



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



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National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

NRFC State Profiles: Tennessee 2010

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

The Shelby County government received two grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in order to offer increased programming for incarcerated fathers. One program, Project REACHH, offers parenting classes, parenting skills education, visitation opportunities, healthy marriage education, increased educational opportunities, job skills training, and Family Group Conferencing in order to improve fathers' relationships with their children. The other grant funds the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood program, designed to increase visitation, improve parenting practices, offer parenting education, provide marriage education, and offer support to fathers with disabilities and to fathers of children with disabilities.ⁱ

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

The Tennessee Department of Health operates a number of programs designed to decrease the pregnancy rate among teenagers. Among these are targeted prevention programs that work with youth to prevent drug and alcohol use; community prevention initiatives that offer mentoring, tutoring, parent/family education, case management, and other services to at-risk children and their families; abstinence education programs; and Black Health Initiatives that work with African-American adolescents to improve employment opportunities and business skills, reduce substance use and violence, encourage social development, and highlight the importance of health care and education.ⁱⁱ In addition, the Department's Division of Maternal and Child Health currently funds 21 community-based abstinence education programs aimed at reducing rates of adolescent pregnancy.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Tennessee 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, Tennessee requires that employers with eight or more employees provide up to 16 weeks for maternity leave. Tennessee has no state provisions for paid leave.^{iv}

Domestic Violence Services

The Tennessee Economic Council on Women created an initiative designed to emphasize how domestic violence affects the business, healthcare, legal, and social services systems. This initiative researches the actual cost of domestic violence in order to highlight the financial impact that domestic violence has on the community.^v In addition, a network of domestic violence programs and sexual assault centers provide crisis hotlines, emergency and transitional housing, legal advocacy, counseling and support groups, community education, volunteer programs, food, clothing, and medical and legal support to victims across Tennessee.^{vi}

Child Custody Policy

Custody decisions in Tennessee are made in the best interests of the child,^{vii} which may consider the relationship between each parent and the child, each parent's previous and likely role in providing for and caring for the child, history of child abuse or domestic violence, the stability of

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the parents' family units, each parent's mental and physical health, the child's home and school record, the child's wishes, and the presence of other individuals in the home.^{viii}

In cases of divorce, separation, or annulment, parents are required to complete a parenting plan to ensure that children's interests are protected. If all parties cannot agree on a parenting plan, they may be ordered to participate in mediation sessions. Furthermore, parents must participate in a Parenting Education Seminar, lasting for at least four hours, that is designed to help parents understand the effects of divorce on children, how to deal with their children during and after the divorce, and how to work with the other parent during and after the divorce.^{ix}

Paternal Establishment

Establishing paternity for a child born outside of marriage provides the child with the same rights as a child born to married parents. When paternity is uncontested, parents can complete a Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity form. When paternity is contested, the alleged father, the mother, and the child must submit to genetic testing in order to establish paternity. In Tennessee, paternity can be established at any time until the child's 21st birthday.^x

Child Support Assistance

Tennessee's child support program is administered by the state's Department of Human Services. Enforcement services are provided through the district attorney's office, the juvenile court, state staff, or a private agency that contracts with the state. Available services include locating noncustodial parents, establishing paternity, establishing and enforcing child support and medical orders, modifying child support orders, and enforcing spousal support orders in cases where child support orders are also in place.^{xi}

Child Support Enforcement

In cases of child support nonpayment, Tennessee child support staff can take a number of steps against the noncustodial parent. For example, staff may place liens on property, withhold support from the parent's income or unemployment benefits, report the debt to credit bureaus, revoke the parent's license, or deny the parent's request for a passport.^{xii}

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

Recently-allocated federal funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has allowed community organizations in Tennessee to offer marriage preparation programs. For example, First Things First, Inc., offers a range of activities designed to reduce the rate of divorce in the Chattanooga area. Among other activities, the organization will create a public advertising campaign, provide non-married expectant parents with marriage education, offer premarital education, provide marriage enrichment and skills training for married couples, offer divorce reduction programs for married couples, and provide marriage education to area high school students.^{xiii}

Other Marriage Initiatives

A number of local community and nonprofit organizations in Tennessee offer marriage and relationship programs. For example, the First Things First, Community Saturation Model program uses federal funds to conduct a public advertising campaign and to provide marriage preparation, education, and enhancement services to couples in Tennessee. The program also uses established curricula conduct divorce reduction programs and to offer educational programs to adolescents in Tennessee high schools.^{xiv}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

In Tennessee, cash benefits are available to low-income families through the Families First program. Under this program, individuals can receive benefits for up to 60 months over their

lifetime. Furthermore, participants must develop an individualized career plan and must engage in work or training activities for at least 30 hours per week. Of these hours, at least 20 hours must be spent in core work activities, such as unsubsidized employment, job search and job readiness assistance, work experience, community service, vocational education, and subsidized employment. The remaining hours can be spent either in core activities or in non-core activities, such as job skills training, post-secondary education, and adult education. Families First recipients who marry after they begin receiving benefits are able to disregard the new spouse's income for three months.^{xv}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

Recent grants from the federal government have allowed for the development of additional programming, such as Project REACHH, for incarcerated fathers.^{xvi}

Job Training and Employment Services

The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development operates a network of more than 80 career centers across the state. These career centers offer local job and labor market information, job preparation skills, skills assessments, vocational and education referrals, and job training referrals.^{xvii} These career centers also partner with other agencies, such as local Workforce Development Boards, which provide additional services under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.^{xviii}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

As part of its pre-release programming, the Tennessee Department of Corrections offers sessions and information on parenting and family reunification. Some of the other topics covered in pre-release programs include life skills, anger management, substance use, job skills, finances, and legal issues.^{xix} The Shelby County government recently received two grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to offer additional programming for incarcerated fathers. These programs include visitation opportunities, parenting skills education, joint parenting training, marriage preparation and education, secondary and vocational educational opportunities, and educational opportunities for parents with disabilities and for parents of children with disabilities.^{xx}

Resources

- **Tennessee Child Support Handbook.** This document provides information about the child support program and about available child support services; available at http://www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/cs/cs_handbook.pdf
- **Tennessee Families First State Plan.** This document provides details about Tennessee's cash assistance program; available at <http://www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/adfam/ff-handbook.pdf>.

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