



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



NRFC State Profiles: Texas 2010

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

The Texas government currently funds a number of programs aimed at promoting responsible fatherhood. For example, the Family Initiatives (FI) section of the Child Support Division currently works with community and faith-based organizations to offer programs that focus on promoting responsible fatherhood, conducting parenting and paternity education, increasing non-custodial parents' access to children, and encouraging stable family formation. The Non-Custodial Parent Choices (NCP Choices) program aims to help low-income non-custodial parents gain employment and comply with child support orders. FI also works with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to provide education and other resources related to child support and paternity to incarcerated fathers in Texas. FI's Access and Visitation (A&V) program helps non-custodial parents gain access to and visitation with their children by implementing shared parenting projects. A&V funds community organizations that provide early intervention, co-parenting education, mediation, and enforcement services and also conducts a public information campaign aimed at helping separated parents learn to work together and co-parent effectively. Furthermore, the Paternity and Parenting Awareness (p.a.p.a.) program uses an evidence-based curriculum to teach high school students and young adults about the responsibilities of parenthood (including responsible fatherhood and paternity establishment) and the importance of education. Similarly, the No Kidding Project trains young adults to deliver paternity and responsible parenting classes to middle and high school students. FI's Strong Start- Stable Families (SSSF) project aims to increase expectant fathers' prenatal participation and to promote healthy relationships, paternity establishment, responsible fatherhood, and self-sufficiency. SSSF offers couples-based pregnancy classes and prenatal education and services focused on establishing paternity, child support, team parenting, relationship skills, violence prevention, and employment. Finally, the Building Strong and Healthy Families in Texas (BSHF-T) project supports unmarried parents to encourage healthy couple relationships, paternity establishment, and parenting skills.ⁱ

In addition to the state's efforts, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services currently funds several community organizations that offer responsible fatherhood programs in Texas. Among the funded organizations are Texas Arms of Love, whose Fathers are Forever (FAF) project teaches parenting skills, promotes two-parent families, and aims to reduce family violence among incarcerated fathers; Goodwill Industries of Greater Texas, Inc., which offers job search assistance, training, educational support, and other employment services to low-income fathers; YouthLaunch, Inc., which works with teen parents to provide employment training and other supports aimed at increasing self-sufficiency; AVANCE, Inc., which works with Latino immigrant fathers to improve relationship skills and provide support services; and Education Service Center – Region 19, which provides relationship skills, parenting skills, personal development opportunities, and other supports to low-income fathers whose children are enrolled in Head Start.ⁱⁱ

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) provides funding to more than 300 clinics that provide comprehensive family-planning services to men and women across Texas. Available services include physical examinations and health assessments, contraceptives, testing

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and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, and other services related to family planning.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, DSHS has been increasing efforts to actively provide clinical and educational services that specifically target the male population.^{iv} Finally, DSHS offers the Abstinence Education Power2wait Program, which aims to prevent adolescent pregnancy by providing abstinence education programs to students in grades 5 through 12.^v

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Ohio is subject to the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (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. 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. Texas has no state provisions for paid leave.^{vi}

Domestic Violence Services

The Family Violence Program, operating within the Health and Human Services Commission, provides funding to community organizations that work with victims of domestic violence. Services provided through these organizations include crisis hotlines, emergency shelter, legal advocacy, service referral, counseling, and other support services.^{vii} The Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV) is a coalition of service providers, community organizations, domestic violence survivors, businesses, professionals, faith-based organizations, government agencies, and other individuals. The TCFV provides support to local domestic violence programs, operates the National Domestic Violence Hotline, provides technical assistance and professional training, serves as an advocate for laws and policies to benefit domestic violence victims, and leads public awareness campaigns.^{viii}

Child Custody Policy

In cases involving child custody, Texas has a presumption or preference for joint custody and makes final custody determinations based on the best interest of the child. Courts may consider the wishes of a child age 12 or older in making custody decisions. Parents who agree on custody arrangements can develop a parenting plan, which the courts will honor as long as it doesn't violate the child's best interest. If parents cannot reach a joint agreement, the court may order them to undergo mediation or family counseling.^{ix}

Paternity Establishment

Establishing paternity for a child born outside of marriage provides the child with a legal father and ensures the child's rights to inheritance, Social Security benefits, medical insurance, life insurance, and veteran's benefits. In Texas, if there are no doubts about the child's paternity, both parents can sign a voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity (AOP); if paternity is disputed, however, the court may order the mother, alleged father, and child to participate in genetic testing to determine a child's paternity.^x

Child Support Assistance

The Texas Child Support Division, operating within the Attorney General's office, is designed to help parents obtain the necessary financial support for their children. It is charged with locating absent parents, establishing paternity, establishing and enforcing child and medical support orders, modifying child support orders when necessary, and collecting and distributing child support payments.^{xi}

