

A Dad's Story

Resource Center staff interviewed a father regarding his experience in the child welfare system. In addition to his retelling his story, this dad offers some suggestions for child welfare agencies to strengthen their work with fathers.

Dad: My son is from my first marriage; his mother has legal custody of him, I have visitation rights. I pay child support every two weeks. Because my son was doing poorly in school and his mother didn't have time for him, he came to live with me and my second wife in the city for awhile. If his mother needed something, or if she wanted to talk to him, she would call. But some weeks she didn't call him at all.

Q: What brought you to the attention of the child welfare system?

Dad: One night I had punished my son; I spanked him. The next day, Friday, at school his teacher asked him how he got a welt on his leg. He told her, "My dad spanked me." Because this was early in the school year, my son's teacher didn't know me yet. In the years before, I knew his teachers and was involved in the PTA. But the teacher called the principal and the school nurse. They called the protective services and child welfare. *Everybody* got involved. But nobody called me; nobody asked me anything, except for the police, who called me at work and suggested that I stop into the station to answer some questions.

Meanwhile, my son was put into foster care until a hearing that was set that Monday. CPS called his mother, but she said she couldn't get a ride to go pick him up. She'll find a ride to court, but can't go pick up her son? So my son spent three

days in foster care, with strangers. This annoyed me.

Q: What happened in court?

Dad: I tried to approach the social worker and the counselor who was handling the case, but they didn't want to speak to me. "We don't really need to speak to you; we'll speak to the judge."

I told the judge, "Yes, your honor, I spanked him with a belt. It's the first time ever." I gave him the reason. The judge said that this can't be tolerated; a child can't be spanked that way. And it was 11 p.m. when I came home from work; I woke my son from his sleep. The judge thought that was also harsh.

But different assumptions were made. Child protective services, welfare, and everybody was telling me that it looked like he was being abused. How could they assume that without talking to me, my wife, his mother, and finding out what had happened? Instead, they charged me with abuse. I wasn't found guilty, but I had to go through parent counseling courses through the department of social services. They never restricted my visitation rights, or told me that I couldn't see my son.

Q: What was his mother's response to the allegations of abuse?

Dad: Because of the bitterness that she felt against me, she didn't speak up in court. She knew I hadn't abused my son. She would never allow him to be alone with me if I had.

Q: Did your son come back to live with you and your wife in the city after this, or did you try to obtain custody?

Dad: No. I assumed they wouldn't give custody to me after what had hap-

pened. My son moved back to his mother's house. He still comes to visit me. He spends weekends with me or I go over there, take him to the movies, shopping, and do things with him. And I visit his school, know his teachers, attend the PTA meetings.

Q: Has this affected your relationship with your son?

Dad: He was angry. He wrote me a letter and told me that he was disappointed in what happened, but that he forgave me and was willing to go on to rebuild our relationship. At first he was frightened. For about six months he didn't want to be alone with me. It took a while for me to build trust. We both worked our way to it.

Services

Q: What services did you receive?

Dad: The counseling dealt with learning how to discipline a child without using violence, such as taking away certain privileges, and dealing with conflicts nonviolently. Though it was called "parent counseling" it focused on the issue of striking another individual and conflict resolution. I learned some techniques. Period.

Q: Were there many dads involved?

Dad: There were very few dads there. The counseling was individual, but twice we got together for group sessions. I only saw one other dad because one of them dropped out.

Q: Were you offered any other services?

Dad: The court recommended it. I was brought up in the "old school," and I got spankings. But there is no tolerance for that now. The courts don't believe that a parent should strike a child. It's considered assault, and in some counties, it is considered child abuse. I didn't think I needed more services, but I heard about this family counseling program, My Baby's Father, through another project I am involved with and thought that it would help me.

Q: Do they have programs for men?

Dad: It's a group with men and women, but the counseling deals with issues of the entire family: the father, the mother, the sister, the brother. It's interesting how certain issues can be brought up, discussed, and problems resolved through this group counseling family technique.

Recommendations

Q: As a man that has gone through the system, do you have some recommendations to make to the child welfare system, child protective agencies, and the courts?

Dad: The system has a stigma against fathers. The system treats fathers more harshly. No one should automatically assume that because this is a man, that he

is violent, and that he is perpetrating violence against a child. Someone could have come to me, and talked to me to find out what I was feeling and why did this happen, and why did I do this. Find out the facts. Also, a child needs to be thoroughly questioned, you know. "Has this ever happened to you before? Has your father ever done this to you before?" I also think the child should be involved in some type of counseling with the parent as well.

Q: With the accused parent?

Dad: Yes. When I was going through this counseling, my son wasn't involved in it. It could have helped us both, and for my son to understand what had happened. But he was never called in by anyone. Think about it. CPS comes into the home, takes the child. They tell a child that his parent is unfit. And CPS doesn't come back and do any follow up to find out what is the relationship of the child with the father after four years? Or has the father attempted to make any crossroads back to the child to heal?

Q: What else would help?

