s needs are unique, coalitions should secure access to a broad range of services. Currently, a three-pronged approach incorporating legal/child support guidance, workforce assistance, and health/social services elements is widely regarded as a promising program structure.
- **Elimination of Barriers to Employment** - Increasing fathers’ access to employment helps fathers meet their child support obligations and has other positive benefits as well. The Fragile Families in Focus study on unmarried parents in Louisiana found that 68 percent of fathers reported that they would like help finding a job or increasing their pay, indicating that workforce programming could help attract fathers to fatherhood initiatives.<sup>6</sup> Fathers also noted that jobs (43 percent) and money (64 percent) were their most common sources of conflict with their child’s mother.<sup>7</sup>
- **Improvement of Parent Relationships** - Helping fathers improve their relationships with their child’s mother may subsequently reduce the mothers’ interference in the father-child relationship and possibly earn her support of his involvement.<sup>8</sup>
- **Reinforcement of the Message that Fathers Matter**– Education and advocacy efforts can help change society’s view of fathers, educate practitioners, and change the attitudes of fathers themselves.<sup>9</sup>

## Challenges

The literature also notes several persistent challenges facing responsible fatherhood coalitions:

- **Staffing** – A national study of fatherhood initiatives in four cities found that many caseworkers are “neither trained – or inclined – to work with fathers.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, a study of the Teen Father Collaboration found that agency leaders’ ambivalence about serving fathers permeated entire organizations and undermined efforts to serve fathers.<sup>11</sup>

- **Recruitment** – Recruitment challenges are one of the most commonly cited hurdles for responsible fatherhood initiatives.<sup>12</sup> As previously discussed, fathers do not access social services as regularly as mothers and sometimes don't have reliable telephone numbers or addresses because they move often.<sup>13</sup> Eligibility requirements may further complicate recruitment for some programs.<sup>14</sup>
- **Retention** – Work and school obligations as well as transportation barriers complicate efforts to keep fathers involved once they are enrolled in a program.<sup>15</sup>
- **Inter-Agency Differences** - Organizations sometimes have conflicting goals, divergent institutional cultures, and difficulty effectively communicating with one another.<sup>16</sup>
- **Working with Child Support** – Child support agencies can be a valuable partner for fatherhood initiatives but partnering with them can also lead to significant challenges. Fathers may be hesitant to participate in programs where child support is involved, fearing that they are part of a sting operation.<sup>17</sup>
- **Funding** – Recently, the economic downturn and shifts in funding priorities have made it more difficult to secure financial support from private foundations for fatherhood initiatives.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, funding continues to be available at the federal level through the Section 1115 grant program. Additional funding may be also available from healthy marriage initiatives.

Fortunately, advanced knowledge of these barriers may allow programs to anticipate challenges and structure programs so that some of these issues can be avoided.

## Conclusion

The past three chapters provided an overview of information on responsible fatherhood programming available in the research literature. Chapter 3 demonstrated that the public policy agenda plays an important role in determining what issues receive vital political and financial support. Chapter 4 provided evidence that noncustodial fathers face an assortment of complex personal and systemic barriers to becoming responsible parents. Finally, Chapter 5 introduced some of the promising practices – and continuing barriers – encountered by those who work with noncustodial fathers.

Serving noncustodial fathers clearly presents substantial challenges. Nevertheless, the potential effects of these programs for fathers, their children, and the generations that follow are immense.

The next chapter shifts gears and synthesizes lessons learned from the literature review with findings from the interviews in order to compare and contrast activities going on in Austin, Texas with efforts elsewhere.

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- <sup>1</sup> Adapted from models discussed in the TFF evaluation, *TFF Final Evaluation Report*, p. 28.
- <sup>2</sup> Reichert, *Broke But Not Deadbeat*, p. 17.
- <sup>3</sup> Sara McLanahan and Irwin Garfinkel. *Unwed Parents: Myths, Realities, and Policymaking*, Working Paper #02-15-FF (Princeton, NJ: Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, July 2002), p. 5.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 9; Pouncy and Johnson, *Developing Creative Ways*, p. 6.
- <sup>5</sup> Pouncy and Johnson, *Developing Creative Ways*, pp. 10-11.
- <sup>6</sup> Mincy et al, *Fragile Families in Focus*, pp. ES-18-ES-19.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. ES-8.
- <sup>8</sup> Kathleen Sylvester and Kathy Reich, *Restoring Fathers to Families and Communities: Six Steps for Policymakers* (Social Policy Action Network, 2000), pp. 17-20.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-39.
- <sup>10</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, p. 21.
- <sup>11</sup> Sander & Rosen, *Teenage Fathers*, pp. 108-109.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.; Knox and Miller, *The Challenge*; Lynne Fender, Alan Hershey, and Demetra Smith Nightingale, *Welfare-to-Work Grant Programs Tackle Recruitment Challenges. The National Evaluation of the Welfare-to-Work Grants Programs*, Occasional brief, series no. 0001 (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, November 2000); Karin Martinson, John Trutko, and Debra Strong, *Serving Noncustodial Parents: A Descriptive Study of Welfare-to-Work Programs* (Washington, D.C., The Urban Institute, December 2000). Online. Available: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/ncp-wtw-d00>. Accessed: July 15, 2003.
- <sup>13</sup> Martinson, Trutko, and Strong, *Serving Noncustodial Parents*; Parke, *Who are Fragile Families*; Sorensen, *States Move*; Doolittle and Lynn, *Working with Low-Income Cases*, p. 59.
- <sup>14</sup> Fender, Hershey, and Nightingale, *Welfare-to-Work Grant Programs*
- <sup>15</sup> Doolittle and Lynn, *Working with Low-Income Cases*, p. 59; Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, pp. 9-10.
- <sup>16</sup> Knox and Miller, *The Challenge*; Dan O'Shea, Christopher T. King, Daniel Schroeder, and Patricia Norman, *The Effectiveness of Non-Custodial Parent Referrals to Workforce Services in Bexar and Harris Counties: An Initial Assessment* (Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, January 2001), pp. 40-41.
- <sup>17</sup> Doolittle and Lynn, *Working with Low-Income Cases*, p. 29.
- <sup>18</sup> Bill Alexander, "Marriage Policies, Poor Economy Shift Funders' Priorities," *Youth Today* ( June 2003), pp. 20-21. Online. Available: <http://www.youthtoday.org/youthtoday/a%20june2003/edmenu.html>. Accessed: July 15, 2003; David Hench, "Deadbeat Dads' Help Program Nears End," *Portland Press Herald* (March 17, 2003), p. 1A. Online. Available: Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/>. Accessed: July 28, 2004.

## **Chapter 6. Responsible Fatherhood Programming in Austin, TX**

This chapter addresses the following research questions:

- What do we know about noncustodial fathers in Austin, Texas?
- Where does responsible fatherhood rank on the local policy agenda in Austin, Texas?
- How do organizations in Austin serve noncustodial fathers?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of these programs?
- How do local activities compare with the best practices and challenges described by the national research literature?

### **Austin's Noncustodial Fathers**

Demographic data and previous research on noncustodial fathers in Austin offers some insight into the characteristics of local fathers. Figure 6.1 describes four recent reports on Austin fathers that are discussed in this section.

It should be noted that each of these studies targeted a slightly different population. The TFF report looked at statewide data and concentrated on young, low-income fathers. The U.S Department of Health and Human Services study targeted a broader age range and looked at fathers from both Austin and San Antonio. The Fragile Families and Child Well-being study concentrated specifically on new parents in Austin, Texas. Finally, SPAN's research was specific to noncustodial fathers in Austin.

