



Head Start and the Fatherhood Initiative

In June 1995, the Clinton Administration launched a government-wide initiative to strengthen the role of fathers in families. The President recognizes that strong families are essential to the future of the nation, and that both mothers and fathers play an essential role in ensuring the well-being of their children. The President also recognizes that changes in the lives of fathers must be supported by the communities in which they live, and that communities must know what resources and support are available to help in this effort. All federal agencies were asked to review their policies and programs and strengthen their support of fathers.

The Department of Health and Human Services responded to the President's request by expanding and enhancing current efforts in support of fathers, and by developing new initiatives. The Administration for Children and Families has made significant efforts on behalf of fathers.

Head Start Initiatives

Parent involvement has long been one of the cornerstones of Head Start, and fathers are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the program. In addition, the Head Start Bureau funded six male involvement demonstration projects between 1991 and 1994, all of which are still in operation. The Bureau has also published a number of parent involvement resources – most recently the *Head Start Handbook of the Parent Involvement Vision and Strategies*, which outlines how mothers and fathers can play critical roles in their children's education. Other innovative steps have been taken to collaborate with fraternities, the Urban League, and other state and local groups to encourage fathers to volunteer and to play an active role in children's lives.

The Head Start Bureau is also launching a new effort to support local Head Start fatherhood efforts. A workgroup has been established and information is being collected on current fatherhood activities across the country. Best practices will be identified, along with additional resources that might be helpful to local programs. These resources will be developed and disseminated as part of an overall strategy to enhance support for father involvement in Head Start. In addition, a study is currently underway involving Early Head Start, which serves children from birth to age three and pregnant women. A portion of the study focuses specifically on fathers who have children enrolled in the program.

The Head Start Bureau welcomes your contributions to these efforts. Information and materials on father involvement initiatives in your program may be sent to:

Father Involvement Initiative
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Head Start and the Fatherhood Initiative

Accepting the Leadership Challenge

Accepting the Leadership Challenge (ALC), a male involvement program, is one of the most successful family intervention projects that Pinellas County Head Start has ever facilitated. In its eighth year, it also symbolizes success in partnering with collaborators: Hillsborough County Head Start and the Gamma Zeta Lambda Chapter of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

ALC is grounded in the belief that all parents want their children to be happy and successful in life, and that they want strong and wholesome relationships both within and outside the family unit. For minority Head Start fathers to achieve these goals, they often must overcome low education, minimal vocational skills, little training in parenting and social relationships, and only a shadow experience in economic self-sufficiency. With proper preparation and guided exposure, though, these men can be successful within their families, the Head Start center, and the community.

Objectives for ALC are:

- To enhance the skills of minority male Head Start parents or father figures.
- To build stronger male/female and other relationships.
- To provide role modeling and hands-on leadership experiences.
- To build positive stress management skills.
- To offer healthy recreational experiences.
- To provide training on the importance of nutrition and healthy lifestyles; the effects of family violence on child development; and the relationship between good work habits and success.
- To highlight the importance of financial competence and entrepreneurship in obtaining and maintaining a desired life style.

To achieve these goals, the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity offers a series of quality experiences for Head Start fathers that provide training, educational travel, opportunities for quality family time, and models of effective parenting.

For more information on Accepting the Leadership Challenge, contact:

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Head Start and the Fatherhood Initiative

The Dad Show

Child Incorporated, a Head Start grantee in Austin, Texas, is going global with its father involvement message. Its weekly radio program, *The Dad Show*, can now be heard around the world via the Internet.

The Dad Show is a one-hour weekly call-in talk show designed to focus attention on fathers and encourage fathers to focus on their families. It is a collaborative effort between Child Incorporated and radio station KAZI in Austin. Additional support for developing *The Dad Show* web site is provided by Bodhi Incubator.

Topics featured are selected from the Head Start Program Performance Standards and other issues of interest to parents. Recent topics have included health and nutrition, reading, substance abuse, homelessness, violence, and dads as mentors and role models. Through *The Dad Show*, Child Incorporated has extended its application of the Program Performance Standards to the broader community, reaching many people in a way that is both non-threatening and accessible.

A variety of listeners are attracted to the show because of its focus on real-life issues. A program on discipline, for instance, appealed to a broad audience. Many parents had questions about appropriate discipline techniques, and the issue of spanking sparked a heated debate. The show's most popular topic has been child support and custody, but even shows that feature financial advisors make the phones light up with callers.

