



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



NRFC State Profiles: Arkansas 2009

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Arkansas's Department of Health and Human Services offers parenting education classes that focus on anger management, behavior management, and child development as well as Family Resource Centers that work to identify and serve families' needs.ⁱ Also, programs such as the Campaign for Healthier Babies, funded through the Department of Public Health, work with fathers to see that they encourage their expectant partners to receive prenatal care.ⁱⁱ In addition, the state uses federal funds to offer a parent education program to fathers through the Fathers and Families from the 21st Century Education Programs, offered through the University of Arkansas.ⁱⁱⁱ State TANF funds are also used to support the Arkansas Workforce Center, whose Community Investment Initiative offers fathers services including parenting and family functioning education and relationship skills training.^{iv}

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

Arkansas funds several programs that work to prevent unwanted pregnancies. The Department of Health offers family planning services to men and women who seek assistance with medical care, counseling, or contraceptive services; adolescents may be eligible for additional counseling or services through this program. The Department also offers abstinence education programs and teen pregnancy/unwed birth prevention programs, which aim to reduce the incidence of adolescent pregnancies in Arkansas.^v

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Arkansas follows 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 serious 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. All public-sector employees may also use accumulated annual leave following a pregnancy. 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. Arkansas has no state provisions for paid leave.^{vi}

Domestic Violence Services

Arkansas has established a state Commission on Child Abuse, Rape, and Domestic Violence. This commission is charged with enhancing the investigation, prosecution, treatment, support, and prevention of such crimes through training, prevention, public awareness, development, and technical assistance services.^{vii} In addition, the Arkansas Coalition Against Domestic Violence has established community-based programs across the state to respond to the needs of domestic violence victims. These programs sponsor crisis hotlines and support groups, and provide individual and group support and counseling, legal and medical advice, and specialized children's services.^{viii} The state also uses federal money to fund Family Violence Prevention and Services Act programs, which aim to prevent family violence and to provide shelter and other services to victims throughout the state.^{ix}

Child Custody Policy

When married couples with children separate voluntarily, both parents have the right to petition an Arkansas circuit court to determine child custody. Custody decisions are based upon the best

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interests of the child, with attempts made to ensure that both parents are able to maintain access to and contact with the child.^x In addition, Arkansas offers an Access and Visitation Family Mediation Program through the Arkansas Judiciary's Alternative Dispute Resolution Commission. Divorced, divorcing, or never-married parents may choose (or may be ordered) to participate in mediation to resolve issues of child custody, visitation, and support. Low-income parents may be eligible to receive mediation services at little or no cost.^{xi}

Paternity Establishment

Establishing paternity ensures the rights of a child or children born outside of marriage to emotional and financial support, as well as to benefits such as inheritances, and veterans,' Social Security, medical, and life insurance benefits. Arkansas has an in-hospital paternity acknowledgement program. Parents can voluntarily establish paternity either by completing an Affidavit Acknowledging Paternity or through a court order. If a man denies paternity for a child, a court hearing and genetic testing can be used to help establish paternity. Paternity can be established for any child under the age of 18.^{xii}

Child Support Assistance

Arkansas's Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) provides administrative and support services to parents seeking child support and to parents paying child support, with the goal of ensuring that all noncustodial parents meet their responsibilities. The OCSE is charged with locating noncustodial parents, establishing paternity for children of unmarried couples, establishing child support orders for unmarried couples, collecting child support, and modifying child support orders for never-married couples. Families who are receiving state assistance are automatically enrolled in child support collection services, and their payments are given to the state to repay the cost of public assistance benefits. Anyone who is a parent, guardian, or legal caretaker of a child who is under 18 or is attending high school may request OCSE services. Fathers who are unable to pay their owed child support to the mother or mothers of their children can request a review of their child support order.^{xiii} Additionally, Arkansas offers fathers the opportunity to participate in the Alternative Parental Support Program, which offers education, job training, family planning, and parenting education to noncustodial parents. By participating, parents can postpone child support payments.^{xiv}

Child Support Enforcement

Arkansas may revoke the driver's and professional licenses of noncustodial parents who do not pay their required child support. In addition, owed child support can be collected from the noncustodial parent's paycheck, unemployment compensation, pension, lawsuit settlements, tax refunds, or other funds. Liens may be placed on the parent's property, vehicles, or bank accounts to induce payment. As arrears rise, the state may also report the debt to credit bureaus, refer the case to the courts, or deny the noncustodial parent a passport.^{xv}

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

Arkansas does not use state funds to support marriage preparation activities. However, the state does offer covenant marriage, under which couples consent to premarital counseling or education, agree to receive counseling if necessary after they marry, and are restricted to certain grounds for divorce, including adultery, abuse, extended separation, and dangerous behavior.^{xvi} In addition, state TANF funds are being used to support a Community Investment Initiative, which provides fathers with services intended to strengthen marriages and relationship skills.^{xvii}

Other Marriage Initiatives

Pilot marriage programs funded by the federal government and nongovernmental sponsors are available in the state. For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides funding for the Northwest Arkansas Healthy Marriage Initiative, based at John Brown University.

Through this initiative, 10,650 couples in Benton, Washington, Madison, Carroll, Crawford, and Sebastian counties have participated in marriage enrichment activities.^{xviii}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

Through the Temporary Employment Assistance Program, Arkansas offers welfare benefits to two-parent families on the same basis as to single-parent families. However, Arkansas does not provide marriage incentives for welfare recipients. Individuals receiving welfare benefits must participate in work activities immediately upon welfare receipt but can fulfill at least part of this work requirement through postsecondary education and training. Arkansas has a 24-month lifetime limit for welfare receipt.^{xix}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

Noncustodial fathers of children receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits may be eligible for pre- and post-employment services, such as training, job referrals, basic education, and mentoring, through the Arkansas Workforce Center. The Center's Community Investment Initiative also offers parenting services, relationship services, employment services, and other supports to both resident and nonresident fathers.^{xx}

Job Training and Employment Services

Using funding from the TANF block grant, the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services offers employment-related services—including education, training, and support services—to Temporary Employment Assistance recipients. The Department of Workforce Services also sponsors educational and workforce preparation programs for youth and adults. For example, the Career Pathways Initiative invests public funds to create job training opportunities and career pathway programs in two-year colleges and technical institutions, which are aimed at enhancing work skills among members of low-income families. Participants can also receive additional job supports such as child care and transportation assistance and counseling.^{xxi} Arkansas Workforce Centers provide information, training, and services for those needing help finding employment.^{xxii}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

The Arkansas Department of Correction offers parenting classes for incarcerated fathers. These classes provide information on healthy parenting, child development, discipline, post-release parenting, and parenting and communication during incarceration. Some fathers may also receive case management training.^{xxiii} In addition, the Community Investment Initiative supports programs aimed at increasing the employment skills and improving the family relationships of men who have left the state's prison system.^{xxiv}

Resources

- **Healthy Arkansas.** This Web site, which is sponsored by a division of the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services, provides information on some services offered to families and individuals in the state; available at <http://www.healthyarkansas.com/>
- **Arkansas Coalition Against Domestic Violence.** The Web site provides information about shelters and other services available to victims of domestic violence in the state of Arkansas; available at <http://www.domesticpeace.com/index.html>

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