



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



FATHERHOOD.GOV
National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

NRFC State Profiles: Alaska 2009

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State and Federally Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Through the Alaska Children's Trust, the state offers grants to community-based organizations that work to improve parenting skills. Several of these organizations work with young parents, first-time parents, or at-risk parents to improve their parenting behavior, prevent child abuse, and raise parents' understanding of child development.ⁱ In addition, several community organizations in Alaska have been awarded funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to offer responsible fatherhood programs. These programs offer parenting classes, job preparation training, anger management lessons, and information on domestic violence.ⁱⁱ The federal government's Administration for Native Americans also funds the Wise Fathers, Well Families Program in Alaska, which promotes positive father involvement and healthy marriages by helping couples improve parenting and relationship skills.ⁱⁱⁱ

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

Using funds from the TANF block grant, Alaska offers educational programs targeted at adolescents on the risks and consequences of teenage pregnancy. The Department of Health and Social Services works with community organizations to offer reproductive health, contraception, and statutory rape education programs.^{iv}

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Alaska has instituted the Alaska Family Leave Act (AFLA), which provides parents with the opportunity to take up to 18 weeks of leave in the event of their own illness or the illness of a family member, or following the birth or adoption of a child. Employees receive "job-protected leave," meaning that they are entitled to return to the same position after taking leave. Alaska has no state provisions for paid family leave.^v

Domestic Violence Services

The Alaska Family Violence Prevention Project, which operates within the Department of Health and Social Services, works with social service providers, health professionals, and community organizations across Alaska to conduct research on domestic violence, develop training instruments, and provide training and technical assistance to increase awareness about domestic violence prevention. The state has also enacted the Alaska Domestic Violence Prevention and Victim Protection Act of 1996, which requires judicial officers, court clerks, prosecutors, paralegals, teachers, school staff, social workers, police officers, child care providers, domestic violence program staff, and substance abuse counselors to receive continuing education and training on domestic violence. Moreover, the law requires that the Department of Health have standards for domestic violence procedures in health care facilities.^{vi} In addition, Alaska's TANF program, in cooperation with the State Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, has implemented special provisions to protect victims of domestic violence who receive public assistance. All TANF recipients are screened for domestic violence and victims are referred to applicable services and supports (e.g., counseling and shelters). Victims may also receive waivers of certain program requirements in order to protect their safety.^{vii}

Child Custody Policy

Upon divorce, both parents may petition the court system for custody of their children. Custody decisions are based upon a number of factors, including the best interests of the child, the capability of each parent to meet the child's needs, evidence of domestic violence or child abuse,

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and evidence of substance abuse. In addition, couples who earn less than \$75,000 and who are establishing or modifying a child custody or visitation agreement are eligible to participate in a mediation program that operates under the jurisdiction of the Alaska court system.^{viii}

Paternity Establishment

Paternity establishment is a prerequisite for child support awards in Alaska and ensures that a child has inheritance rights and can receive his or her father's medical insurance, life insurance, Social Security, and veterans' benefits. Fathers in Alaska can establish paternity by completing a paternity acknowledgement form in the hospital after their child's birth. Fathers can establish paternity at any time during the child's life. If a man doubts that he is the father of the child, the Child Support Services Division can order genetic testing to confirm paternity.^{ix}

Child Support Assistance

The Child Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Department of Revenue coordinates and collects child support payments in Alaska. The CSSD helps parents establish paternity, sets up child support agreements for unmarried couples, locates absent parents, collects administrative and judicial child support orders, revises agency-established child support orders, and responds to parents' challenges of child support decisions. Child support payments to parents who participate in the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program are given to the state to help offset the cost of benefits.^x

The court system is responsible for setting the amount of most child support awards in the state, including child support awards for divorcing couples. In the case of administrative agreements, the CSSD can reduce the amount of child support required from noncustodial parents who have incomes below 150 percent of the poverty line, are ill or disabled, or have physical custody of other children.^{xi}

Child Support Enforcement

Alaska employs several methods to ensure receipt of child support from a nonpaying, noncustodial parent. These methods include deducting money from the parent's paycheck or tax refund, seizing funds from the parent's bank account, seizing other property, and contacting credit bureaus. As arrears rise, Alaska can revoke the parent's driver's license.^{xii}

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives currently offer funding to community organizations aimed at promoting the skills and resources necessary for couples to sustain healthy marriages.^{xiii}

Other Marriage Initiatives

The federal government's Administration for Native Americans offers several programs aimed at supporting and encouraging healthy marriages and relationships among native Alaskan couples.^{xiv} The U.S. Army offers marriage education programs to families stationed at Fort Wainwright and Fort Richardson. The Building Strong and Ready Families programs offer marital assessments, relationship skills-training, health assessments, screenings and referrals for services, and marriage enrichment weekends.^{xv}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

The Alaska Temporary Assistance Program (ATAP), operating under the federal TANF program, provides cash benefits to low-income families with children. ATAP operates under the "Work First" approach, which is based on the idea that individuals should first find employment that will then help them gain job skills and, eventually, become self-sufficient. However, welfare recipients can participate in education and preparation (for example, GED completion) programs that will enable them to later transition to work. There is a 60-month lifetime limit on the receipt of benefits

and all families are required to complete a Self-Sufficiency Plan to identify self-sufficiency goals. To encourage workforce participation and the transition to self-sufficiency, Alaska offers families assistance with child care and transportation costs, clothing, and training programs. One- and two-parent families are eligible for benefits through ATAP on the same basis for most of the year, but benefits are reduced for two-parent families from July through September when more work opportunities are available. Alaska does not offer marriage incentives to welfare recipients. Single-parent families receiving welfare benefits must cooperate with the Child Support Services Division in establishing paternity for all children and collecting owed child support.^{xvi}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

Alaska funds a number of educational and job training programs that serve noncustodial fathers who are imprisoned^{xvii} and a number of state- and federally-funded community-based fatherhood programs offer services to assist low-income noncustodial fathers in achieving economic stability.^{xviii}

Job Training and Employment Services

Job training and employment services are available to eligible residents through the Alaska Job Center Network. Participants receive support services either through designated partner grantees or directly through the Network. These services include job-search preparation workshops, career counseling, skills assessments, job-skills training, case management support, apprenticeships, educational services, and transportation and child care support.^{xix} Incarcerated fathers in Alaska are also entitled to participate in a number of job preparation, training, and educational programs offered in the state's correctional institutions.^{xx}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

The Alaska Department of Corrections offers several educational and work preparation programs along with mental health services to men who are incarcerated in state facilities. Prisoners are also eligible to participate in Life Skills Programs, which focus on teaching skills related to anger/stress management, decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and parenting.^{xxi} Some facilities offer a Children of Incarcerated Parents Video Project, through which parents can stay involved with their children by reading stories on videotape.^{xxii}

Resources

- **Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.** This Web site provides an overview of state services and policies for families; available at <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/>
- **Child Support Services Division.** This Web site provides information about child support policies in Alaska; available at <http://www.csed.state.ak.us/default.asp>

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