While there are no exact figures on the number of noncustodial fathers in Austin, the 2000 U.S. Census reported that there are approximately 30,000 women in the Austin Metropolitan Statistical Area raising a child without a husband present, or approximately 10 percent of all family households.<sup>1</sup>

The Texas Fragile Families Initiative reported that – statewide – the fathers they served were 55 percent Hispanic/Latino, 35 percent Black, 8 percent White, and 2 percent Other.<sup>2</sup> The Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study – which focused specifically on Austin – similarly reported that 50 percent of fathers were Hispanic, 32 percent Black Non-Hispanic, 14 percent White Non-Hispanic, and 3 percent Other. Compared with Census 2000 data, Black and Hispanic men appear to be overrepresented in the local noncustodial father population. The Census estimated that 56.4 percent of Travis County residents were Non-Hispanic White, 28.2 percent were Hispanic/Latino, and 9.3 percent were Black/African-American while 6.1 percent reported another race/ethnicity or a combination.<sup>3</sup> This overrepresentation is consistent with national data. The TFF evaluation found that there are strong links between program needs and ethnicity (p.10).

## Figure 6.1

### Published Research on Texas Fathers

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funded a study on the work and residential status of low-income, noncustodial fathers in the Austin-San Antonio corridor and the corridor between Camden, New Jersey and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A report entitled "*Low-Income, Non-Residential Fathers: Off-Balance in a Competitive Economy*" reviews the preliminary findings.

Austin was one of twenty cities across the United States included in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study. The researchers interviewed mothers and fathers from 325 local families at birth, 12 months, and 30 months to learn about their personal resources, relationships, and the ways government policies affect their lives. Their Austin-specific findings were published in a report entitled "*The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study Austin, TX Baseline Report*."

In 2002, the Social Policy Action Network, in partnership with the National Practitioners' Network for Fathers and Families, conducted research in four cities to examine the challenges that face low-income fathers who try to access services to help them support their families. They conducted focus groups with low-income, noncustodial fathers and fatherhood practitioners as well as interviews with about 20 caseworkers who worked directly with fathers. Their findings are published in a report entitled "*Keeping Fathers in Families: Austin's Opportunities*."

The Texas Fragile Families (TFF) Initiative gathered information on the young (17-25), low-income fathers who participated in TFF activities at eleven sites across Texas using the Responsible Fatherhood Management Information System (RFMIS). Their findings are available in the TFF evaluation, "*TFF Final Evaluation Report*."

Sources: Edin, Kathryn, Laura Lein, and Timothy Nelson, *Low-Income, Non-Residential Fathers: Off-Balance in a Competitive Economy, An Initial Analysis* (September 28, 1998). Online. Available: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/ELN/el98.htm>. Accessed: June 25, 2004; McLanahan, Sara, Irwin Garfinkel, and Yolanda Padilla, *The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, Austin Texas Baseline Report* (October 1999); Baron, Julianne and Kathleen Sylvester, *Keeping Fathers in Families: Austin's Opportunities* (Social Policy Action Network, 2002); Texas Fragile Families Initiative (TFF), *TFF Final Evaluation Report* (Austin, TX: Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2004)

The common characteristics of fathers described by these reports parallel the national findings. Among their key findings:

- Unmarried parents in Austin were very committed to one another and their child at the time of birth.<sup>4</sup> Ninety-eight percent of Austin fathers reported that they wanted to be involved in their child's life and consider their role as fathers to be important.<sup>5</sup> Most (60 percent) TFF fathers visited their child daily.<sup>6</sup>
- The majority of noncustodial fathers in Austin fell below 200 percent of the poverty line (61 percent). The median personal income was \$12,500.<sup>7</sup>
- Fifty-two percent of Austin's noncustodial fathers interviewed by Fragile Families and Child Well-being researchers were less than 25 years old. Most had completed only a high school education (32 percent) or less (39 percent).<sup>8</sup>



- Among noncustodial fathers in Austin and San Antonio, many lacked stable housing: only a small minority of the interviewees had lived in the same house or apartment for 6 months or more.<sup>9</sup>
- Noncustodial fathers in Austin and San Antonio indicated that there is a perceived lack of self-respect associated with needing and asking for help.<sup>10</sup>
- Noncustodial fathers in Austin reported that the main barriers to being more involved in their children's lives were strained relationships with the child's mother, lack of employment, limited parenting skills, and personal barriers such as mental health issues and/or substance abuse.<sup>11</sup>
- Local noncustodial fathers complained that they don't have access to legal assistance in Austin to help them with custody issues.<sup>12</sup>
- According to the TFF report, many young fathers do not have identification documents and lack access to reliable transportation, complicating efforts to secure employment.<sup>13</sup>

While the specific populations studied by each of these reports varies, several trends are apparent. First, local fathers want to be involved in their children's lives. Second, local fathers struggle to financially support themselves and their children. Third, local fathers have unmet needs, either because the services they require are not available or because they are not accessing existing resources.

## **The Local Public Policy Agenda**

As Chapter 3 indicated, the social science research community and its financial supporters sometimes play an important role in elevating social issues onto the public policy agenda. Several local research organizations included Austin as one of the cities they investigated for statewide or national studies on noncustodial fathers and responsible fatherhood initiatives. Researchers from the University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work contributed to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study of Austin and San Antonio as well as the Austin portion of the Fragile Families and Child Well-being study. Researchers at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs' Ray Marshall Center participated in an evaluation of TFF's supplementary Bootstrap program. The locally-based Hogg Foundation and St. David's Foundation provided funding for the Texas Fragile Families Initiative. Finally, the Center for Public Policy Priorities – an Austin-based, nonpartisan policy research organization – administered the Texas Fragile Families Initiative and published several reports and position papers on noncustodial fathers.

There is further support for responsible fatherhood initiatives at the state level. The Texas Office of the Attorney General (OAG) recently prioritized strengthening Texas families and established an Office of Family and Legal Policy, which subsequently developed several noteworthy fatherhood initiatives across the state. In addition to securing a \$105,245 Section 1115 grant to support the TFF Bootstrap Project, the OAG sponsors several other programs including the Tarrant County Employment Partnership Project – a Ft. Worth-area program where the child support office refers fathers to the

local Workforce Development Board for individual case management – and the Family Reintegration Project, an initiative that helps fathers recently released from two state jails obtain gainful employment and resume parenting duties, including the regular payment of child support.<sup>14</sup>

Austin is a progressive, Democratic-leaning city where there is typically broad-based public support for social policy initiatives. The Austin/Travis County Community Action Network (CAN) – a public/private partnership of 14 organizations interested in the social well-being of local residents – plays an important role in setting the local policy agenda. The healthy development of children and families is one of the CAN's top five priorities.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these facts, there is currently little momentum in support of responsible fatherhood programming in Austin. As the next sections will demonstrate, limited awareness of responsible fatherhood goals in Austin exists outside the research community and service providers and advocates typically do not coordinate with each other. Competing issues – including the harsh effects of the economic downturn on the local economy – have furthered condemned responsible fatherhood to a low place on the public policy agenda at the present time.

## **Local Programs**

This section examines programs in Austin that currently address the needs of noncustodial fathers described earlier in this report. It uses the three-pronged approach mentioned in Chapter 5 – health and social services, workforce programs, and legal services – for organization purposes.

The findings discussed in this section were collected through interviews with representatives of local organizations and supplemented with Internet research and program literature such as annual reports and brochures.

