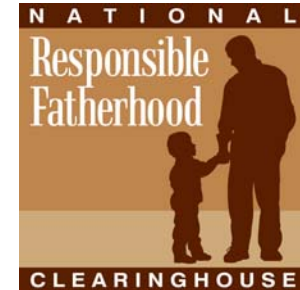




U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
Administration for Children
and Families
Office of Family Assistance

Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Ohio

July 2008



www.fatherhood.gov

Ohio

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

Ohio uses state and federal funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to support the Ohio Strengthening Families Initiative (OSFI). OSFI uses ACF Healthy Marriage Demonstration grants and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) allocations to support local and community-based marriage promotion activities targeted towards low-income unwed parents. These programs aim to help parents develop the skills necessary to create strong relationships, understand the value of marriage, and maintain healthy marriages.ⁱ

Other Marriage Initiatives

In addition to the funds provided directly to the state of Ohio, the Office of Family Assistance (part of the federal Administration for Children and Families) distributes Healthy Marriage Demonstration grants directly to community-based organizations in Ohio that provide services to unmarried and low-income parents, as well as education programs targeted towards high school students and at-risk youth.ⁱⁱ

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Ohio's Department of Job and Family Services supports local and county-wide fatherhood initiatives and responsible fatherhood programs through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) allocations distributed at the county level. The purpose of these programs is to provide services for non-custodial parents to help them find employment and become closer to their children.ⁱⁱⁱ

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

Ohio's Department of Job and Family Services supports local and county-wide pregnancy prevention initiatives through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) allocations distributed at the county level. These programs are intended to target at-risk youth and prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies.^{iv} For example, the Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) program encourages pregnant and parenting teens to complete high school and aims to reduce the rate of out-of-wedlock and teen births.^v

Take Time to Be a Dad Today



The Family and Medical Leave Act

Ohio is subject to the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), 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 the jobs of parents who have worked with the same organization for at least one year and have worked at least 1,250 hours within the past year. In addition to the federal FMLA, Ohio requires all public sector employers to offer up to six weeks of unpaid leave for a birth or adoption. Ohio also offers up to four weeks of partial wage replacement for public sector employees.^{vi}

Domestic Violence Services

Ohio's Department of Job and Family Services supports community-based domestic violence programs through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) allocations distributed at the county level. Services offered by these programs include counseling, shelters, crisis hotlines and educational programs. Additionally, the Ohio Department of Health, Office of Sexual Assault and Violence Prevention has a compilation of resources and links available to organizations that provide domestic violence services.^{vii}

Child Custody Policy

In cases of divorce or legal separation, Ohio has no preference or presumption for joint custody.^{viii} Instead, Ohio determines child custody based on the best interests of the child. This may include factors such as the child's wishes; the parents' wishes; the child's interaction with his/her parents and siblings; the child's adjustment to home and school; each individual's mental and physical health; previous child support payment; each parent's likelihood to honor the court's decision; and previous instances of abuse or neglect. Whenever possible and in the best interests of the child, the court requires the establishment of a shared parenting plan to ensure that both parents have continued contact with their child.^{ix}

Many Ohio courts offer divorce mediation, which may include discussion of parenting issues. Furthermore, the judicial system has provided parent education grants to assist with the development of mandatory courses to educate parents about the impact of divorce on their children, to provide information about available services, and to work directly with children whose parents are divorcing.^x

Paternity Establishment

Establishing paternity for a child born outside of marriage provides the child with rights to Social Security benefits, life insurance benefits, veterans' benefits, and inheritance rights; provides the child with a sense of identity; allows for the establishment of child support orders; and helps secure health insurance for the child.^{xi} Ohio's Central Paternity Registry is responsible for collecting and processing all paternity documents, which in turn enables the county Child Support Enforcement Agencies to establish orders for child support.^{xii} Paternity can be established at any point before a child's 23rd birthday.^{xiii}