Child Support Enforcement

In order to collect unpaid child support, child support staff may take a number of actions against noncustodial parents. The Child Support Division may: withhold support from the parent's wages; intercept federal income tax refunds, lottery winnings, or other state or federal benefits; place liens on the parent's property and/or assets; suspend the parent's driver's, professional,

hunting, or fishing license; or file a lawsuit against the parent. A judge also may order a nonpaying parent to serve a jail sentence.^{xii}

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

The Texas government currently funds a number of programs aimed at promoting healthy marriages and relationships. As mentioned previously, the Family Initiatives (FI) section of the Child Support Division currently works with community and faith-based organizations to offer programs and a public education campaign designed to encourage stable family formation. FI's Strong Start- Stable Families (SSSF) project aims to increase expectant fathers' prenatal participation and to promote healthy relationships, paternity establishment, responsible fatherhood, and self-sufficiency. SSSF offers couples-based pregnancy classes and prenatal education and services focused on establishing paternity, child support, team parenting, relationship skills, violence prevention, and employment. Finally, the Building Strong and Healthy Families in Texas (BSHF-T) project supports unmarried parents to encourage healthy couple relationships, paternity establishment, and parenting skills.^{xiii}

Other Marriage Initiatives

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Assistance currently funds 15 programs designed to support and maintain healthy relationships in Texas. These programs offer marriage skills education, relationship and life skills education, support groups, public campaigns, marriage retreats, conflict resolution, and other services and supports to married and unmarried couples. For example, the Healthy Family Initiative provides marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills to unmarried expectant parents. Furthermore, the Alliance for North Texas Healthy Effective Marriages (ANTHEM) receives funding to offer marriage education to unmarried couples, engaged couples, married couples, and high school students and to conduct a public awareness campaign. Other organizations, such as the Active Relationships Center and Friendship West Baptist Church, target their programs specifically towards minority couples. Many of these organizations use research-based curricula, such as the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) curriculum, in their programs.^{xiv}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

Cash assistance for low-income families in Texas is available through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. There is a lifetime limit of 60 months on receipt of TANF benefits in the state of Texas.^{xv} TANF recipients are required to participate in work activities for at least 30 hours per week when they are ready to do so or when they have received TANF benefits for 24 months, whichever comes first.^{xvi} At least 20 of these hours must be completed in core work activities, and the remaining 10 hours can include core or non-core work activities. Core work activities include subsidized or unsubsidized employment, work experience, on-the-job training, job search and job readiness assistance, community service, vocational education, and child care services. Non-core work activities include job skills training and secondary education. In two-parent families receiving child care assistance, parents must participate in a total of at least 55 hours per week of work activities, of which 50 hours must be spent in core work activities. If two-parent families are not receiving child care assistance, they must participate in a total of 35 hours per week of work activities, of which 30 must be spent in core activities.^{xvii}

Low-income families may be eligible to receive a One Time Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (OT-TANF) benefit, which is designed to provide support for families that are likely to quickly become self-sufficient while avoiding the need for long-term TANF receipt.^{xviii} In order to promote marriage among low-income couples, when a TANF recipient marries, his or her spouse's income is disregarded for six months in determining TANF eligibility.^{xix}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

Incarcerated fathers in Texas can participate in a number of programs through the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and private community organizations intended to improve their parenting skills and their relationships with their children and partners.^{xx} As mentioned previously, the Family Initiatives (FI) section of the Child Support Division currently funds a number of programs aimed at noncustodial fathers, such as the Non-Custodial Parent Choices (NCP Choices) program and the Access and Visitation (A&V) program. These programs aim to help noncustodial fathers gain employment, comply with child support orders, develop co-parenting skills, and gain access to and visitation with their children.^{xxi}

Job Training and Employment Services

Job services are available to Texas residents through a network of 28 local Workforce Development Boards. Services include job openings information, job search assistance, seminars, training programs, and career development.^{xxii} Community organizations in Texas have received funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to offer employment services, including employment skills training, service referrals, and job search assistance, to low-income fathers.^{xxiii}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice offers a number of programs for individuals incarcerated in state facilities. Several of these programs, such as the “Innerchange” pre-release program, include family counseling and sessions designed to help fathers restore and stabilize their families.^{xxiv} Funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has enabled community organizations to offer programming for incarcerated fathers. For example, Texas Arms of Love (People of Principle) works with incarcerated fathers to improve parenting skills, promote healthy relationships, promote marriages and two-parent families, and teach anger management and other violence prevention techniques.^{xxv} Finally, the Family Initiatives (FI) section of the Child Support Division works with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to provide education and other resources related to child support and paternity to incarcerated fathers in Texas.^{xxvi}

Resources

- **The Attorney General of Texas: Family Initiatives.** This Web site provides information about state programs and services designed to promote responsible fatherhood and stable family relationships; available at <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/cs/ofi/index.shtml#ncp>
- **Texas Department of State Health Services.** This Web page provides information on male involvement programs designed to reduce unwanted and early pregnancies in Texas; available at <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/famplan/mi.shtm>

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