The Dad Show premiered in 1997, and former President George Bush was the program's first featured guest. "I believe the decline of the American family is one of the most serious problems this country has," President Bush stated. "I think what you're doing makes a wonderful contribution and is very, very important." President Clinton has also underscored the importance of such outreach to fathers: "The single biggest problem in our society today may be the growing absence of fathers from their children's homes."

Child Incorporated is now reaching out to fathers and their families through the world wide web. Rebroadcasts of *The Dad Show* can be heard around the world on RealAudio at www.dadshow.com. Because these are previously aired shows, they are not interactive.

For more information on The Dad Show, contact:

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Head Start and the Fatherhood Initiative

F.A.M.I.L.Y.

Fathers Advocating Male Involvement in the Lives of Youth

The FAMILY program of the School District of Philadelphia Head Start involves fathers, uncles, grandparents, and other men in the community who are concerned about the lives of young children. The program has been so successful that it was featured in *Linking Our Voices*, a new training video on parent involvement in Head Start Policy Councils.

The FAMILY program was initiated in 1992, when a Head Start father joined the Policy Council and found that he was the only male there. He undertook an effort to get more fathers involved but was killed in a tragic car accident shortly thereafter. Other fathers in the program picked up the baton and founded FAMILY in his memory.

The men in FAMILY hold monthly meetings where they learn leadership and parenting skills; receive information in such areas as nutrition and health; explore male/female relationships; and gain an understanding of how all of these issues affect the lives of children. The topics addressed during these meetings are determined by the men themselves. FAMILY, which is now a subcommittee of the Policy Council, collaborated with Temple University to develop *A Resource Book for Male Involvement in Prekindergarten Head Start*. The book provides a curriculum for teaching men what they can do at home to be more involved in their children's lives.

Other FAMILY activities include the annual Male Involvement Initiative Conference and an annual picnic held the Saturday before Father's Day for all the families, Head Start staff, and school personnel. The program is also undertaking a literacy initiative to enhance the literacy skills of men and promote their reading to children.

Funding for FAMILY comes from the Head Start program's Parent Involvement Resource Fund. The program has been invaluable in supporting men as active partners in Head Start, and in challenging men peer-to-peer to make the most of their abilities and to be better fathers. Many men remain active in FAMILY after their own children have graduated from Head Start, thereby continuing their contributions to the program and to the community.

For more information on FAMILY, contact:

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Head Start and the Fatherhood Initiative

Fathers Support Group

The Lee Head Start Center in Worcester, Massachusetts, developed an eight-week group experience for fathers and other male role models of Head Start children. The Fathers Support Group provides an opportunity for men to talk with one another and discuss important issues in a safe and supportive environment.

Topics discussed in each session are based on issues currently of greatest concern to men in the community. Sessions in 1998 were as follows:

- Session #1: Introduction, Group Ground Rules, Ice-Breaker Exercise, and Open Session identifying and prioritizing issues to be discussed
- Session #2: Balancing Family and Work
- Session #3: Discipline with Consistency
- Session #4: Establishing Boundaries and Respect
- Session #5: Developing Self-Confidence and Character In Your Child
- Session #6: Identifying Positive Role Models and Encouraging Safe Play
- Session #7: Encouraging an Inquiring Mind: Developing Learning Skills
- Session #8: Listen to You Child: Kids Are People, Too

An experienced facilitator participates in the sessions, and the continuity of having the same facilitator in each session is important to group comfort and cohesion. Funding for the eight-week sessions is provided through a grant from the ACF Regional Office. Child care is provided on site by Head Start staff, who generously volunteer their time in support of this initiative. Transportation assistance is also available to those in need.

The Fathers Support Group has been a success, and men have continued their supportive associations in more informal group sessions. Participating fathers have represented varying cultures and ethnicities, including Hispanic, African American, and Caucasian.

For more information on the Fathers Support Group, contact:

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Head Start and the Fatherhood Initiative

Good Guys for Head Start

York County Head Start has developed a highly successful initiative to enhance male involvement in its programs. With support from a grant awarded in 1998 by the ACF Regional Office in Boston, Good Guys for Head Start aims to:

- Increase male participation in Head Start
- Enhance the bonding between children and males
- Provide positive opportunities for fathers/significant males to interact with their children

To accomplish these goals, the York County program has involved all of its 14 Head Start centers in Good Guys projects and activities. More than 45 men and children participated in constructing such outdoor equipment as a sandbox, storage shed, slide, and climbing dome. Outdoor and sporting events also provided an opportunity for men to participate in constructive activities with their children. Most of these activities were held in evenings and on weekends to accommodate the men's schedules.