Dad: Well, the child protective service staff should learn more about the effect that this process has on people, the families. I want them to empathize. They need to really listen to people's experience. Otherwise, they become desensitized to the process and they can't

understand something that they are not involved in.

More issues about parenting need to be addressed, too; not just discipline. There are so many variables that go into this thing. Different people, different rules, and all this is confusing. So many things are involved, you just can't put a label on it.

Q: You are right, it's complicated for the child.

Dad: It's complicated for the adult as well.

If a man wants to be a father and raise his child, he should be given the same tools and opportunities as a woman. And the stigma is, as long as the mother is around, the man doesn't have a chance for custody. Fathers should not be made to feel like they are the unimportant parent.

Q: Would it help if there were more men involved in the process or other supports for men?

Dad: Yes, it might make it easier if the groups where men are going have more men as facilitators, and not only women. Or more information for men. They (DSS) definitely need to have men involved in the process. It seems that women show insensitivity when it comes dealing with men. Women stereotype men: "...a man should only be involved with his sons, to deal with them in sports" and things like that.

A man has to know that it is okay to take a cooking class, go to school functions, get involved with their children. Some men think being involved in such things isn't masculine and that's something that women should do. That's not true.

Q: How can we help involve more men in what their children are doing?

Dad: That's a big question. It starts with the individual. You can't instill something in someone. An individual has to want to have within themselves, to want to be better, not only himself, but his child. You must already want this and know that this is the right thing to do. So that has to come from the individual. His child is going to mirror and reflect what he sees in the home.

Q: What would you tell other fathers in a similar situation? Maybe someone who has a problem in excessively disciplining their children. Or those in your case where you felt the allegations were somewhat unjustified.

Dad: You have to be responsible for what you do; things aren't the way that they used to be. You can't take a belt or an extension cord and beat your child until welts are on their body. This is wrong. CPS has a job to do and you need to be patient; seek whatever type of help that you need to make sure that it doesn't happen again. Then, re-establish a bond with your child. Because when these people come into your home, take your children and put them in foster care, and go to court, it tears a family apart. Everybody is affected by this.

Q: Suppose I work for the child welfare agency and as a woman, I am starting a program for fathers. I'm used to work-

ing with women. What do I need to know about men in developing this program?

Dad: First, a man has the same capabilities that a woman has when raising a child. It means that a man can cook, clean, provide necessities, care for that child, just like a woman can. And in some cases even better. You can't look at a man and say "Aw man, what does he want custody of his kids for? You know he's gotta work, he's gotta..." So what? He can put his child in child care while he works. Just because he works doesn't mean that he can't provide and have a relationship with his children. First thing women say when they see a man, "Why is he trying to raise those children alone? Why doesn't he have to have a woman help him?" Why can't a man do it? The mother may be out there, on crack or heroin or something, or maybe she's dead.

Second, if a man wants to be a father and raise his child, he should be given the same tools and opportunities as a woman. And the stigma is, as long as the mother is around, the man doesn't have a chance for custody. Fathers should not be made to feel like they are the unimportant parent.

You could be a mother and be raising a son, and there are certain things that a mother can't give that boy. And you may be a father raising a daughter. There are certain

things that you can't give that girl. A lot of variables go into this. It's a big, big picture.

Q: In my new program for fathers, what activities should I include? I think men just like sports. Should my activities be centered around game night or the fight on TV?

Dad: No. Incorporate men in all things, not just sports. Dads and their children can go to the library. "What do you like? I like looking at the stars. I like looking at the moon. Okay, let's go get a book on celestial bodies and get into astronomy." Or he might like fish or something. We can go to the library and get some books on the different fish. You have to bring these things out of a child, and see what they like. You can go to the community center and do things there, like arts and crafts. You can make leather things and jewelry or do wood working.

Q: Are fathers interested in doing things like that?

Dad: Of course, but it's automatically assumed that they're not. It's assumed that they won't be interested, so they are not involved, and they are not asked. Because it's stereotypical of a woman to think that the only thing a man wants to do, or is thinking about, is sports. And that's not good. Sometimes men need some encouragement to do things. I go to PTA meetings and

maybe I am the only man in a room full of women. Schools have parent day, where a parent comes in and explains their occupation, and father and son days, and mother and daughter days. Almost every time it's just the mothers there. Fathers need to be involved, too. I was probably the only man that would go to my son's school and visit with his teacher, and sit in the classroom and eat lunch with him.

Q: So, has your view of parenting changed?

Dad: Of course. Like I said, my mother and father, they grew up an old-fashioned way. They both worked two jobs to pay for an expensive house. When me and my sister got home from school, they were at work. So we did homework and chatted on the phone to our friends. When our parents got home about 8 or 9 p.m., we were getting ready to go to bed. So we basically raised ourselves. Well, parenting is spending time, quality time with your child. I had my own phone, TV, and stereo in my room, but I never had my parents' one-on-one time. Without that time, you can't build a bond or trust with your child. That bond is really important to your child and to you.

The ESFT approach is strengths-oriented, solution-focused, skills based and culturally sensitive. The model encourages a systemic perspective of families and helps child welfare workers to focus on solutions, not problems and pathology.

