

## VII: FORMATION AND MAINTENANCE OF TWO-PARENT FAMILIES

One of the central purposes of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) (P.L. 104-193) is to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. Only eight percent of children in two-parent married households live in poverty, compared with 35 percent of those raised in single-parent households. Yet, beyond the obvious disadvantages of income security, child well-being suffers in so many ways when children are raised without the constructive and committed involvement of both their parents. Children are less likely to engage in various high-risk behaviors, or suffer from health and emotional problems, when raised by parents who enjoy a healthy marriage.

States generally have not developed programs intended directly to help families form or strengthen marriages. Instead, States have focused during the first years of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program on building work programs. It has become increasingly evident, however, that strong welfare-to-work programs involve much more than teaching job skills and expanding employment opportunities. Helping families succeed at work necessarily involves helping family members work through many and various life challenges, ranging from addiction and illness to relationship problems. Helping families overcome serious life challenges is a large part of how welfare-to-work programs succeed.

It is not surprising that many States are now examining ways they could directly help families form and strengthen healthy marriages by making support services available to their participants who want and might benefit from them. While States are involved in a variety of activities aimed at promoting healthy marriages, this report focuses specifically on initiatives funded through the TANF program. Several States have launched specific initiatives. While these efforts currently involve only a small fraction of State TANF spending, they demonstrate how States are beginning to make promising services available to help strengthen and form healthy marriages, anticipating that those healthy marriages will yield tremendous benefits for children. Examples of these are:

- **Arizona** has used TANF funds to create a Marriage and Communication Skills Commission whose membership represents the State legislature, the governor's office, as well as an expert in the field of marriage and family education and counseling. Created in 2000, the Commission reviews and approves requests for funds from community-based organizations that provide marriage and communication skills programs. In September 2001, eleven organizations received funds totaling almost \$800,000 from the Commission to teach marriage education skills in local communities. Those eligible for services are married or cohabiting parents whose income is less than 150 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines. In addition, \$75,000 was allocated for the development, production, and printing of a

marriage handbook that is distributed to couples when they apply for a State marriage license.

- **Michigan** has set aside \$250,000 in TANF funds for a FY 2003 marriage initiative targeting services to TANF-eligible families. Counties may apply for the funds, but no county may receive more than 20 percent of the total funds.
- **New Mexico** set aside \$400,000 in TANF funds for use in FY 2003 on pre-marital training, marriage education classes, and fatherhood and parenting programs. A grant was awarded in October 2002 to New Mexico State University.
- **Oklahoma** designated \$10 million in TANF funds for a statewide marriage initiative that includes the creation of a Marriage Resource Center, a statewide training/service delivery system for marriage education workshops, integration of fatherhood projects into State marriage activities, a statewide survey regarding attitudes towards marriage and divorce and a youth education component that seeks to promote healthy and sustained marriages. As of June 2002, Oklahoma has trained 450 marriage education workshop trainers. Included in this group of initial trainers are social workers and clergy. Each of the trainers is obligated to conduct four marriage education training sessions over the next year.
- **Utah** earmarked \$600,000 in TANF funds in FY 2002 for a State marriage initiative that includes an engaged couples education pilot program, a home visitation program for fragile families, a web site and curriculum for long-distance marriage education learning, and an annual State marriage conference. To date, the State has produced a video for engaged couples to view when obtaining their marriage licenses as well as a booklet for use by nurse home visitors. In addition, the State hosted a "Marriage Week in Utah" in February and a Marriage Celebration conference in June. In May 2003, the State intends to train 76 marriage education workshop trainers. Each of the trainers will be obligated to conduct four marriage education training sessions over the next year.

### **Fatherhood:**

Nationally, States and localities are continuing to use TANF and non-TANF funds for a variety of initiatives that seek to involve fathers in the lives of their children and families. These activities include:

- **Responsible Fatherhood Demonstrations:** Localities in eight States were given grants or waivers totaling \$1.5 million for demonstration programs (authorized under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act) providing a wide range of services to encourage better parenting and involvement by low income, non-custodial parents. El Paso County, Colorado uses the funds to provide strategic information leading to better child support relationships with incarcerated fathers and better use of penalties such as license revocation. Other sites are San Mateo, California; Baltimore, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; Girardeau County, Missouri; Concord, New Hampshire; Tacoma, Washington; and Racine, Wisconsin. Services are designed to assist in finding jobs, increasing incomes, better parenting, establishment of paternity and child support orders, and payment of child support.

