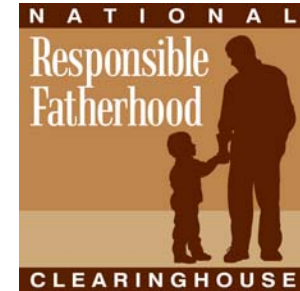




U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
Administration for Children
and Families
Office of Family Assistance

Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Colorado

July 2008



www.fatherhood.gov

Colorado

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

Colorado does not use state funds to support marriage preparation activities. However, pilot marriage programs funded by the federal government and nongovernmental sponsors are available in the state. The University of Denver School of Social Work provides information and support to child welfare professionals and community organizations that address barriers that prevent couples from forming healthy marriages.ⁱ Another program, offered by the Colorado Healthy Marriage Initiative, will provide premarital education to engaged couples. Colorado State University will work with unmarried men and women expecting a child to improve their job readiness, parenting, conflict resolution, and relationship skills. Other organizations will provide mentoring for couples considering marriage and offer a range of relationship-skills activities.ⁱⁱ

Other Marriage Initiatives

Recently enacted federal legislation allocates substantial new funding for healthy marriage efforts. Embedded in the legislation are funds aimed at improving the relationships and parenting skills of couples who already are married. These funds have allowed community organizations to design programs for married couples facing relationship and other challenges. These programs include relationship-skills classes for couples facing divorce, marriage enrichment weekends, and public awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of healthy relationships.ⁱⁱⁱ

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

The Colorado Department of Human Services was recently awarded substantial federal funding to partner with organizations around the state to offer responsible fatherhood programs. The funding will be used to increase father involvement through relationship- and parenting-skills education. The Department will also fund a training academy for service providers, a public education campaign about the importance of responsible fatherhood, and a clearinghouse of information and resources on fatherhood. Programs will target low-income, unmarried, young, noncustodial, and single custodial fathers.^{iv} In addition, the Tony Grampsas Youth Services Program funds community organizations that work to reduce youth crime and violence and prevent child abuse and neglect. A number of organizations offer support and services to at-risk parents to foster their positive parenting practices.^v

Take Time to Be a Dad Today



State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

Through the Department of Public Health and Environment, Colorado funds an Abstinence Education Program aimed at lowering rates of sexual activity and childbearing among teens. In addition to a public education campaign, the program funds community-based organizations that promote life-skills development, supports for youth, positive behavior, and abstinence among youth in grades 6 through 12.^{vi}

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Colorado follows the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), which allows both fathers and mothers to take 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. Colorado has no state provisions for paid leave.^{vii}

Domestic Violence Services

With federal funding from the Violence Against Women Act, which was enacted in 1994 and reauthorized in 2006, the S.T.O.P. Violence Against Women program provides funds to a number of state offices and agencies, local governments, tribal governments, and community-based programs. Recipients of these funds provide training on domestic violence; establish specialized domestic violence units in law enforcement and district attorneys' offices; develop protocols and policies for domestic violence; collect information on domestic violence across the state; and provide services and supports to victims of domestic violence, including emergency and transitional housing, crisis hotlines, case management, advocacy, legal assistance, educational programs, and support groups.^{viii} In addition, the Domestic Abuse Assistance Program uses funds from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant to fund community organizations that provide services and support for domestic violence victims.^{ix}

Child Custody Policy

When married couples with children separate voluntarily, both parents have the right to petition the Colorado court system to determine child custody arrangements. Custody decisions are made in the best interest of the child, which includes meeting the child's physical, emotional, and mental needs. The court will also consider the wishes of the parents and the child or children, past parental involvement, presence of abuse, and a number of other factors. Parents can choose (or may be ordered) to participate in mediation (known as Alternative Dispute Resolution) to resolve matters of child custody and support.

Paternity Establishment

Establishing paternity provides a child born outside of marriage with legal rights, including the right to child support, medical benefits, death or disability benefits, and inheritance rights. Colorado has an in-hospital paternity acknowledgement program; if paternity is undisputed, the father may sign an Acknowledgement of Paternity form at the time of the child's birth. The paternity establishment process can be started at any time before the child's 18th birthday and, in some cases, at any time before the child's 21st birthday. If a man doubts that he is the father of a child, the court system or the Colorado Child Support Enforcement Program can order genetic testing to ascertain paternity.^x



Child Support Assistance

The Colorado Child Support Enforcement Program is responsible for ensuring that all children receive financial and medical support from both of their parents. The program helps custodial parents establish an order, helps to establish paternity, modifies orders, locates noncustodial parents, and collects and distributes child support payments.^{xi} Either parent may request services from the Child Support Enforcement Program; anyone who receives public assistance benefits automatically also receives Child Support Enforcement services.

Several programs exist to help fathers understand and work with the child support system. The Child Support Enforcement Program makes regular presentations to incarcerated fathers to help them understand and pay their child support awards. Fathers who have recently been released from prison can receive services from the John Inmann Work and Family Center to help them secure employment and meet their child support obligations.^{xii}

Child Support Enforcement

If a noncustodial parent does not pay child support, Colorado law gives the state the right to place liens on bank accounts and property, intercept tax refunds and lottery winnings, make reports to the credit bureau, and charge the parent with contempt. As arrears rise, the state may also report the debt to credit bureaus or revoke the noncustodial parent's passport.^{xiii}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Welfare Benefits

The state offers welfare benefits to two-parent families on the same basis as to single-parent families through Colorado Works. Parents receiving financial assistance must participate in work activities upon receiving benefits for 24 months; adults can receive benefits for no more than 60 months in their lifetime. The minimum number of hours per week that a parent must work is determined by each county, but education and job training may fulfill the work requirement.^{xiv}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

The John Inmann Work and Family Center offers services and supports for noncustodial fathers who have recently been released from prison. A collaboration of several government departments and agencies, the Center offers case management, employment services, and child support and legal services to fathers. The program is intended to help fathers secure employment, reconnect with their families and communities, and understand their rights and responsibilities as fathers.^{xv}

Job Training and Employment Services

Job training and employment services are available to low-income men through county-level workforce centers. These centers offer workshops, educational and vocational training, workplace readiness skills-development, job referrals, job-search assistance, and support services.^{xvi} Among other supports and services for former inmates, the John Inmann Work and Family Center offers employment services as needed.^{xvii}



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Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

Ten of Colorado's correctional facilities offer parenting programs to inmates with children. These programs provide information on forming effective family relationships, understanding child development, managing behavior, and teaching values to children.^{xviii} The state's child support enforcement agency also offers a Parenting Time Program, which informs incarcerated fathers of their legal responsibilities, the state child support system, and the process for having child support orders modified.^{xix}

Resources

- **Colorado Department of Human Services.** This Web site provides an overview of state services and policies for families, including information about child support, welfare, protective services, child care, and fatherhood; available at <http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/>
- **Survey of State Child Support Policies, Procedures, and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers.** This report, published by the Center for Policy Research, provides a summary of nationwide fatherhood policies for incarcerated men; available at <https://childsupport.state.co.us/siteuser/do/general/GetPDF?PDFNumber=39>



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