York County Head Start programs have also purchased father involvement materials for their lending library. These materials include books on fathering and co-parenting skills. Men can borrow these resources to improve their understanding of the important role they play and enhance their ability to contribute to their children's healthy growth and development.

From all indications, this initiative has changed the way men look at involvement in the lives of their children. The impact can be felt not only in the centers but in home-based interactions as well. One home visitor remarked, "These Good Guys feel more comfortable interacting with us on home visits. This is also providing the children with more emotional support from their significant males."

Male volunteerism has greatly increased since the initiation of the Good Guys program. The seven participating Head Start centers have reported a combined increase in male volunteer hours of 572 percent.

For more information on Good Guys for Head Start, contact:

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Head Start and the Fatherhood Initiative

The Male Involvement/Empowerment Project

In 1989, the Friends of Children of Mississippi Head Start initiated the Male Involvement/Empowerment Project to encourage and foster male participation in the home, community, and especially the lives of children.

The program focuses first on working with fathers to help them become self-sufficient and to build their self-esteem, self-respect, and life skills so they feel they have something important to offer their children. The program works under the philosophy that you must help a man develop the skills to support himself before he can start supporting his children.

The program works to help men travel down one of three paths:

- Becoming employed
- Becoming self-employed
- Going to school

Every other Saturday, the Friends of Children of Mississippi hosts a Male Project Summit. The program focuses on six main topics at these meetings: education, health, government, life skills, job skills, and human service. These summits aim to empower men to be culturally and socially literate, as well as self-sufficient. Men receive training in job and life skills, discuss topics of interest, and learn from members in the community about issues that are meaningful to them, such as credit, child rearing, and what employers look for in hiring.

The project also works to help men start their own businesses. It has partnered with local banks to get men start-up loans of up to \$25,000. To date, the program has helped 106 businesses get underway, making many men self-sufficient. In fact, the average income last year from these small businesses was between \$27,000 and \$28,000. Men are also putting their job training to use, with 170 jobs created, secured, or upgraded last year. Sixty-one fathers have gone back to school.

For more information on the Male Involvement/Empowerment Project, contact:

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Head Start and the Fatherhood Initiative

Male Involvement: The St. Bernardine Model

The Male Involvement Program has been operating at St. Bernardine's Head Start and Adult Learning Center in Baltimore, Maryland, since 1982. Developed as part of St. Bernardine's ongoing family life program, the Male Involvement Program is intended to enhance the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children and the role of both parents as their children's primary educators. Today, the program serves 192 fathers and other significant males. St. Bernardine's Male Involvement Program, and its parent outreach programs in general, were featured in *Nurturing the Promise*, a new video highlighting Head Start and its commitment to providing quality services to children and families.

The first step was the creation of a therapeutic Men's Group, which continues to serve as the cornerstone of the Male Involvement Program. The group offers an opportunity for men to discuss issues within a safe, nonjudgmental environment. Issues addressed have included co-parenting, paternity establishment, male sexuality, and child support. Although the group is facilitated by a clinical psychologist, the men themselves determine how the group functions.

St. Bernardine's offers a variety of other services to help men become better partners and better fathers to their children, including family mediation, parenting skills development, job training, and substance abuse education and intervention. Most of these services stem from the program's collaborative relationships with other community-based agencies; the Bureau of Child Support Enforcement, for example, provides monthly workshops on child support and paternity establishment.

St. Bernardine's newest project is Peer Support Counseling. This initiative pairs fathers/significant males who are new to the program with men who have been involved for at least a year. The program makes an effort to pair men who have faced similar issues and situations. The Peer Support Counselors receive ten weeks of training with a qualified therapist and must complete a course in family mediation before they are paired with a new member. The project is funded through the Family and Work Institute and Baltimore City Head Start.

In addition to family support initiatives, St. Bernardine's provides opportunities for fathers to be directly involved in their children's educational development. An Early Childhood Certification Program supports the hiring of men as teachers and support personnel. Special time is also set aside for men to interact with the children at St. Bernardine's so that the children can experience positive male role models.

For more information on St. Bernardine's Male Involvement Program, contact:

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Head Start and the Fatherhood Initiative

Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians Male Involvement Initiative

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians Head Start program is taking a closer look at the male role model in early childhood education from a variety of angles: cultural barriers, age of fathers, local male role models, the effectiveness of grandparents as primary care-givers, and the importance of male involvement in light of recent brain development research on children from birth to age three.