My Baby's Father

A Family Systems Focus on Re-Involvement of Men in Meeting Family Reunification and Permanency Goals

by Ross N. Ford, MSW, LCSW-C

Editor's note: This article reports on an exciting training program in Baltimore, Maryland. The purpose of the the training program is to teach skills to child welfare workers and others so they can work effectively with fathers whose children are involved with the child welfare system. In particular, it teaches skills in working with inner-city African American men who have, over the course of more than one generation, been marginalized from their families.

Where are the fathers in the permanency planning and implementation process? Are fathers involved in child placement decisions, family reunification delivery strategies, and expedited termination of parental rights? Do child welfare professionals and policy makers need assistance in including fathers in the family support and child welfare integration process?

Fathers are noticeably missing as active participants in today's post-Adoption and Safe Family Act child welfare arena. Yet, it is a time of renewed opportunities for family-focused planning and interventions, for decisions based on comprehensive assessment, and for collaboration between child welfare and other systems with which the family is involved. Child welfare agencies can be more proactive in identifying and addressing male involvement goals. A popular misperception is that men are not interested in being actively involved in their family. On one

hand, many fathers are resistant, but their lack of or limited involvement is often the result of marginalization. Over time they have been systematically overlooked and excluded from the family. Including the father, on the other hand, provides information, perspective, and clarity that is helpful to the child welfare workers who are involved in making critical reunification and permanency decisions. As we look to improve outcomes for children and families, we need to identify ways of involving fathers in the decisions that affect their children and families.

To support better outcomes for families and children "My Baby's Father," uses a family systems approach and concrete skill development as a way to increase male involvement. The training we use in the program is based on the Enriched Structural Family Therapy (ESFT) model, which is an original family systems approach to strengthening families. ESFT is strengths-oriented, solution-focused, skills based and culturally sensitive. The model encourages a systemic perspective of families and helps child welfare workers to focus on solutions, not problems and pathology.

ESFT incorporates the highly acclaimed Structural Family Therapy (SFT) approach, associated with Salvador Minuchin and Jay Haley, which we modified in our practice with inner-city families over the past twenty-five years. We

combine the basic elements of the structural model with an emphasis on parenting skills, family order, and kinship forms that are specific to at-risk and fragile families. This family systems approach is enhanced by the evolution of the My Baby's Father (MBF) model component.

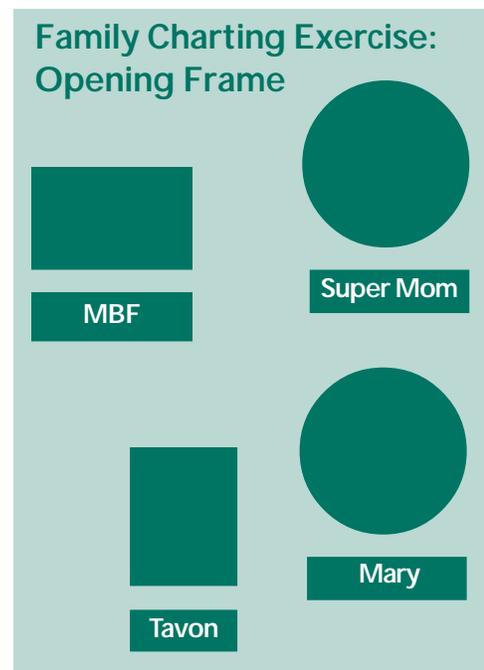
The MBF Male Involvement Model

The MBF is a highly interactive training model that uses an intergenerational family charting process to focus on the roles and relationships that characterize the dynamics of everyday life in today's families. The model takes its name from a primary, standout metaphor, "my baby's father" that is used widely both to refer to the person with that designation, as well as to describe role expectations of that person. Trainers and participants work together to create the story of the family, its members, communication, roles, and relationships. The story begins with the MBF: Opening Frame, as follows.

Typically the trainer begins: *This is a story about the marginalization of men in the family. The man's role in the family has shifted; and that shift has been supported inadvertently by policies and typical ways of dealing with men in the child welfare system. In our story, there is a person carrying this new role in the family. We call him by a metaphor of identity, My Baby's Father (MBF). This is what the members of the family and the proverbial mom call him.* In our work with families, we ask participants to identify those roles and behaviors that are identified with a good MBF. The MBF's role is easily delineated. Typically, participants define

good MBF as one who brings disposable diapers or necessary items; spends quality time with child and the mother; participates in the child support system; holds a job; and takes baby to spend time with his own parents.

The next key person is Super Mom. She is Mary's mother; but she gets her identity because generally she is called Mama by Mary and by the grandchild (Tavon). The next characterization focuses on the relationship between Mary and Tavon, whose relationship is more like siblings than like mother and child. The training continues with a here-and-now process, generating the story, adding family members, and exploring widely used metaphors—his children's mother (HCM), my baby's daddy (MBD), little man, and others. The training focuses the participants' attention on a comprehensive and sometimes complicated set of transactions that may not be specifically



addressed in textbooks but are always present when working with families in the child welfare system (as highlighted by the typical closing frame below).

