



U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
Administration for Children
and Families
Office of Family Assistance



NRFC State Profiles: Arizona 2009

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Arizona's Department of Economic Security implemented the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) program, which operated in 22 sites throughout the state in efforts to reduce child maltreatment by increasing parents' abilities to care for their children. Each site offered an array of services tailored toward each community's unique needs, including case management, parenting classes, life skills, emergency services, home visitation, mentoring, domestic violence shelters, and family resource programs. However, due to the state's fiscal crisis, funding for all programs was suspended as of April 2009. Contracts are still in place, with the hope that program services will be restored when additional funding becomes available.ⁱ

In addition, services are available to at-risk families with young children (up to age 5) through the Healthy Families Arizona (HFAz) program. HFAz provides home-based services for parents and children that include the following: providing child development, nutrition, and safety education; teaching appropriate parent-child interaction and discipline; providing referrals for screening for developmental delays; encouraging self-sufficiency through parent education and employment; providing emotional support and encouragement to parents; and linking families with community services, health care, child care, and housing.ⁱⁱ

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

The Arizona Department of Health Services operates the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Program, which is a statewide initiative aimed at preventing adolescent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The program utilizes evidence-based curricula and youth development programs that have been shown to effectively delay sexual activity and to reduce risky sexual behaviors among adolescents. There are currently seven programs being implemented in Gila, Maricopa, Pinal, Yuma, Pima, and Yavapai Counties.ⁱⁱⁱ The state also provides educational programs on statutory rape and male responsibility in an effort to reduce early parenthood.^{iv}

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Arizona is subject to the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993, which requires employers with 50 or more employees to offer up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to parents upon the birth or adoption of a child, to recover from an illness, or to care for an ill family member. The FMLA protects fathers and mothers who have worked with the same organization for at least one year and have worked at least 1,250 hours within the past year. Arizona has no state provisions for paid leave.^v The federal FMLA also allows eligible family members to take up to 26 weeks of leave annually to care for a military service member who has been injured in the line of duty.^{vi}

Domestic Violence Services

In an effort to help victims of domestic violence become self-sufficient and safe, Arizona uses TANF funds to provide emergency shelter, transitional housing, counseling, legal and advocacy services, and other supports (e.g., case management, transportation, child care, life skills training) to victims of domestic violence and their children.^{vii}

Child Custody Policy

Each parent has the right to receive equal consideration as a child's primary caregiver upon divorce or relationship dissolution. Custody decisions are based upon the best interests of the child.^{viii} Arizona also requires parents who request that the court system determine custody,

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parenting time arrangements, or child support to attend a parent education class or parent information program. Such classes and programs provide information on how parents can help their children adjust to divorce, understand the effects of a divorce or separation on children, reduce conflict between parents, understand the value of a parenting plan, understand family court procedures, and recognize community resources for support.^{ix}

Paternity Establishment

Establishing paternity may make a child eligible for health insurance, child support, and/or survivor's benefits, such as Social Security or life insurance benefits. To encourage paternity establishment for children of unmarried couples, Arizona has an in-hospital paternity acknowledgement program. Parents may sign an Acknowledgement of Paternity immediately after the child's birth. If paternity is not established in the hospital, a judge may enter a court order establishing paternity, or the Division of Child Support Enforcement may establish paternity through genetic testing. Either parent has the right to initiate the paternity establishment process at any time before the child turns 18.^x For unmarried couples, paternity must be established before a child support award is ordered.^{xi}

Child Support Assistance

The Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE), operating within the Arizona Department of Economic Security, was established to ensure that parents provide financial, medical, and emotional support to their children and to encourage parents to be responsible for their families. The division is responsible for locating noncustodial parents, establishing paternity, establishing child support orders for never-married couples, enforcing child support orders, and collecting child support payments. Welfare recipients with child support orders automatically receive services from the DCSE.^{xii}

