



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



## NRFC State Profiles: Virginia 2009

### Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

#### *State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs*

In 2003 and 2004, the Henrico Fatherhood Conference offered workshops and presentations designed to honor fathers and to increase awareness of the importance of fatherhood. The state's Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) has developed a Fatherhood Resource Chart to identify fatherhood groups and services around the state.<sup>i</sup> The Virginia Department of Health funds the Resource Mothers program, which provides support to first-time pregnant teenagers and includes a father involvement component. Individuals serving as Resource Mothers encourage pregnant teens to involve the father in the pregnancy and in the child's life. Some localities operate a Resource Fathers component designed to help support the father's parenting, encourage him to finish school, and assist him in finding a job so that he can support his child.<sup>ii</sup>

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has also provided funding to two responsible fatherhood programs in Virginia. Boat People SOS, Inc., offers job training and placement services, financial education, and service referrals to immigrant and refugee fathers. Child Development Resources' Putting Responsible Fatherhood First program is designed to increase fathers' involvement with their children, knowledge about parenting and co-parenting, confidence in the parenting role, and knowledge of and access to community services.<sup>iii</sup>

#### *State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood*

The Virginia Department of Health currently operates two programs designed to reduce adolescent pregnancy. The Better Beginnings Coalitions aim to increase community awareness of adolescent pregnancy, to support local programs aimed at reducing adolescent pregnancy, and to advocate for educational and health services for teens. Eighteen Coalitions currently provide direct services to youth and families, media campaigns and public education, and training and technical assistance for service providers working with teens. The second program, the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (TPPI) funds seven community-based programs that aim to reduce the rates of adolescent pregnancy throughout Virginia. Several of these programs have established components specifically for male teenagers using the For Males Only curriculum.<sup>iv</sup> Finally, the Department of Health also funds a Family Planning Program that provides comprehensive family planning and contraceptive services to men and women in Virginia. Services are offered regardless of an individual's ability to pay.<sup>v</sup>

#### *The Family and Medical Leave Act*

Virginia abides by the provisions of the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which allows both fathers and mothers time off after the birth or adoption of a child, or during an illness, without fear of losing their jobs. Parents are entitled to up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave over a one-year period to care for a new child, an ill family member, or to recover from their own illness. 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. Furthermore, public sector employees are allowed to use sick leave to care for family members.<sup>vi</sup> As of 2009, 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.<sup>vii</sup>

#### *Domestic Violence Services*

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) operates the Men Ending Violence program, which uses education and training to reduce the incidence of sexual violence in the state.<sup>viii</sup> VDH's

### *Take Time to Be a Dad Today*

Division of Injury & Violence Prevention operates Project RADAR to help health care professionals recognize and respond to situations of domestic or intimate partner violence. The project provides policies, guidelines, assessment tools, training programs and curricula, educational materials, and data on domestic or intimate partner violence.<sup>ix</sup>

The Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance (Action Alliance) has developed an accreditation process to ensure that domestic violence centers in Virginia have the resources and infrastructure necessary to offer services to victims. The Action Alliance also operates a 24-hour toll-free hotline for victims of domestic and sexual violence and educates the public and policy makers on how to prevent and respond to domestic violence.<sup>x</sup>

### *Child Custody Policy*

Individuals involved in a case concerning child custody, visitation, or support must participate in a parenting education program for at least four hours. These programs are designed to help parents learn about parenting responsibilities, conflict resolution options, financial responsibilities, and the effects of divorce on children. The court can order parties to participate in additional programs if necessary.<sup>xi</sup> Where appropriate, parents are encouraged to participate in alternative dispute resolution, or mediation, in order to establish custody and child support arrangements.<sup>xii</sup> Virginia makes custody decisions and visitation arrangements in accordance with the best interests of the child, including issues such as the age and condition of the child; the age and condition of each parent; the relationship between the child and his/her parents; the child's needs; the role of each parent in the child's life; the willingness of each parent to remain involved with the child and to support the child's relationship with the other parent; the child's preference; and history of abuse in the family.<sup>xiii</sup>

### *Paternity Establishment*

In Virginia, unmarried parents must establish paternity before child support can be obtained. The Division of Child Support Enforcement helps parents establish paternity, which can be accomplished in two ways. First, a father can voluntarily sign a form stating that he is the child's father. The form can be obtained from state child support offices, hospitals, health clinics, and the Vital Records office. It can be completed any time following the child's birth. Second, if paternity is disputed, an alleged father can submit to a genetics test to determine whether or not he is the father. If the alleged father does not wish to take the genetics test, paternity may be established through the courts, which may mandate that a genetics test be performed.<sup>xiv</sup>

### *Child Support Assistance*

The Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) is responsible for child support services in the state. Services offered by the DCSE include paternity establishment, location of noncustodial parents, collection of support payments, child support order establishment and enforcement, and disbursement of child support payments. All custodial parents, noncustodial parents, and individuals/agencies with physical custody of a child are eligible to receive DCSE services. If a custodial parent receives Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits, the first \$50 of child support payments are given to the parent, and the remainder is given to the state in order to defray some of the cost of TANF benefits.<sup>xv</sup>

The DCSE also offers technical assistance and support to a number of fatherhood initiatives designed to promote responsible fatherhood and child support payment. Among these projects is the Barriers Project, operated by the Virginia DCSE and the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement and designed to identify and address barriers that prevent noncustodial fathers from paying child support. Moreover, the Customer Services for Nonresidential Parents Project develops strategies to help noncustodial parents avoid accumulating child support arrears. The Virginia Access and Visitation Program funds nonprofit organizations that offer mediation, parent education, parenting plan development, neutral pick-up and drop-off centers, and supervised visitation to custodial and noncustodial parents.<sup>xvi</sup>

### *Child Support Enforcement*

The Virginia DCSE uses a number of enforcement strategies to collect child support payments from noncustodial parents, including withholding income; intercepting state and federal tax refunds; placing liens on property; seizing bank accounts or other assets; suspending driver's, professional, or other licenses; and reporting the debt to credit bureaus. The DCSE may also take the noncustodial parent to court if he or she refuses to pay child support.<sup>xvii</sup>

## Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

### *State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities*

Virginia does not currently use state funds for marriage preparation activities.