Overcoming barriers to male involvement

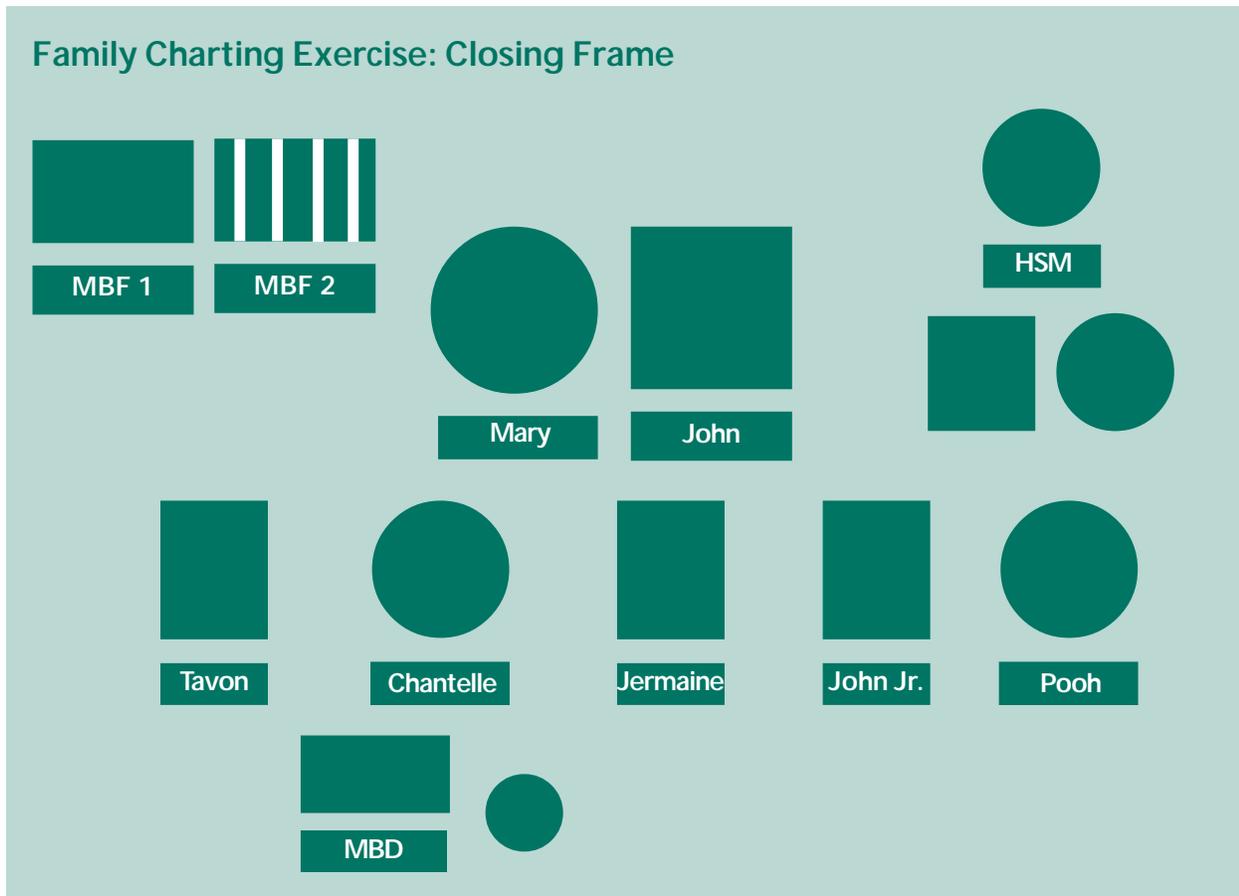
Training in the MBF model gives participants the advantage of “seeing” and “hearing” family dynamics and relationships. Use of the model enhances the ability of participants to get a clear picture of what the family system looks like and to identify the otherwise hard to see influences on the family.

The approach is useful in identifying the support that the family will need to bring about positive changes in the system and individual family members.

Greg M., age 24, came to the attention of the child welfare system when Greg Jr., age 8, came to school with bruises on his legs and was suspected by his teacher to have been physically abused. The father was found guilty of child abuse and the son was removed from the home and placed with the maternal grandmother. The separation of the son from the family signaled the beginning of the total disinte-

gration of the family; mother and father were unable to continue to sustain an ongoing relationship. Seven months later, Greg was incarcerated on a drug-related charge and began a five-year sentence. During this period, Greg filed for divorce from the mother, a crack addict; and upon release, married a woman who stuck by him during his incarceration. He moved in with the new wife and her two small children. He re-established contact with Greg, Jr., who remained in the home of his grandmother.