### **Health and Social Services**

#### *Austin Independent School District*

Austin Independent School District (AISD), the region's largest public school district, served more than 78,000 students during the 2002-2003 school year. AISD provides several programs that support parents and promote responsible fatherhood.

Four Austin high schools – Reagan, Travis, Crockett, and Johnston – provide comprehensive services for young parents attending AISD schools. These include counseling, support groups, transportation assistance (bus passes), parenting education, career counseling, job-readiness training, referrals, and child care assistance. Each of these schools has an on-site child care facility serving 12-20 children and lengthy waiting lists. Coordinators at each site also work with WorkSource Child Care Solutions to provide child care assistance to students who place their children at other child care facilities in the community.

Approximately 10 percent of the participants in AISD's parenting programs are fathers. One component of the parenting education curriculum used by AISD is the Parenting and Paternity Awareness (PAPA) Program sponsored by the Texas Office of the Attorney General. PAPA "promotes responsible parenthood and encourages the formation of strong, stable families" through 10 interactive lessons and videos.<sup>16</sup>

Garza Independence High School, an alternative "school of choice" in AISD, also provides child care and other supportive services. No fathers currently utilize these programs. All parents are encouraged to participate in parenting education classes. Garza also provides extensive school-to-career services including a career assessment for all incoming students, guidance selecting a college or post-graduate training, assistance in applying for financial aid, career and college fairs, and individual job search assistance.

The Texas Education Agency's Pregnancy, Education, and Parenting (PEP) program funds a portion of AISD's programming. Additional funding comes from Title I funds and the AISD budget.<sup>17</sup>

### *People's Community Clinic/Tandem*

The People's Community Clinic (PCC) was founded by a group of doctors and nurses in 1970 and is Austin's largest sliding scale primary care provider for uninsured, working-poor families. In 1996 PCC began providing a pre-natal clinic for teen mothers. Their experiences quickly led them to conclude that health care programs were only "the tip of the iceberg" so they began working with several other Austin organizations to provide comprehensive services. This collaboration, known as Tandem, currently includes PCC, LifeWorks, Any Baby Can, and the Austin Child Guidance Center.

In 1999, PCC and LifeWorks applied for and received funding to participate in the Texas Fragile Families Initiative (TFF), allowing them to expand services to fathers. Core program services included employment assistance, guidance on paternity and child support issues, and peer support groups. The Austin TFF site was also selected to participate in the Bootstrap program, allowing Tandem to provide stipends to young, low-income fathers who participated in workforce training activities.

The Tandem coalition is still serving fathers connected to pregnant women participating in the prenatal program and is in the process of applying for funding to hire a case manager focused on fathers. Past and current Tandem supporters include the St. David's Foundation, Hogg Foundation, the RGK Foundation, the Topfer Family Foundation, and the Texas Department of Human Services.

### *Lifeworks*

Austin nonprofit LifeWorks provides "a continuum of services to youth and families, addressing critical needs to achieve lasting, positive change."<sup>18</sup> LifeWorks works closely with AISD to serve young parents, both by providing programming in AISD schools and by accepting referrals from the school district for Teen Parent Services.

LifeWorks' Teen Parenting Services (TPS) provides case management and counseling to help young parents stay in school and learn parenting skills. Parenting education includes such topics as infant/child growth and development, discipline and guidance, and budgeting. Staff members also help parents access resources such as child care, housing, employment, health care, and basic needs. LifeWorks reports that over 300 youth have participated in the program, with 75 percent of participants continuing their education, 89 percent demonstrating increased knowledge of parenting skills, and 97 percent avoiding a repeat pregnancy while receiving services.<sup>19</sup> TPS primarily serves teen mothers but occasionally work with their partners as well. Clients must be ages 11 to 19, meet the 200 percent Federal Poverty Guideline, need assistance staying in or returning to school, and want to increase their parenting skills. Funding is provided by the City of Austin, Travis County, United Way Capital Area, and foundation grants.

In addition to TPS, Lifeworks also administers the East Austin Male Involvement Project (a.k.a. the "XYZone") in partnership with other local organizations including Communities in Schools, the City of Austin, Travis County, and various workforce providers. Part of a statewide initiative sponsored by the Texas Department of Health and funded by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Title X Family Planning program, the XYZone program aims to prevent teen pregnancy by promoting responsibility as well as respect for self and others in young men (13-17) attending Johnston High School and its feeder schools. The program has provided comprehensive services (including case management, tutoring, job readiness training, fatherhood curriculum, etc.) to 125 young men. Over 500 participated in community outreach activities. Only one participant fathered a child while participating in the program; the program also served a small number of young men who had already fathered children. Organizers reported a surprising increase in abstinence though it was not the focus of the program. Funding for the program ends in August 2004.

#### *Communities In Schools – Central Texas, Inc.*

Communities In Schools (CIS) – Central Texas, Inc. is a community-based organization providing extensive drop-out prevention services to students from selected campuses in AISD and other local districts (see Appendix B). CIS is a chartered member of the national Communities In Schools organization and was honored by Worth magazine as one of the top 100 nonprofit organizations in the U.S. The program served more than 24,000 students last year, including intensive case management for 4,000 students.<sup>20</sup>

Eligibility for CIS services is based on meeting at least one of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) At-Risk criteria, receipt of free or reduced price lunch, receipt of TANF, meeting the Delinquent Conduct (51.03 (a) Family Code) definition, or involvement in family conflict or crisis. Pregnant and parenting teens automatically qualify for services under the TEA criteria. However, because most participants qualify through the free/reduced price lunch program by default, the number of young fathers participating is unknown.

Eligible students receive an individualized assessment by a CIS staff member. Once needs are established, students receive a variety of services including intensive case management, counseling (individual, group, family, and crisis), health care, parenting classes, employment and pre-employment programming, and tutoring.

CIS programming is funded by the Texas Legislature, United Way / Capital Area, school districts, and private donors. CIS is also a WIA Youth provider.

### *No Kidding: Straight Talk from Teen Parents*

*No Kidding: Straight Talk from Teen Parents* is a project of Youth Launch, a local affiliate of the national organization formerly known as the Peer Assistance Network of America. YouthLaunch builds collaborations with school districts and community organizations to “build, support, and enhance programs that give young people the opportunity to engage in service.”<sup>21</sup>

*No Kidding* hires mothers and fathers ages 17-25 to educated middle school and high school students about the rights, realities, and responsibilities of teen parenting. Currently in its first year of programming, *No Kidding* has hired and trained 10 young mothers and fathers to date. Peer educators receive 40 hours of training, child care assistance, and a stipend in exchange for teaching units on paternity establishment, child support, and parenting at local schools, churches, and community organizations.

The *No Kidding* program is funded by a 17-month Section 1115 demonstration grant from the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement to the Texas Office of the Attorney General.

### *El Buen Samaritano*

El Buen Samaritano (‘El Buen’) is an Austin-based mission of the Episcopal Church that serves working-poor Hispanic families in order to promote their successful participation in society. El Buen provides a variety of services including a Family Forward parenting support group, health care, basic needs assistance, adult basic education, ESL, GED, computer skills training, citizenship classes, counseling, case management, and referrals.

El Buen does not currently provide any services that specifically target fathers but is taking action to attract more male customers based on concerns about the prevalence of domestic abuse. They hope to provide support to men who sincerely want to change and engage community Hispanic male role models who speak out against abuse and control in relationships. On Father’s Day, 2004, they sponsored their first Dia de los Padres family festival, which they hope to make an annual event. They are also exploring sport and leisure activities in order to attract more male participation in programming.

El Buen’s services are funded through a variety of Episcopal and private foundations as well as individual donors.