- Partners for Fragile Families Demonstrations:** Low-income areas in nine States received waivers to test a uniform set of interventions to increase income and child involvement by young unmarried minority fathers. Partners for Fragile Families (PFF) sites include: Boston, Massachusetts; Baltimore, Maryland; Denver, Colorado; Indianapolis, Indiana; Los Angeles, California; Minneapolis, Minnesota; New York, New York; Racine, Wisconsin; and West Chester, Pennsylvania. Services include: job search, training, fatherhood motivation and education, peer group discussions, and establishment of paternity and child support orders, collection of child support and marriage promotion. Up to \$1 million per site was committed to these projects. The goal of the demonstrations is to make lasting changes in the way public agencies and community organizations work with young unmarried parents to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for children and parents, by strengthening family ties and commitments and by promoting the voluntary establishment of paternity, payment of child support, provision of medical child support, and other types of increased father involvement. The PFF demonstration sites, through their State Child Support Enforcement agencies, have been granted waivers by the Secretary of Health and Human Services to allow private foundation funds to be used to match Federal funds that support PFF program services.
- Special Improvement Project Grants:** The purpose of the Special Improvement Projects (SIP) grant program is to provide funding for projects which further the national child support mission and goals to help children get financial and medical support and improve program performance and services to child support customers. Eligible SIP applicants include State, local public and non-profit agencies (including faith-based organizations), Tribes and Tribal organizations. Fatherhood initiatives have been an important focus of SIP grants. For example, in Washington, D.C., the STRIVE DC/Partnership Program assisted unemployed non-custodial parents with child support orders who were on probation or parole. It helped these non custodial parents with obtaining and maintaining a job, fatherhood skills, compliance with child support enforcement obligations and resolution of other child support issues. During the grant period 32 non-custodial parents graduated, 21 were placed in jobs and 20 were still employed at the end of the grant period (3/1/01-7/31/02). The Child Support Assurance in Larimer County, Colorado is directed toward non-custodial parents' satisfactory participation in the Parent program. Participants receive stipends that are paid to the family in the amount equivalent to their monthly support payment.

Other State activities related to fatherhood include:

- Louisiana** has a program, Project Return, which provides non-medical substance abuse treatment, family counseling, GED and academic advancement, training in conflict resolution and communication/relationship building, job training and placement assistance to former prison inmates. The Department of Corrections administers the program among prisoners in New Orleans, Shreveport, and Lafayette. Currently, 48 former inmates are enrolled and 45 percent were placed in employment. Another program is a "What My Father Means To Me" essay contest that was created by the Fatherhood Council of the State Legislature of Louisiana. It is the starting point for future fatherhood programs and was designed to demonstrate the importance of having fathers in children's lives. Students from kindergarten through high school from 314 Louisiana school submitted 17,000 essays. The awards

ceremony, sponsored by the National Center for Fathering, the Governor's Office and the State's TANF program, was held in June 2002. Awards were presented to a "Father of the Year," as well as a "Father Figure of the Year." Students were also given awards. The first prize winner for each grade level was awarded a \$100 Savings Bond.

- **Maryland** has a program called Listening Dads are Champs Campaign that was launched in the fall of 2001. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in conjunction with the Baltimore Ravens, the National Campaign to Prevent Youth Violence and community groups in Baltimore all undertook this campaign to encourage fathers to spend more time talking to their children. It was designed to convince fathers and other male caregivers to spend at least fifteen minutes of undivided, child-directed time with their children each day. The campaign kick-off event was at the Ravens/Cleveland Brown's football game, where "Listening Dads are Champs" messages were displayed on the visual imaging scoreboard. Additional activities included public service announcements, community events, and a Listening Dads Fact Pack available through the Ravens' and SAMHSA's web sites.
- **Minnesota** is developing new fatherhood strategies for incarcerated fathers.
- **Nevada** has a program for Drug Treatment for Non-Custodial Fathers.
- **New Jersey** is striving to form a collaborative environment between the community and faith-based groups to provide services to enable and motivate non-custodial parents to pay child support.
- **Texas** has developed several initiatives to promote fathers' involvement with their children including the following. The Texas Fragile Families Initiative (TFFI) is a partnership among private/public funders and non-profit/government service providers designed to build the capacity of community-based organizations to implement parenting programs that focus on involving fathers with their children. Services are provided to fathers ages 14 to 25 years. In addition to case management, educational and employment services; there are peer support and parenting groups, mediation and counseling, father/child recreational and educational services and more. Project Bootstrap in partnership with TFFI provides a monthly stipend (for up to eight months) to young fathers who are enrolled in a job training program and participating in the TFFI fatherhood program. Other services such as mediation, assistance with child support matters and Federal employment bond for those with criminal records will be available also. The Office of the Attorney General (Child Support Division) and the Texas Workforce Commission have collaborated with the local workforce development boards and the judiciary to identify, refer, and provide services to non-custodial parents who qualify for Welfare-to-Work and other employment services.
- **Virginia** launched a fatherhood campaign in 1994 to improve the social and health outcomes of children through greater father involvement. Originated as a public awareness campaign, it was later expanded to include statewide, community-based programs, in which social service agency employees are trained to make referrals. \$300,000 in Federal TANF funds are used to provide technical assistance and resource material support. The program provides

workshops on a variety of topics including the promotion of healthy marriages. Community seed grants have been provided for faith-based and school-based groups.