We met Greg at the weekly family-systems training work-



shop, which we conduct with a community-based organization of ex-offenders who provide workshops and psycho-educational interventions with youth at highest risk for incarceration. While Greg was especially effective in sharing with young people his own story as a deterrent to their involvement in criminal activity and lawlessness, he was resistant to participating in family-based training. He stated that training would have no relevance. We began the first training session with the MBF Family Charting Exercise. During the training, Greg compared himself to the family illustrated in the Family Charting Exercise. He surprised the group by engaging us in a long and detailed discussion on the difference between the way “John,” the father in this family, treated his own child compared to the way he treated “Mary’s” children from previous relationships. From his comments, it was obvious to us that Greg had found himself on the chart. Without having to disclose, he was able to identify with John and articulate his perspectives on the relationship and communication problems that were creating conflict, pain, and distress in both families. Ultimately, Greg utilized the training as a springboard to overcome relationship and communication difficulties in the household with

his new family and to overcome barriers to re-uniting with his son.

Helping the child welfare system intervene in the marginalization process

The training model helps us to involve Greg and numerous fathers who, like Greg, silently search for ways to be reintegrated into their family systems. The model has become the basis of service delivery in five male involvement initiatives in the Baltimore/Washington area and, most recently, in youth services programs in Namibia, South Africa, and Brazil. We conduct training in the MBF intervention in a range of settings including several local Departments of Social Services in Maryland; community-based consortia; college, university, and public school programs; as well as in several other cities in the United States. We have set up a Family Training Center to make training and support in these family systems models available to child welfare administrators and service providers in various regions throughout the country.

Recent public laws on adoption and safe families require that states continue reasonable efforts to reunify children and their families. For us, reasonable effort should include family systems interventions that give the families the support they need to make

Essential Components of the MBF Model in Child Welfare

1. The model presents an ideal format for meeting the challenge of supporting male involvement. Training is supported by a clarified framework for assessing strengths and risks as well as developing collaborative intervention plans that are helpful for reunification and other forms of expedited permanency.
2. The model enhances the capacity of agencies to navigate through barriers and meet other goals of family involvement, reunification, worker sensitivity, worker skill development, and case management.
3. The model gives direct case workers safe, appropriate skills that are usable in a team context. It teaches simple interventions that structure, shape, and support the time frames set up for specific outcomes.
4. The model provides sequential steps for intervening within a family system and for helping to realign the system to a state of equilibrium through redefining and redirecting roles and communication patterns within the family.

mandated changes and to meet deadlines. We share the MBF male involvement model as a solution-oriented process for improving family functioning and for enhancing the capacity of family members to function in role appropriate ways, deal with the day-to-day situations in a noncrisis manner, and assume responsibility for behavior change.

Co-creator of the MBF Male Involvement Training model, Ross N. Ford is a program executive, licensed

social work practitioner, trainer, and public policy maker and CEO of the Martin Pollak Project, a large child placement organization in the Baltimore/Washington area, and lead agency for the Baltimore managed care initiative. In that role, he also directs the Maryland Child Welfare Managed Care Demonstration Project, bringing an established reputation with Baltimore City Department of Social Services and its clients.

SAVE THE DATE!

Partners in Progress

Lessons Learned from the Child and Family Services Review The Annual Meeting of State and Tribe Child Welfare Officials

How can states, tribes, the federal government, and the national resource centers work together to achieve measurable progress in child welfare programs? Plenary sessions and workshops will focus on broad issues related to the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and the Program Improvement Plans, as well as specific areas that states are taking on in their improvement plans.

Who should attend

- ◆ State and tribal child welfare directors
- ◆ CFSR coordinators
- ◆ Representatives from the largest metropolitan area in each state

When: January 27-29, 2003

Where: Omni Shoreham Hotel
Washington, DC

For more information

Visit our Web site at
or
contact our Child Welfare
Specialist at 202.638.7922 or via
e-mail at donna@esilsg.org.



Fathers in Training: Empowering Men to Become Better Fathers

Fathers in Training (FIT) is a service to fathers provided by the Virginia Beach Department of Social Services in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The program was established about six years ago to strengthen families by providing an environment in which fathers can acquire the tools to become effective and motivated parents.

“It is the healthier father that is most likely to create a healthier environment for his family,” explains Brian Hawkins, FIT director.

FIT also helps fathers strengthen the bond between their children and significant others. It encourages active fathering and helps families become self-sufficient. Identified by the National Family Preservation Network as a best practice fatherhood program model in the child welfare system, FIT is a three-tiered program with a parent education dimension, employment services, and assistance for fathers involved in the court system.

Currently, about half the fathers in this program have a child(ren) involved in child welfare. FIT serves fathers involved in child support, TANF, child abuse and neglect, and court child custody cases. One of the program’s goals is to help nonresi-

dential fathers obtain employment that pays a sufficient salary. This helps motivate fathers to support mothers and children as they leave the agency’s welfare roles. The program also works with fathers who have been founded (investigated and found to have abused or neglected a child) for child abuse or neglect by the agency’s Child Protective Services Unit. About 20 percent of the men in FIT are voluntary involved (there was no finding of abuse or neglect but the family was found to be at-risk and voluntarily agreed to participate in the services) and seek to improve fathering skills. About 30 percent of the fathers involved come directly from the local courts for custody issues, parenting skills, employment, anger management skills, and issues regarding family violence.