Child Support Enforcement

In cases of nonpayment of child support, the state may withhold up to 50 percent of a noncustodial parent's wages, place liens on the parent's personal property or motor vehicles, adjust a parent's unemployment or workers' compensation benefits, suspend the parent's driver's or professional license, seize bank accounts, or intercept the parent's state or federal tax refund. When arrears rise above \$2,500, the state may also deny or revoke a parent's passport.^{xiii}

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

In April 2000, the Arizona legislature established a Marriage and Communication Skills Commission to identify community-based organizations to receive state funding for marriage preparation activities and training. These organizations offered marriage and communication workshops to help couples improve communication skills, develop healthy relationships, improve child well-being, and reduce domestic violence. Workshops, which are no longer available, were open to all couples and were free to those with incomes below 150 percent of the federal poverty line. Higher-income couples paid 15 percent of the workshop cost, and the state paid the remaining 85 percent.

The Marriage and Communication Skills Commission was also charged with developing a marriage handbook, which is currently given to couples who apply for marriage licenses. The handbook provides information on issues facing married couples, such as how to promote healthy communication and improve conflict resolution skills. Arizona also offers covenant marriages to interested couples. These unions require couples to receive counseling or education from a clergy member, counselor, or marriage educator before they marry. Dissolution of a covenant marriage also entails more requirements than does dissolution of a noncovenant marriage.^{xiv}

Other Marriage Initiatives

Non-state funded marriage programs are available to Arizona residents. For example, the Healthy Marriages/Strong Families Project, operated by the Arizona Youth Partnership, uses the PAIRS curriculum and workshop activities to help couples improve communication and conflict resolution skills and to build strong family relationships.^{xv}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

Under the TANF block grant, needy families in Arizona are eligible for cash assistance. All work-eligible individuals in households receiving TANF funds must participate in work activities as soon as possible after they begin receiving benefits; however, education or training counts towards this work requirement. Families may receive welfare benefits for no more than 60 months. Arizona does not offer marriage incentives to welfare recipients and there is a family benefit cap that stipulates that no additional funds can be awarded for children born after the family begins receiving assistance.^{xvi}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

There is currently no information available on current state services offered to low-income non-custodial fathers in Arizona.

Job Training and Employment Services

Job training and employment services in Arizona are available to low-income individuals through a number of programs. All individuals receiving welfare benefits must participate in the state's Jobs program, which offers training and employment services and, in some cases, assistance with transportation, child care, housing, and utility expenses.^{xvii} Two-parent families who are unable to provide for their child or children because of unemployment or underemployment may be eligible for participation in the Two Parent Employment Program, part of the Jobs program.^{xviii} Some participants also qualify for the JOBStart wage subsidy program. With funding from the U.S. Department of Labor, Arizona also runs a job service for all residents who request assistance. This program provides job-search assistance, job referrals, recruitment services for employers, job-seeker assessments, career guidance, and job-search workshops.^{xix}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

The Arizona Department of Corrections offers inmates several services and programs aimed at increasing self-sufficiency and reducing recidivism, including mental health services, addiction treatment services, educational services (literacy programs, GED preparation, and work-based education), and job training.^{xx} Several Arizona prisons offer parenting programs to improve general parenting skills among fathers. One facility offers a voluntary Parenting Potential Self-Study program for fathers. This program addresses parenting styles, child development, and personal growth and attempts to teach fathers new parenting skills. In addition, some facilities offer the Father Read program in which fathers can record themselves reading stories and send the tapes to their children. These programs seek to enable fathers to improve and maintain contact with their children while incarcerated.^{xxi}

Resources

- **Arizona Department of Economic Security.** This Web site provides information about state services and policies for families, including information on marriage initiatives, welfare, and child support; available at <https://egov.azdes.gov/cmsinternet/Default.aspx>
- **Arizona Marriage and Communication Skills Commission.** This Web site provides access to the state's marriage handbook and community and information about family counseling, child support,

domestic violence, and legal resources available to families; available at
<https://egov.azdes.gov/cmsinternet/main.aspx?menu=170&id=2236>

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