In Ohio, paternity can be established in three ways. First, both parents can complete an Acknowledgement of Paternity Affidavit at any time before the child turns 23.^{xiv} Alternatively, when paternity is contested, either parent may request that the county Child Support Enforcement Agency conduct genetic testing to determine paternity.^{xv} Lastly, if an individual refuses to consent to genetic testing, paternity can be established through a court order in either Juvenile Court or Domestic Relations Court.^{xvi}



Child Support Assistance

The Ohio Office of Child Support, operating within the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, is responsible for child support collection and enforcement in the state of Ohio.^{xvii} The Office of Child Support helps locate nonresidential parents, establishes paternity, establishes and enforces child support orders, establishes and enforces medical orders, modifies child support orders upon request, and collects and distributes payments.^{xviii}

Child Support Enforcement

Ohio Child Support Enforcement Agencies may take a number of steps to induce child support payment. Agencies may withhold income from earnings, worker's compensation benefits, unemployment benefits, pensions, disability benefits, lottery winnings, bank accounts, or other funds; seize federal or state tax refunds; report the debt to credit bureaus; or suspend a parent's professional license. Furthermore, a parent who does not pay his or her child support as required may be held in contempt, fined, or sentenced to jail.^{xix}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

The Ohio Works First (OWF) program provides cash assistance to needy families in the state of Ohio. In Ohio, families may receive benefits for up to 36 months. Upon reaching this threshold, the county Department of Job and Family Services may grant an additional 24 months of assistance based on state or federal hardships or for good cause. In total, families may receive no more than 60 months of OWF benefits.^{xx}

Adults who receive OWF benefits must participate in work activities and/or alternative activities, such as life skills or parenting classes, or drug or alcohol addiction programs. These individuals must participate in such activities as soon as possible after applying for OWF benefits but no longer than 24 months after they begin receiving benefits.^{xxi} In Ohio, two-parent families are eligible to receive OWF benefits on the same basis as one-parent families.^{xxii}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

A number of programs are specifically offered to noncustodial fathers who are currently institutionalized or have been in the past. These programs, such as Citizen Circles, Children of Incarcerated Parents: Breaking the Cycle, and Returning Home, offer services and supports to noncustodial fathers of minor children.

Job Training and Employment Services

Ohio operates a network of One-Stop locations that offer job search assistance, training, and other services to state residents.^{xxiii} Furthermore, Ohio's statewide Career Opportunities & Training Information (SCOTI) offers information about available positions, job fairs, apprenticeships, and workshops for job seekers.^{xxiv} Furthermore, Citizen Circles work with recently-released offenders to develop skills in a number of domains, including employment.^{xxv}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services have collaborated to provide a number of programs designed specifically for inmates with children. For example, Children of Incarcerated Parents: Breaking the Cycle is designed to help maintain two-parent families, improve offenders' employment opportunities, foster family self-sufficiency, and prevent future incarceration both of offenders and of their children. The program is offered to inmates who are nearing the end of their sentences and who have a parenting partner willing to participate in the program. Prior to release, inmates, their partners, and their children receive programming designed to improve family well-being, communication skills, relationship skills, and problem solving skills. Families also develop case management action plans designed to help families upon offenders' release. Upon release, offenders and their partners receive an additional three to six months of family programming and case management.^{xxvi}

Another program, Returning Home, works with incarcerated parents to provide pre- and post-release services and activities, including parenting education, parent-child interaction, case management, relationship skills development, job readiness support, and other services.^{xxvii} Additional demonstration grants provide parenting education, communication and conflict resolution skills, job training, and wrap-around services in order to strengthen ex-offenders' family relationships, help maintain stable families, and prevent the later incarceration of offenders' children.^{xxviii}

Resources

- ***Children of Incarcerated Parents: Breaking the Cycle; Returning Home Demonstration Projects; Ohio Strengthening Families Initiative; Grant Awards.*** Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, Office of Policy and Offender Reentry. This document provides information about programs available to incarcerated parents in the state of Ohio; available at <http://www.drc.state.oh.us/ColP/TANF%20Booklet.pdf>

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