### *American YouthWorks*

American YouthWorks (AYW) is a nonprofit charter school located in downtown Austin. YouthWorks - a member of the WorkSource Youth Employment Partnership – provides job training and job placement services, a health center, counseling, Youth Core programming, child care, and a charter school.

The AYW charter school serves students ages 16-21 who wish to pursue a high school diploma. Classes are taught four hours a day with a focus on project-based education and service learning.

AYW's Youth Core offerings are provided through the Americorps program. Current programs include the Casa Verde Builders, Environmental Corps, and Career Corps. People of color and low-income young adults are encouraged to apply; program eligibility varies but is generally open to young people ages 16-25. Participants receive a living stipend while participating in the Youth Corps programs. An educational award is also provided upon completion of the program.

## **Workforce Programs**

### *WorkSource*

WorkSource, the Greater Austin Workforce Board, is one of 28 workforce development boards throughout Texas. The Texas Legislature charges WorkSource with oversight of the entire local workforce system. The Greater Austin Workforce Board manages the local implementation of all major workforce programs funded by the federal government: the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSE&T), Veterans' Employment and Training Services, Choices - the employment and training program serving applicants, recipients, and former recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Wagner-Peyser, and subsidized child care programs. Project RIO, a program targeting ex-offenders to prevent recidivism, is also administered through the local board.

The local system consists of five parts: the workforce board, career centers, child care programs, youth services, and funded programs.

There are three full-service career centers in Austin and four self-service satellite centers in Pflugerville, Manor, Del Valle, and Jonestown. Services available at career centers include a career resource library, labor market information, job listings and referrals, computer and Internet access, interest and aptitude testing, job placement assistance, professional workshops and seminars, and referrals to partner agencies.

WorkSource Child Care Solutions provides care for more than 2,700 local children each day. Child Care Solutions offers qualified parents access to subsidized child care services at a facility of their choice.

WorkSource youth services provide low-income youth, ages 14-21, with job readiness and life skills through the Youth Employment Partnership. Services include career counseling, GED or high school equivalency training, computer training, job readiness training, career exploration, community involvement, leadership skills development, tutoring, and job shadowing.

Funded programs focus on training and community collaboration. Examples include High Technology Initiatives for Adults programs through Eastside Telecom and Capital IDEA, the Achieving Performance Excellence Nursing Initiative in partnership with the Austin

Community College and the Seton and St. David's Health Care Networks, and support for the Capital Area Training Foundation's Industry Cluster Initiatives.

WorkSource career centers are open to the public – walk-ins can access the resource libraries, computer banks, labor market information, and job listings. Eligibility for other services varies based on funding stream requirements.

### *Capital IDEA*

Capital IDEA is a nonprofit, community-based workforce intermediary active since January 1999. The organization is a joint venture between Austin Interfaith – a local Industrial Areas Foundation group – and leaders from the Austin business community. Capital IDEA's programming is based on seven core strategies: jobs-driven education and training, support services, case management and counseling, creating a customized training strategy for each person, family wage jobs with benefits and a career path, institution-based community commitment and accountability, and long-term training and post-placement support.

Capital IDEA's services are available to adults (18+) who have legal permission to work in the United States and a family income that falls at 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line or below. Applicants must demonstrate a commitment to full time study and a willingness to volunteer time and energy to the community after completion of training. Applicants must complete a five-part recruitment process over several weeks, which includes a four-hour career profile test and career counseling. Approximately 1/5th to 1/7th of persons who initiate the application process enroll in the program.

Capital IDEA currently provides training for careers in health care, the high tech sector, and accounting. Supportive services include child care, transportation, emergency assistance, and counseling. Program participants who graduated and entered employment in 2003 earned an average of \$30,084 annually – a 259 percent increase in their earnings from their time of entry into the program.

Capital IDEA's programming is supported by local, state and federal funds, foundations such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation, RGK Foundation, and Topfer Family Foundation, individual and corporate donors.

### *Capital Area Training Foundation*

The Capital Area Training Foundation (CATF) "builds partnerships between industry, education and the community which lead to college and career success for Central Texans while meeting employers' needs for a qualified workforce."<sup>22</sup> A nonprofit organization, CATF's provides a variety of direct services including Community Technology Training Centers, the Gateway Program, and the Greater Austin@Work High School College & Career Fair.

CATF's Community Technology and Training Centers (CTTCs) provide free community access to computers at open-door computer labs as well as training on computer skills to un-or-underemployed adults. Sample classes include Database Management,

Hardware, Networking, Programming, and Web Design. Seminars on job search skills such as resume writing and interviewing are also provided.

The Gateway Program was founded in 1994 as a collaboration between CATF, Austin Community College, and the local construction industry. Participants receive college credit for participating in five weeks of training developed by the Association of Builders and Contractors (ABC). Supportive services are available through WorkSource and Austin Community College. The program is open to Travis County residents, age 18 or older, who have lived in Texas for at least one year and are currently un-or-underemployed, regardless of criminal record. Gateway is an approved WIA intensive services provider.

The Greater Austin@Work High School College and Career Fair connects more than 25,000 juniors and seniors from Austin-area high schools with information about opportunities at private and public sector employers, nonprofit and community based organizations, and colleges and universities. The 2004 Fair provided a Financial Aid Plaza to assist students with completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

### *EnterTech*

EnterTech is a project of the E-Learning and Training Labs of the IC2 Institute at the University of Texas at Austin. The 45-hour program combines an instructor-led, Web-based workforce training program that simulates "on-the-job" experiences in addition to project-based team learning activities. EnterTech concentrates on imparting "soft skills" in participants with the goal that graduates will experience higher incomes, job promotions, improved confidence and a desire to continue their education.

EnterTech is not a stand-alone program. EnterTech partners with community organizations, workforce programs, and employers to establish training programs. Previous local partnerships include ACC, the River City Youth Foundation, the Del Valle Correctional Institute, the Housing Authority of the City of Austin, CATF, Manpower, 3M, and the Round Rock Texas Workforce Center. Partner agencies and funders establish eligibility standards but all participants must possess a minimum of sixth-grade math and reading skills.

### *Goodwill Industries of Central Texas, Inc.*

Goodwill Industries of Central Texas, Inc. ("Goodwill") helps Central Texas residents find employment through services such as resume writing assistance, job interview skills training, and job referrals. In contrast to the workforce intermediary model, Goodwill works with individuals to help them identify the type of work they'd like to be doing and then helps them find a suitable position in the community.

Goodwill is the lead agency for the WorkSource Youth Employment Partnership. Supportive services include case management and referrals to other agencies for assistance with basic needs and social services.



Eligibility for Goodwill programs is dependent upon the funding source. Funding sources include WIA funds via WorkSource, City and County support, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and revenue generated by Goodwill retail stores.

#### *Austin Area Urban League, Inc.*

The Austin Area Urban League (AAUL) assists African Americans and disadvantaged citizens in the achievement of social and economic equality. AAUL is a member of the WorkSource Youth Employment Partnership and also provides computer training, employability skill classes, professional development, and job placement assistance to unemployed and underemployed low-income and minority adults. The WIA youth services include GED classes, after-school tutoring, male and female responsibility components, the opportunity to obtain Microsoft Office certification, and a summer program.

In addition to workforce programs, AAUL also provides parenting classes that are open to the community. A Male Responsibility Program serves 10-17 year old males through group discussions, guest speakers, and assistance with school issues.