Program success is measured in a variety of ways including increases in the amount of time a father spends with his children; the number of fathers claiming paternity for their children; and the amount of regular financial support provided to children. Fathers who complete the program also show increased knowledge of disciplinary techniques and uses of alternative disciplinary meth-

ods and better understanding of child development. Fathers also show increased cooperative co-parenting as well as greater cooperation with service providers.

The FIT program structure

FIT offers participants support, education, and advocacy by

- ◆ Providing an environment that encourages learning and will address identified barriers to effective fathering such as anger management, conflict resolution, and working with support systems as well as others;
- ◆ Offering employment assistance services to assist fathers in financially contributing to the well-being of their children.
- ◆ Supporting an alumni group of dads who have successfully completed the program and wish to maintain and increase their participation within the community;
- ◆ Helping to ensure the protection of children and families. Domestic violence, effective communication, anger management, and conflict resolution issues are the primary topics of every group meeting due to FIT’s zero tolerance of abuse in the home.

“We have created a safe, but challenging environment for fathers to engage in conversations about the joys and challenges of fatherhood with other fathers,” states Hawkins. The challenges come in different forms:

Class attendance—Fathers must be present and be an active participant each week for a minimum of 17 of the 20 weeks of the required program. Not everyone can make that commitment. Participation in and contribution to the group are evaluated.

Self-examination—Fathers need to dig deep to examine long held opinions, hurts, grudges, and other emotions to better understand themselves and their relationships with their children. This is difficult and not everyone is willing or has the needed support to do this.

Participation—FIT believes that every father wants the best for his child; the program relies on the participation of each father because every father has skills, experience, or knowledge that will add something. “We depend on fathers’ input, we all learn from each other, whether you are a dad making a lot of money or someone making little money, no one person has all the answers,” explains Hawkins. “Therefore, everyone in the program must contribute and express their beliefs openly.”

To accommodate most fathers’ schedules, the two-hour classes meet Wednesday evenings.

The classes, or groups, are divided into four different levels and meet for five weeks. The group progresses through the levels as one unit, increasing their trust, camaraderie, and shared knowledge. Each level focuses on five topic areas: appropriate support networks, anger management, effective communication, conflict resolution, and parenting. As the group moves to the next or more advanced level the information and discussions become more involved and demanding. During the program, weekly tests are given. A pre-test is given before the subject material is covered and a post-test after the material is presented. While these tests are not graded, they become a tool for assessing program and facilitation effectiveness. Each participant is also rated from noncompliant to excellent for his participation.

The group begins at the bronze level in which the foundation for the principles and skills that will be needed for the program are learned. At the silver level, participants learn the importance and strengths of the group, learning from one another, the philosophy, and what is needed for their growth as individuals. The participants at this level also begin to assume responsibility for their actions. Next, at the gold level, the participants work on applying the FIT program concepts within family relationships. Participants are expected to see them-

selves as “catalysts of positive change,” and identify principles on which to base their goals and decisions. The fourth level is the Alumni group. This last “official” group of the training addresses the same educational components, but each participant applies these differently. Successes and struggles are regular topics. After the graduation program, participants are encouraged to remain active and receive continued support in a healthy environment. Conferences or forums are scheduled to provide additional opportunities and skills.

Recently, the *Xchange: A Forum for Fathers* offered dialogues on financial investments, fathering children with special needs, improving parenting when children live in separate homes, understanding child support systems, and a panel discussion led by daughters on the importance their fathers had in their lives. More than 700 fathers participated. “Fathers from all cultures, races, and socio-economic levels joined together with a common goal,” explains Hawkins, “to celebrate the importance of family, community, our children, and fatherhood. Fathers felt connected and supported by one another and empowered as men of their communities.”

Long-term alumni believe that real growth truly takes place after graduation. More than 20 percent of fathers referred to the

program for child abuse or neglect stay involved as alumni.

What makes FIT work?

Historically, social services and their programs have been places of shame for fathers. “Fathers were always the first ones blamed for problems in their families. It is no wonder that men shy away from us. We first have to make our places father friendly, from the first glance of a receptionist to the programs we offer,” explains Hawkins.

The program is managed and run by fathers, who are also specifically trained social workers. “We want to provide the services that men need; just as we do for mothers,” says Hawkins. Any program, a fatherhood program or other program, cannot be built on the charismatic nature of one or two individuals,” explains Hawkins. “For this program to be successful it has to build into a self-sustaining entity, with many individuals able to step to the plate with support. This is a long-term program; it takes a long time to make the changes that some fathers need to make.” FIT is doing just that, building on success, galvanizing support, and being recognized both inside and outside of the agency.

“Our agency recognizes the importance of this program to children, their fathers, and the community overall. Having that support is essential,” states

Hawkins. The program grew out of employment services that were offered from within the Department of Social Services and has grown. Hawkins says, “We had to convince everyone that this program could help them. To the caseworkers, we said ‘We can reduce your caseload and help you work with the father.’ To the CPS workers, we said ‘We can help you with founded and unfounded cases of abuse and neglect. We can provide parenting skills training.’”