### *Other Marriage Initiatives*

Using recently allocated federal funding, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has provided grants to a number of community-based organizations designed to develop healthy marriage skills in Virginia. For example, Bethany Christian Services of Virginia uses the Marriage Savers curriculum to provide marriage education, marriage skills, relationship skills, parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job assistance to unmarried expectant parents.<sup>xviii</sup>

## Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

### *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits*

In Virginia, cash benefits are offered through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Upon applying for TANF benefits, individuals are screened for referral into the diversionary assistance program. This program offers short-term assistance to TANF-eligible individuals who have a temporary loss of income and is designed to prevent the need for long-term TANF benefit receipt.<sup>xix</sup>

Virginia has a lifetime limit of 60 months on receipt of public assistance benefits.<sup>xx</sup> TANF recipients must participate in job activities through the Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW) program for at least 35 hours per week, at least 20 of which must involve core work activities such as job readiness training and subsidized or unsubsidized employment. The remaining hours may include non-core work activities such as job skills training and secondary education. Recipients who have full-time employment must participate in VIEW activities for at least 30 hours per week. Two-parent families can receive benefits through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Unemployed Parent (TANF-UP) program. To receive assistance, parents must establish paternity, and each parent must participate in work activities under the VIEW program for at least 35 hours per week. If parents are employed full-time, they must participate in VIEW activities for at least 30 hours per week.<sup>xxi</sup>

### *Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers*

The Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) offers a number of initiatives designed to promote noncustodial fathers' child support payment and involvement with their children. For example, the Barriers Project works with noncustodial fathers to identify the reasons for irregular or non-payment of child support. Upon identification of barriers, which commonly include parental conflict, employment issues, and high amount of arrears relative to income, the project offers support services designed to address these issues. Furthermore, the Barriers Project operates a network of community organizations that offer parent education, mediation, conflict resolution, training, and other opportunities designed to increase fathers' child support payment. In addition, the Customer Services for Nonresidential Parents Project works with parents at risk of accumulating arrears to develop methods to prevent and manage them. DCSE's partnership with the Better Housing Coalition is designed to provide job opportunities for unemployed or low-income noncustodial parents.<sup>xxii</sup>

### Job Training and Employment Services

The Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW) program offers employment and training opportunities to low-income parents who receive TANF benefits. Services offered include job search and job readiness training, subsidized or unsubsidized employment, community work experience, on-the-job training, vocational education and/or training, job skills training, and GED completion.<sup>xxiii</sup> Furthermore, the Virginia Employment Commission offers job search assistance, job referral and placement, skill-building activities, and program referrals to Virginia residents.<sup>xxiv</sup>

### Incarceration and Reentry

#### Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

The Virginia Department of Corrections offers a number of educational programs to individuals incarcerated in state facilities. Among these programs are life skills programs, which include information on family responsibilities and reentry programs designed to provide transition services, conflict resolution skills, and domestic violence education. However, these programs do not specifically target fathers.<sup>xxv</sup> In addition, the Department of Social Services currently operates five pilot programs aimed at helping inmates re-integrate into society. The programs include a focus on relationship building and family member skills building, and include educational and mentoring components related to fatherhood, parenting, and strengthening families.<sup>xxvi</sup>

### Resources

- **Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Child Support Enforcement.** This Web page provides an overview of fatherhood initiatives and programs for noncustodial parents offered or supported by the DCSE; available at <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/dcse/fatherhood.html>.

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<sup>iv</sup> Virginia Department of Health, Office of Family Health Services. (2009). *Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative: Services*. Accessed online 08/02/09 from <http://www.vahealth.org/teenpregnancyprevention/services.asp>.

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<sup>xi</sup> Virginia Judicial System. (2009). *Parent education*. Accessed online 08/02/09 from <http://www.courts.state.va.us/courtadmin/aoc/djs/programs/parented/home.html>.

<sup>xii</sup> Code of Virginia, Title 20, ch. 6.1, §124.4 (2000). *Mediation*. Accessed online 08/02/09 from <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?000+cod+20-124.4>.

<sup>xiii</sup> Code of Virginia, Title 20, ch. 6.1, §124.3 (2004). *Best interests of the child; visitation*. Accessed online 08/02/09 from <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?000+cod+20-124.3>.

<sup>xiv</sup> Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement. (n.d.). *Child support and you*. Accessed online 08/02/09 from [http://www.dss.virginia.gov/pub/pdf/dcse\\_you.pdf](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/pub/pdf/dcse_you.pdf).

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xvi</sup> Virginia Department of Social Services. (2008). *Fatherhood initiatives*. Accessed online 08/02/09 from <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/dcse/fatherhood.html>.

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