#### *Austin Community College*

Austin Community College (ACC) is a two-year community college offering university transfer credit, workforce training, continuing education, and adult basic education. The college's six campuses and satellite service centers serve more than 65,000 students each year.<sup>23</sup>

To enroll in programs, students typically must have a high school diploma or GED and take/prove exemption from the Texas Success Initiative test. ACC also provides an Early College Start for high school students who have completed their sophomore year.

ACC does not offer any special programming for fathers but does assist parents through a variety of services including financial aid counseling and book lending; career and life skills counseling; and child care assistance. Child care assistance, funded by the Perkins Grant program, is only available to students in workforce (applied science and certification) programs. Students receive awards based on demonstrated financial need and GPA. The program currently serves about 80 students who enroll their children at off-site facilities contracted by the college.

### **Legal Services**

Despite the fact that the Texas Office of the Attorney General has worked hard in recent years to become more father-friendly, local child support offices currently offer no special services for noncustodial fathers beyond occasional referrals to legal counseling. Fifteen minutes of free legal counsel is available to any Austin father, regardless of income, through Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid and Volunteer Legal Service of Central Texas' joint legal clinics. While qualifying low-income fathers may be eligible for additional free or low-cost legal assistance through these organizations, conflict-of-interest concerns greatly restrict the services available to noncustodial fathers.

### *Travis County Domestic Relations Office*

Additional assistance may be available to noncustodial parents through the Travis County Domestic Relations Office (DRO). The DRO provides conflict resolution meetings with parents, legal action through civil contempt for denial of possession, legal action to request counseling for the children if necessary, classes for parents to enhance cooperative parenting skills, access to monitored neutral children exchange sites, and referrals to mediation.<sup>24</sup> Not all cases qualify for court action – determination of eligibility is made on a case-by-case basis by the visitation attorney. Fathers interested in receiving assistance from the DRO must attend an orientation meeting and submit an application and \$20 application fee.

### *The Lonestar Fatherhood Initiative*

The Lonestar Fatherhood Initiative (LSFI) was established in 1979 as an advocacy organization for fathers. Over time, the focus of the organization evolved to focus on services to men facing divorce, child support issues, paternity issues, custody modification, termination of rights, visitation denial, protective orders and adoption. Today, LSFI provides free legal consultations, attorney referrals, low-cost legal document creation, and low-cost DNA testing. LSFI also provides a Recommended Professional Services directory of local attorneys, child exchange centers, counselors, paralegals, mediators, process servers, and private investigators who work with fathers.

LSFI services are funded through membership fees of \$160 per year. Approximately 25 percent of customers receive full scholarships for membership; a limited number of other customers receive partial scholarships or pay for membership in installments.

## **Related Initiatives**

In addition to the service providers discussed in the last section, Austin is also home to several initiatives that support fatherhood programming through technical assistance, training, curriculum development, and professional networking opportunities.

### **National Fatherhood Initiative**

The National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) is a nonprofit organization that aims to improve child well-being by encouraging father involvement. Founded in 1994, NFI's primary focus is on building capacity among service providers who work directly with fathers and families. NFI provides curriculum, training, technical assistance and a variety of materials on responsible fatherhood such as brochures, posters, and CDs. The organization has also engaged in several public awareness campaigns and provides referral services for fathers.

The Southwest Region Office of the NFI is currently located in Austin but will be closing in the near future. NFI will continue to work with organizations in and around Austin through its national office.

## **Center for Successful Fathering**

Austin-based psychologist Dr. Ron Klinger founded the Center for Successful Fathering. For the past twenty years Dr. Klinger and his wife have run a family practice in north Austin. By the early 1990s he was extremely concerned by the increase in the number of single-mother families he worked with and frustrated with the prevalence of father absence.

Dr. Klinger began working with fathers in a few Round Rock Independent School District schools in 1990-1991. Over the next couple of years he experimented with different kinds of programming with these fathers and conducted interviews with approximately 300 involved, "balanced" fathers recruited through an ad in the Austin-American Statesman. Based on the knowledge gained from these experiences, Dr. Klinger began writing curriculum for fatherhood programs and, in 1995, founded the Center for Successful Fathering as a 501©3 nonprofit organization.

Today the Center has moved away from offering direct services to fathers. Experience in the field showed them there was little cultural or social change within the educational organizations that were hiring the Center so the emphasis now is to get the parent educators who deal with parents to run the programs promoting father involvement themselves. Additionally, the Center provides technical assistance on how to start successful fathering programs. Dr Klinger's newest curriculum was developed for use by local Head Start programs targeting fathers of children from birth to six years of age.<sup>25</sup>

Funding for the Center for Successful Fathering has varied over time. Current and former revenue sources include the Webber Family Foundation, the Rockwell Fund, Texas Education Agency Regional Service Centers, and Texas Office of the Attorney General. The new Executive Director of the Center is pursuing a social entrepreneurship model to fund the Center's programs.

## **Pregnant and Parenting Teens Group**

The informal Pregnant and Parenting Teens group has existed for over a decade. Once heavily focused on advocacy for young parents, today the group primarily works to coordinate services between school and community-based organizations. Membership includes LifeWorks, the People's Community Clinic, Any Baby Can, AISD PEP programs, and other local organizations interested in young parents and child well-being.

## **Advisory Coalition for Male Involvement**

The Advisory Coalition for Male Involvement (ACMI) was established in 1992 as a part of a three-year initiative by the Texas Department of Health to enhance and expand family planning services to men. ACMI's mission was to "promote positive, responsible male involvement in relationships, family planning, human sexuality, pregnancy, parenting, and in the prevention of violence and sexually transmitted diseases."<sup>26</sup> The group held five statewide conferences between 1993 and 1998, developed a Web site ([www.texasmalescare.org](http://www.texasmalescare.org)), and played an integral role in the development of the XYZone project administered by LifeWorks. Due to a shift in priorities at the Texas Department of Health in 2003, this group is currently inactive.

In addition to these initiatives, the previously discussed Tandem coalition also belongs in this category as it helps local organizations coordinate services and provides professional networking opportunities for practitioners. Notably, there is no local coalition focused solely or primarily on responsible fatherhood.

## **Analysis**

This section summarizes the key findings from interviews with Austin practitioners, researchers, and fatherhood programming experts to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of local programs.

### **Strengths**

Austin is well positioned to be a leader in responsible fatherhood programming. Attributes that make Austin a promising site for future initiatives include:

- State-level support – The Texas Office of the Attorney General has demonstrated substantial interest in supporting the goals of responsible fatherhood.
- Availability of services – Austin is home to more than 1,000 nonprofit organizations. As the state capital and county seat, Austin hosts many relevant state agency headquarters – including the OAG and Texas Workforce Commission – as well as county resources such as the Travis County Domestic Relations Office and the Health and Human Services Department.
- Technical support – Technical assistance is available from the University of Texas at Austin, the Center for Successful Fathering, the National Fatherhood Initiative, the Texas Office of the Attorney General, the Texas Department of Health, and the Center for Public Policy Priorities. All of these resources help draw funding to the Austin community.
- Professional networks - Though underutilized in recent years, Austin also enjoys several established practitioner networks. Tandem, the Pregnant and Parenting Teens group, and the currently defunct Advisory Coalition for Male Involvement all represent potential avenues for coordinating a new fatherhood initiative.

### **Weaknesses**

Because Austin is not currently home to a formal responsible fatherhood initiative, the list of local weaknesses is more extensive. Interview participants pointed out a variety of needs:

- Austin has a shortage of spaces in workforce programs offering fathers the opportunity to earn a living wage and access to a career ladder.
- The youngest fathers need supports to help them stay in school and transition into the workplace or continuing education.