Convincing fathers to be active participants in the program can sometimes be difficult. Striking the right chord with each one and recognizing each man’s needs is important to the success of his family. “We tell some of the men ‘This program is about safety... the safety of your children, your family, *and* you.’” “One Man’s Plan” is a contract that the father completes and indicates his willingness to work with the FIT program “to be a better father.”

Many mothers distrust the program so FIT invites mothers to attend open forums with FIT facilitators and have frequent conferences with case workers.

One of FIT’s greatest assets is the fathers, the alumni, who remain with the program to mentor and help other dads.

“Our job is to empower other fathers, leaders, and agents of change,” Hawkins continues. Hawkins firmly believes that this



program and its services meet a definite need for fathers. By providing fathers with a safe place and opportunity for dialogue and training, dads are able to acquire the skills and relationships that many of them desire.

References

National Family Preservation Network, (2001.) Position Paper on Fatherhood in the Child Welfare System.

Virginia Beach Department of Social Services, (2002). Fathers in Training program materials.

I have been in six prisons and one common denominator I have seen are men who say they want to take care of their children. They mean it when they say it. Then when they get out, the children are the last things on our minds. A lot of us just don't know what a father is. We don't even know what a man is!

—Philadelphia Inquirer, May 2001

Fathers in Prison

Stephen is 32 years old. He was sentenced to twenty years for a series of burglaries and has been incarcerated for the last eight years. He states, "After being here for eight years and sleeping in the same cell every night, if you are strong enough, you begin to face the truth within your life. You begin to understand your motivations in life and eventually you begin to really feel the consequences of those motivations. You begin to see how you have hurt yourself, your victims, your family, and especially your children. I lay in my cell and I listen to the noise and the silence. I think about my two kids every night. I think about how I was always too busy running the streets to spend time with them. I think about how I have deeply hurt them by committing crimes and coming to prison. But most of all I think about how I can become a better father to them and not necessarily make up for lost time, but be a loving and positive role model.

—from *Teaching Parenting Skills to Incarcerated Fathers* by Carl Mazza

Everyday, more than 500,000 fathers are in prison; half of these men have children under the age of 18. It is estimated at 1.5 million children have a parent in prison. In addition to the stress of separation, erratic living arrangements, and the like, as a group these children are less likely to succeed in school, and more likely to be involved in substance abuse, gangs, and delinquency. They are five times as likely to end up in prison themselves. The prison population is increasing due to longer prison terms and more sentences for non-violent crimes; therefore, more children will be at risk to troubling behaviors and need an array of human services. Incarceration has an impact on child welfare. Most children in foster care have had an incarcerated parent, although many children who have an incarcerated parent live with their mothers or other family members.

The criminal justice system and the child welfare system share much of the same population. Many inmates themselves were, at one time, part of the child welfare

system. The typical male grew up in a single parent home; one in seven was raised by relatives, and 17 percent spent time in out-of-home care. Most male offenders have limited education and poor employment skills. At time of arrest, 90 percent had an income below \$25,000 and 69 percent had an income below poverty level. Indeed, this is a population that is most in need.

But, fathers are good for their children, and research shows, children are good for their fathers. Reaching out to these fathers while they are in prison, connecting them with their children, helping them examine their roles as men and fathers, and providing meaningful support for them can strengthen and build families in the child welfare system. At the same time, providing fathers with motivation, support, and skills can lessen the likelihood of their re-entry into the criminal justice system. And, as research shows, this decreases the likelihood of their children, especially their sons, spending time in prison.

The child welfare system has overlooked incarcerated fathers. Imprisoned fathers are often considered as uninvolved, inaccessible, and unlikely role models for children. Most are not involved in decision making, case planning, or service delivery. Most states and child welfare agencies do not have written, up-to-date policies regarding child welfare practice with incarcerated parents, or if they do, they focus on incarcerated mothers. Workers receive little guidance, training, or support in including incarcerated fathers. Yet, child welfare workers are legally mandated to facilitate parent-child visits. Child welfare workers, and children, face many obstacles in

visiting a father in prison: the lack of communication, difficulties in scheduling visits, the time-consuming nature of visits, and visiting procedures that are uncomfortable or humiliating. Prisons are not child friendly and few rules or regulations facilitate father/child visits. Even communication between fathers and their children (mail, phone, visits) are all highly regulated, often insensitive, expensive, and, due to various literacy rates, limited. Furthermore, if a child's mother refuses or objects to a child visiting a father in prison, the father may not get to see his child at all. Indeed, a father serving a long sentence may never spend any time outside of prison with

his young children. How can his role of father be strengthened to make a difference for his child?