The program looks to respected male Tribal leaders to demonstrate to young men that gender-specific roles are not appropriate, and that there is nothing diminishing about being a nurturing male. In addition, the Head Start program has implemented a cultural curriculum that encourages men to celebrate their culture with their children through dance, stories, and sports.

An inordinate number of children in the Choctaw Indian Head Start program are being raised by their grandparents, even though the parents may be in the community. In response to this phenomenon, the program has initiated a support group for grandparents. One of the primary focuses of this group is identifying ways to encourage fathers to recognize the important role they play in the lives of their children and to accept responsibility for being a parent. Grandfathers in this group serve as role models and provide an incredible amount of wisdom and energy to the program.

The Choctaw Indian Head Start program is also involved in a new statewide male involvement effort: the Men in Early Childhood Network. During the Network's first meeting, participants identified issues common to male caregivers, discussed the strengths that men bring to caregiving, shared both success and horror stories, and renewed their commitment to increasing the presence of men in early childhood.

For more information on the Choctaw Head Start male involvement initiative, contact:

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Head Start and the Fatherhood Initiative

SHARE Male Involvement Project

Sunbelt Human Advancement Resources, Inc., (SHARE) Head Start has joined with Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity in a creative male involvement initiative. The purpose of the SHARE Male Involvement Project is to increase the participation of fathers and significant males in the Head Start program and in the lives of their children. The objectives of this partnership are to:

- Develop effective strategies for increasing resiliency in males through the development of intervention and prevention programs
- Provide workshops to alleviate some stereotypical views toward males
- Provide support and mentoring services to help fathers and significant others
- Expose children to positive male role models in their formative years
- Promote a channel of communication for men, children, and families to make problem sharing and problem solving a joint effort

To meet these objectives, the SHARE Male Involvement Project concentrates on enhancing employability skills, parenting skills, and self-esteem. Collaborative relationships have been established with local churches, businesses, and community organizations in support of these efforts.

The SHARE Male Involvement Project provides training in such areas as literacy, life skills, and relationships. GED courses are also available. Men in the project participate in a number of key community activities, including the "Partnership for a Drug Free Future" Festival, Habitat for Humanity activities, and the Special Olympics held at Furman University. In response to the needs of the children, SHARE Male Involvement volunteers have implemented a series of after-school activities, including tutoring sessions and intramural sports. As a preventive measure, youth from local group homes are invited to male involvement events so they may be exposed to positive male role models.

A unique feature of the SHARE Male Involvement Project is its partnership with Perry Correctional Center. Members of the project visit men at the Center to provide inmate fathers with information on Head Start and its services to children and families, as well as mentoring and life-skills training. Likewise, their visits to the Correctional Center provide male involvement volunteers with ideas for their mentoring program with youth in the group home, to prevent young boys from becoming involved with the justice system.

For more information on the SHARE Male Involvement Project, contact:

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Head Start and the Fatherhood Initiative

The Significant Male Task Force

The Significant Male Task Force (SMTF) in Washington, D.C., was founded in April 1994 to help men become more involved in the lives of their children. It was organized under the auspices of the D.C. Public Schools Head Start, and with support from the United Planning Organization (another grantee). SMTF members include parents, staff, and other supporters of Head Start. Each man involved is not necessarily the father of a Head Start child—he may be a brother, uncle, grandparent, nephew, cousin, or friend who has a major role or active interest in the child's well-being.

The objectives of the SMTF are to:

- Increase awareness of the need for male participation in children's lives
- Encourage the involvement of men as nurturers of young children
- Serve as a support group for the Head Start program
- Promote positive self-concept through knowledge of cultural and family heritages
- Instill positive health and nutrition values in young children and their families
- Educate children regarding the negative effects of the use of illegal and legal drugs
- Provide positive role models for children

SMTF provides opportunities for men to be active and supportive of their children and to serve as surrogate fathers for children who do not have significant male figures in their lives.

The men in SMTF organize and participate in a variety of activities through the year, including family picnics, mentoring programs, a bike ride/repair program, and workshops on topics of interest to men. SMTF members regularly visit Head Start programs and local schools to read and tell stories to children. The group also cosponsors "The Saturday Academy," where select students in the fourth through the eighth grades participate in tutoring, field trips, and computer science, technology, and mathematics sessions during the summer. In May 1998, SMTF held its second annual training conference entitled "Vision 2000." Workshops focused on reaching fathers, nutrition, literacy, health, male involvement, and issues that African-American males face as fathers.

The Significant Male Task Force does not receive regular program support. It raises money for events and special projects as they are planned.

For more information on the Significant Male Task Force, contact:

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