- Fathers are not currently connecting with needed counseling for depression, anxiety, anger management, and substance abuse.
- There is not enough legal assistance available to help fathers navigate the child support system and obtain guidance on visitation and custody issues.
- Young fathers need basic life-skills and parenting training. Many fathers have never had a bank account and also need financial education.
- Due to the high cost of rent in Austin, many fathers need assistance with obtaining affordable housing.
- Young noncustodial fathers lack positive male role models. They need long-term relationships with older men who can model responsible behavior.
- Fathers need culturally sensitive programming. Some fathers need services provided by someone who speaks a language other than English.
- Ex-offenders need help locating good jobs and establishing themselves in the community as responsible citizens.

Interviewees also discussed probable reasons why these needs continue to go unmet. Most importantly, they complained that the local system of services for fathers is disjointed. Lack of coordination between providers makes it difficult for fathers to locate and access needed services. Furthermore, it also makes it difficult for local organizations to provide services in an efficient, effective, and equitable fashion.

Besides compromising the quality of services for fathers, lack of coordination has also caused advocacy efforts to fall by the wayside in recent years. Frontline staff at many local organizations that could potentially serve noncustodial fathers are unaware of father absence issues or, worse, continue to believe stereotypes about deadbeat dads. Only a handful of organizations try to educate unmarried mothers about the potential benefits of having the father of their child involved. Outreach efforts are nonexistent at most local organizations that could be serving noncustodial fathers.

Several other issues surfaced in the course of this research. As previously mentioned, Austin's child support enforcement offices have never been effectively engaged as full partners in any local fatherhood initiative. Practitioners also noted that federal eligibility requirements and performance measures often discourage or even preclude government-funded programs and agencies from serving noncustodial fathers. Finally, the shortage of responsible fatherhood funding at the national level has a trickle-down effect on local communities.

Overall, it is clear that Austin faces many of the same challenges – in terms of both noncustodial fathers' needs and programmatic issues – that were described by the national literature. This report represents an opportunity to build on our understanding of the past and strategize for the future. The next chapter reviews the key findings of this study and suggests concrete policy recommendations to support child well-being and responsible father involvement in Austin.

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- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Census 2000" database. Online. Available: [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?\\_bm=y&-context=qt&-qr\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF1\\_U\\_QTP10&-ds\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF1\\_U&-tree\\_id=4001&-redoLog=true&-all\\_geo\\_types=N&-\\_caller=geoselect&-geo\\_id=38000US0640&-format=&-\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-context=qt&-qr_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U_QTP10&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U&-tree_id=4001&-redoLog=true&-all_geo_types=N&-_caller=geoselect&-geo_id=38000US0640&-format=&-_lang=en). Accessed: August 1, 2004.
- <sup>2</sup> TFF, *TFF Final Evaluation Report*, p. 10.
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Texas Quick Facts: Travis County, Texas* (2004). Online. Available: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48453.html>. Accessed: August 5, 2004.
- <sup>4</sup> Sara McLanahan, Irwin Garfinkel, and Yolanda Padilla, *The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, Austin Texas Baseline Report* (October 1999), pp. 5-7.
- <sup>5</sup> McLanahan, Garfinkel, and Padilla, *The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study*, p. 13.
- <sup>6</sup> TFF, *TFF Final Evaluation Report*, p. 12.
- <sup>7</sup> McLanahan, Garfinkel, and Padilla, *The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study*, p. 15.
- <sup>8</sup> McLanahan, Garfinkel, and Padilla, *The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study*, p. 11.
- <sup>9</sup> Kathryn Edin, Laura Lein, and Timothy Nelson, *Low-Income, Non-Residential Fathers: Off-Balance in a Competitive Economy, An Initial Analysis* (September 28, 1998). Online. Available: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/ELN/el98.htm>. Accessed: June 25, 2004.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Keeping Fathers in Families*, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>12</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Keeping Fathers in Families*, pp. 11-12.
- <sup>13</sup> TFF, *TFF Final Evaluation Report*, p. 16.
- <sup>14</sup> Texas Office of the Attorney General, *Attorney General John Cornyn Announces Federal Grant To Promote Fatherhood* (October 3, 2001). Online. Available: <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/newspubs/newsarchive/2001/20011003bootstrap.htm>. Accessed: August 5, 2004; Texas Office of the Attorney General, *Attorney General Abbott Announces New Project To Help Tarrant County Fathers Pay Child Support* (October 13, 2003). Online. Available: <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/oagnews/release.php?id=6>. Accessed: August 5, 2004; Texas Office of the Attorney General, *Attorney General Abbott Announces New Program To Serve Families* (March 6, 2003). Online. Available: <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/oagnews/release.php?id=118>. Accessed: August 5, 2004.
- <sup>15</sup> Austin/Travis County Community Action Network, *Social Well-being Agenda and Action Plan* (Austin, TX: Community Action Network, September 16, 2003). Online. Available: <http://www.caction.org/SWBAgendaActionPlan.html>. Accessed: August 6, 2004.
- <sup>16</sup> Texas Office of the Attorney General, *Child Support Outreach/Volunteer Program*. Online. Available: <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/child/outreach.shtml>. Accessed: June 14, 2004.
- <sup>17</sup> Title 1 funds provided by the U.S. Department of Education "ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments." See <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html> for additional information.
- <sup>18</sup> LifeWorks, *Home Page*. Online. Available: <http://www.lifeworksweb.org/>. Accessed: June 27, 2004.

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<sup>19</sup> LifeWorks, *Success*. Online. Available: <http://www.lifeworksweb.org/success.asp>. Accessed: June 27, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Erin Ochoa, *Non-profit helps dropouts get back on track* (April 19, 2004). Online. Available: [http://www.news8austin.com/content/your\\_news/?SecID=278&ArID=104481](http://www.news8austin.com/content/your_news/?SecID=278&ArID=104481). Accessed: June 27, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> YouthLaunch, *Mission*. Online. Available: <http://www.peerassistance.org/about/mission.html>. Accessed: June 17, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Capital Area Training Foundation, *Home Page*. Online. Available: <http://www.catf-austin.org/>. Accessed: June 30, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Austin Community College, *ACC at-a-glance*. Online. Available: <http://www.austincc.edu/aboutacc/glance.htm>. Accessed: June 24, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Travis County, *Visitation Enforcement*. Online. Available: [http://www.co.travis.tx.us/dro/enforce\\_visit.asp](http://www.co.travis.tx.us/dro/enforce_visit.asp). Accessed: August 9, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Head Start did not respond to requests for information about their programming. Future research should further investigate their activities.

<sup>26</sup> Texas Males Care, *Who is Texas Males Care?* Online. Available: <http://www.texasmalescare.org/who.htm>. Accessed: July 1, 2004.

## Chapter 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Not every father can become a good parent. Some men have insurmountable personal barriers – violent behavior, mental health disorders, or severe substance abuse problems – that greatly reduce the likelihood they will become responsible, involved fathers.

Fortunately, this is not the case for most men. Most fathers want to be involved in their children's lives and support their children's physical, mental, and financial needs. Nevertheless, many men face personal barriers such as poverty, unemployment, and limited education. Responsible fatherhood initiatives can help these men overcome their obstacles and achieve their parenting goals.

This chapter summarizes the key findings of this study and recommends strategies to improve Austin's programming for noncustodial fathers.

### Key Findings

The key findings of this analysis can be summarized as follows:

1. Responsible fatherhood goals are more likely to be acted upon when fatherhood holds a prominent position on the public policy agenda. In the past this was accomplished by connecting fatherhood to another issue with broad-based, bi-partisan support: welfare reform.
2. Noncustodial fathers want to be involved in their children's lives and take responsibility for their needs.
3. Noncustodial fathers face a variety of complex barriers including but not limited to poverty, un- and under-employment, limited education, limited of work experience, the absence of paternal role models, the lack of life, parenting, and financial skills, and insufficient access to legal counsel.
4. Most fathers aren't getting the services they need because they aren't available, they don't know they're available, or they're nervous about accessing them.
5. Fathers require comprehensive services from an array of health and social services, workforce development, and legal assistance organizations.
6. Fathers are easiest to engage during the first few years of their child's life. Targeting younger fathers is a promising strategy to recruit these new parents.
7. Multi-organization partnerships are the most promising approach to ensure comprehensive service delivery yet many initiatives struggle to establish effective collaborations.



8. Organizations must have the buy-in of staff at every level to effectively serve noncustodial fathers.
9. Fatherhood programs are experiencing a temporary period of disinvestment by federal programs and private foundations.
10. The present lull in fatherhood programming provides an exciting opportunity to reflect on previous initiatives and strategize about the future. Because responsible fatherhood is connected to a number of other politically salient issue areas such as child well-being, welfare reform, and marriage promotion, it is highly likely that new opportunities will present themselves in the near future.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were formulated based on the key findings, the recommendations offered by interview participants, and the researcher's evaluation of Austin's programming for noncustodial fathers. This section is organized according to the three elements of responsible fatherhood programming identified in Chapter 1: the public policy agenda, the understanding of noncustodial fathers' needs, and the service delivery system.

### **Area One: The Public Policy Agenda**

#### *Objective: Increased Awareness*

Establish an advocacy and education program that raises awareness about the importance of fathers, the needs of noncustodial fathers, and services available to fathers in Austin.

#### *Guiding Principles*

The guiding principles of this objective are as follows:

- **Visibility** – Public awareness is the first step towards action.
- **Fathers Matter** – Father involvement can provide children with economic, social, and developmental benefits.
- **Stereotypes Disrupt Families** – Stereotypes about noncustodial fathers are harmful for both fathers and their children. Fathers may accept stereotypes and decide their children are better off without them. Practitioners who believe and perpetuate stereotypes about noncustodial fathers act as roadblocks for fathers seeking assistance to become responsible parents. Finally, mothers who believe stereotypes about noncustodial fathers may act as gatekeepers, limiting fathers' access to their children.

- Persistence – Stereotypes about noncustodial fathers will not be eliminated by a single PSA campaign. Advocacy and education efforts require a long-term commitment and multiple approaches to be effective.

### *Policy Recommendations*

- Local organizations that work with noncustodial fathers should set up a permanent working group dedicated to advocating for responsible fatherhood programming. This group should work with policymakers, media, and funders in order to increase the prominence of fatherhood issues on the local public policy agenda.
- The working group should organize an annual PSA campaign to create and sustain public awareness about responsible fatherhood. Free PSAs are available from the AdCouncil and the National Fatherhood Initiative.<sup>1</sup>
- The Center for Successful Fathering could potentially help the working group develop educational curriculum for staff that work with fathers in local organizations. Goals include eliminating staff biases and stereotypes about noncustodial fathers, educating staff about how to work with young, low-income men, and securing support for responsible fatherhood programming throughout organizations, from front-line staff to executive leaders.
- The group should attempt to educate mothers about father involvement through prenatal curriculum and literature in English and Spanish. Mothers could be targeted through the People's Community Clinic, Austin Community Health Centers, and other prenatal care providers. The group could recruit graduate students from the University of Texas School of Social Work and/or College of Education to develop the curriculum and train prenatal care staff on how to use it. Goals should include eliminating stereotypes, discouraging gate keeping, helping mothers understand the benefits of setting personal differences aside, and, possibly, using mothers as a conduit to recruit fathers into programs.

## **Area Two: Understanding Noncustodial Fathers' Needs**

### *Objective: Reliable Information*

Policymakers, advocates, and program designers will have access to reliable information on fathers' needs.

### *Guiding Principles*

The guiding principles of this objective are as follows:

- Austin-specific – Noncustodial fathers in Austin, Texas face different circumstances than fathers elsewhere.
- Diversity – Every noncustodial father has a unique background and unique needs. Policymakers, advocates, and program designers need to understand

the diverse characteristics of noncustodial fathers in order to develop appropriate programming.

- Scientific – Research on noncustodial fathers in Austin should use scientific techniques to ensure accuracy.

#### *Policy Recommendation*

- Researchers at the University of Texas at Austin should conduct an in-depth survey of local noncustodial fathers to further explore their needs and characteristics.

### **Area Three: Service Delivery**

#### *Objective: Outstanding Programming*

Every noncustodial father in Austin will have access to high-quality services to help him become a responsible father.

#### *Guiding Principles*

- High quality – Services for noncustodial fathers are provided in an equitable, efficient, and effective manner.
- Affordable – Services for noncustodial fathers are free whenever possible. Fee-based services are affordable to low-income fathers.
- Sustainable – Programming for noncustodial fathers is institutionalized as a part of the health and social services, workforce development, and legal services delivery systems.
- Fathers matter – Father involvement can provide children with economic, social, and developmental benefits.
- Father-friendliness – Noncustodial fathers should be aware of services that exist for them and feel that their participation is welcomed.

#### *Policy Recommendations*

- Local organizations that serve noncustodial fathers should develop a responsible fatherhood coalition to coordinate services. This group should consist of 'active' and 'supporting' partners. Active partners will have representation on the coalition's decision making board and participate in bi-monthly planning meetings; supporting partners will be organizations that agree to provide and accept referrals but do not wish to be involved in managing the coalition. All partners should sign a memorandum of understanding in order to establish clear expectations and create accountability. The previously mentioned advocacy work group should be comprised of members from this coalition.

- To support the efforts of the responsible fatherhood coalition and increase awareness about its activities, volunteers from the Metropolitan Austin Interactive Network (MAIN), Capital Area Training Foundation, or U.T. Austin should be enlisted to develop a Web site for the group. A listserv should also be established to facilitate information sharing.
- The responsible fatherhood coalition should establish a goal of making case management available to every noncustodial father who needs it and develop criteria to identify those fathers who need intensive services.
- The coalition should also promote the concept of the family as the unit of service intervention. This will help institutionalize services for fathers and open up more funding streams to support programming for noncustodial fathers.
- Coalition partners should increase outreach efforts to fathers by targeting venues frequented by young men such as schools, sporting events, bars and dance clubs, churches and other religious institutions, and retailers such as sporting goods stores, auto parts vendors, and clothing shops.
- Local schools and organizations that provide youth recreation activities should develop strategies to better engage fathers in parent-child activities. Technical assistance could be obtained from the Center for Successful Fathering or National Fatherhood Initiative.
- Local child support enforcement offices should produce a comprehensive pamphlet describing services available for noncustodial fathers in the Austin area and provide a copy to every father they work with.
- The Texas Office of the Attorney General should partner with the United Way to add a responsible fatherhood search category to 2-1-1 referral systems around the state.
- Corporations are an untapped potential source of funding support for responsible fatherhood initiatives. The coalition should approach Austin businesses that include family well-being as a corporate giving focus.
- An organization such as LifeWorks that has experience with counseling and working with young men should consider developing a noncustodial fathers support group and/or mentoring program.
- Volunteer Legal Services of Central Texas, Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid, the Lonestar Fatherhood Initiative, and the Texas Office of the Attorney General should work together to improve noncustodial fathers' access to legal counsel, especially regarding visitation disputes.
- The State Legislature should require the Texas Workforce Commission and Texas Office of the Attorney General to work together and develop a plan to increase low-income noncustodial fathers' access to workforce programs. The

local child support enforcement offices should strengthen their relationships with CATF, Capital IDEA, and other local workforce programming providers.

## **A Final Note**

The United States has come a long way towards understanding the valuable contributions caring, responsible fathers make to their children's lives. Despite these gains, formidable tasks still face those who work in and care about this field. Advocates must work hard to keep responsible fatherhood on the public policy agenda. Researchers must continue to monitor the efficacy of responsible fatherhood programs and suggest promising directions. Service providers need to find ways to make inter-agency collaborations work. Finally, policymakers must support fatherhood initiatives with more than just rhetoric.

Austin enjoys relative affluence, generous citizens who care about the well-being of others, and immense resources. Should local organizations choose to come together and launch a major responsible fatherhood initiative, there is no doubt Austin would quickly become a leading community in this field. More importantly, countless local children stand to benefit from good relationships with responsible fathers.

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.adcouncil.org/campaigns/Fatherhood\\_Initiative/](http://www.adcouncil.org/campaigns/Fatherhood_Initiative/) and <http://www.fatherhood.org/psa.asp> for Web, print, television, radio, and other PSAs.

## Appendix A: Potential Service Providers

Organization	Phone	Anger Management	Child Care & Early Education	Cooperative Parenting	ESL	Ex-Offenders	GED, Basic Education, & Literacy	Health Care	Job Training & Employment Legal Issues (Child Support, Custody)	Mental Health Issues and Counseling	Parent Education	Substance Abuse Counseling	Transitional Housing	Transportation
Any Baby Can-Family Learning and Literacy Program	(800) 672-0238				X		X							
Any Baby Can-Parenting Education	(512) 454-3743										X			
Asian American Adult Literacy Program	(512) 785-838				X									
Assault Prevention/Anger Management Program	(512) 326-1717	X												
Austin Academy	(512) 326-8655						X		X					
Austin Child Guidance Center	(512) 451-2242									X	X			
Austin Drug and Alcohol Abuse Program, Inc.	(512) 454-818											X		
Austin Learning Academy	(512) 457-9194			X		X					X			
Austin Men's Center	(512) 477-9595	X								X				
Austin Travis Co MHMR-Single Point of Entry for all MHMR Services	(512) 472-4357 Ext. 2									X				
Austin Travis County Community Health Center	(512) 972-4278							X						
Austin Youth Development Project	(512) 854-4591					X	X		X					
AustinYouth.org	(512) 301-0991								X					
Blackland Transitional Housing	(512) 972-5795												X	
Boys and Girls Clubs														
Capital Area Mental Health Center	(512) 302-1000	X		X						X		X		
Capital Area Rural Transportation System	(800) 456-7433													X
Capital Metro	(800) 474-1201													X
Casa Marianella-Language Programs	(512) 385-5571				X									
Child Abuse Prevention Program	(512) 326-1717	X									X			
Child Access/Visitation Program and Cooperative Parenting Program	(512) 854-9696			X					X					
Comstock Halfway House	(512) 386-5174					X							X	
Construction Gateway Training Program	(512) 381-4214								X					
Cornerstone Counseling, Inc.	(512) 420-0803											X		
Counseling for Individuals and Couples	(512) 454-3685	X								X		X		
Crime Prevention Institute, Inc.	(512) 502-9704					X			X					
Deb's Homestyle Living	(512) 451-2409												X	
Domestic Violence Prevention Program	(512) 326-1717	X												
Ebenezer Child Development Center	(512) 478-6709		X											
El Buen Pastor Early Childhood Development Center	(512) 476-4505		X											
Encore House	(512) 300-2900												X	
Family Forward-Middle Way Family Education Program	(512) 459-5490 Ext. 200										X			
Family Law Hotline	(800) 777-3247								X					
FamilyConnections	(512) 478-5725										X			
Head Start Travis County	(512) 451-7361		X								X			
Huston-Tillotson High School Enrichment Program	(512) 505-3056						X							
Interfaith Hospitality Network	(512) 453-6570												X	X
Literacy Austin	(512) 478-7323				X		X							
Mainspring Schools	(512) 442-2301		X								X			
Manos de Cristo	(512) 477-7454				X									
Men's Outpatient Treatment Program	(512) 236-9629											X		X
Ministry of Challenge	(512) 476-0472						X					X		
Office of the Attorney General-Child Support Division	(512) 460-6000								X					
Open Door Preschools	(512) 477-9632		X											
Parents as Teachers	(512) 454-3706										X			
Planned Parenthood	(800) 230-7526							X						

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Anger Management</b>	<b>Child Care &amp; Early Education</b>	<b>Cooperative Parenting</b>	<b>ESL</b>	<b>Ex-Offenders</b>	<b>GED, Basic Education, &amp; Literacy</b>	<b>Health Care</b>	<b>Job Training &amp; Employment</b>	<b>Legal Issues (Child Support, Custody)</b>	<b>Mental Health Issues and Counseling</b>	<b>Parent Education</b>	<b>Substance Abuse Counseling</b>	<b>Transitional Housing</b>	<b>Transportation</b>
Rainbow Child Development Center	(512) 474-2297	X													
Reading Is Fundamental of Austin- Parent Book Clubs	(512) 472-1791						X								
Salvation Army-Social Services	(512) 476-1111								X			X		X	X
	(512) 476-1111														
Salvation Army-Worker's Dorm	Ext. 124														
Sandstone Health Care, Inc.	(512) 346-9800								X				X		
Seton McCarthy Community Health Center	(512) 324-4930							X							
Seton South Community Health Center	(512) 324-4940							X							
Seton Topfer Community Health Center	(512) 324-6850							X							
STEP Forward	(512) 457-0999					X			X						
Texas Workforce Commission-Project Rio	(800) 453-8140					X			X						
The Kids Exchange	(512) 467-0803		X												
	(512) 472-1196														
Trinity Center at St. David's Episcopal Church	Ext. 142				X								X		
UT-Clinical Psychology Practicum	(512) 471-3393														
Volunteer Healthcare Clinic, Inc.	(512) 459-6002							X							
YWCA-Common Ground	(512) 326-1222														

## **Appendix B: Schools Served by Communities In School**

### **Austin ISD:**

Allison Elementary, AISD Alternative Learning Center, Andrews Elementary, Blackshear Elementary, Burnet Middle School, Crockett High School, Dawson Elementary, Dobie Middle School, Fulmore School, Gonzalo Garza Independence High School, Harris Elementary, Johnston High School, Kealing Junior High, Lamar Middle School, Langford Elementary, Lanier High School, LBJ High School, Mendez Middle School, MIP at Johnston HS, Oak Springs Elementary, Pearce Middle School, Pecan Springs Elementary, Porter Middle School, Reagan High School, Sims Elementary School, Travis High School, Wooldridge Elementary, and Zavala Elementary

### **Del Valle ISD:**

Del Valle Opportunity Center

### **Georgetown ISD:**

Georgetown High

### **Hays Consolidated ISD:**

Barton Middle School, Fuentes Elementary, Hays High School, Hemphill Elementary, Tobias Elementary, Tom Green Elementary, and Wallace Middle School

### **Wimberley ISD:**

Wimberley Danforth Junior High and Wimberley High School

Source: <http://www.cisaustin.org/EmployeePublic/DetailTable.CFM>



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