A small but growing number of states and statewide efforts to support fatherhood within the criminal justice and child welfare system, as well as community-based programs targeted to recently released or paroled fathers, reflect an increased recognition in the importance of incarcerated fathers' role in the lives of their children and their well-being. Collaboration between criminal justice and child welfare systems to develop family-oriented policies and programs for incarcerated parents is beginning. We include some examples of programs, as well as resources, that illustrate

Fathers in Prison: Changing Child Welfare Policy

- ◆ Child welfare and correctional leaders should establish national standards covering parents and their children and adopt these standards as a part of the accreditation process for correctional institutions and child welfare agencies.
- ◆ State-level departments of child welfare and federal-level child welfare agencies should provide leadership in developing model policies and administrative regulations to guide child welfare proactively when children are involved in the child welfare system and their parents are in correctional institutions.
- ◆ Family advocates and child welfare and criminal justice professionals should promote the development of a national research, knowledge-building, and knowledge-dissemination agenda focusing on prisoners and their families and children.
- ◆ Social service organizations and practitioners should provide leadership for the development of public policies and service programs that help parents in prison maintain ties with their children and address family needs related to correctional supervision.

From Seymour, Cynthia and Creasia Finney Hairston, Eds., (2001). "The Forgotten Parent: Understanding the Forces that Influence Incarcerated Fathers' Relationships with Their Children," Children with Parents in Prison, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

how programs to support fathers are emerging.

Programs for fathers

- ◆ **The Alliance of Concerned Men (Abridging)** in Washington, DC, provides parenting lessons to fathers in prison, and brings their children to see them.
- ◆ **PATCH (Papas And Their Children)**, run in Texas by the Bexar County Adult Detention Center and Detention Ministries, encourages inmates to attend parenting and life skills classes—sessions intended to help reduce recidivism. For each one-hour class attended, a father is entitled to a one-hour “contact” visit with his child (sitting in a room with his child, instead of speaking through a glass window).
- ◆ **FATHERS (Fathers As Teachers: Helping, Encouraging, Reading, Supporting)** program focuses on literacy and parenting skills for fathers in jail, while helping the children with schoolwork.
- ◆ **Long Distance Dads, Incarcerated Fathers Program**, is an educational and support program developed in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. Many community-based fatherhood programs are facili-

tating weekly support groups for fathers in their county prisons. Once they return to the community, fathers are able to seek assistance with job training, education, counseling, and support from the fatherhood program. (Visit www.fcnetwork.org/fatherhood/turner.html)

- ◆ **Georgia Fatherhood Program** works with fathers who are incarcerated for a long term. The goal is to help them stay connected to their children if the custodial parent/guardian and child are in agreement.

For a listing of nearly a dozen other state programs, see www.fcnetwork.org.

Programs for children

There are several programs for children whose parents are incarcerated. Programs for children range from support groups, community outreach programs, and tutor/mentor programs that are designed to bridge the gap between children and parents who are imprisoned.

- ◆ **Angel Tree**, a multi-state Christian organization, gives gifts to children of imprisoned parents.
- ◆ **FORUM** provides youth with development and leadership skills.

- ◆ **Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners** is operated by the Child Welfare League of America in collaboration with the Department of Justice and the National Institute of Corrections. www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/frccpabout.htm

References and Resources

Family and Corrections Network offers a wide variety of information, training, and technical assistance. www.fcnetwork.org

Child Welfare League of America, An Overview of Statistics. www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/factsheet.htm

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Fatherhood or Father-in-the-Hood?

Washington, D.C. has seven community collaboratives across the city whose mission is, in part, to provide neighborhood families who are at risk of coming into the child welfare system with community-based services and supports. The collaboratives work intensively in partnership with the city's public Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA).

Raymond Coates-EL is a family support worker at the North Capitol Collaborative. Based on his personal experiences, he recognized the need to help fathers in this collaborative connect and strengthen their ties to their children. When he was paroled from prison, he had a hard time reestablishing a relationship with his son who lived with his son's mother. Mr. Coates-EL had no one to help him.

At the time of his release from prison, his parole officer asked him a lot of questions like, "Where are you going to live?" "Do you have a job?" and "How are you going to find a job?" But, Mr. Coates-EL said, "The parole officer didn't ask me if I have any children. And, in some ways, my son was one of my potential lifelines. My son could be a reason for me to be successful."

Later, as a family support worker, he became aware of how few men were a part of the lives of their children who were involved with the child welfare system. He didn't think that was good for the children, or for the men themselves, for that matter.

He thought the situation was only going to get worse. For example, during 2002, approximately 2,500 ex-felon men

returned to the District of Columbia from prison, and many—if not most—are fathers. Would they reconnect with their children? If not, how could the collaborative help these men do so in positive ways?

Mr. Coates-EL proposed to the North Capitol Collaborative and the CFSA an outreach program to fathers whose children are (or are at risk of becoming) involved in the child welfare system and took on an additional job responsibility as the Coordinator for the program "Daddy's Here."

Characteristics and components

The program, which began in 2000, is for fathers, most of whom do not live with their children. So far, 271 men have participated (with an estimated 65 percent repeat rate in the support groups noted below). Only three of the men who participated lived with their children. Mr. Coates-EL recruited participants through outreach with homeless men and those who resided in halfway houses where men live as they adjust from prison to community life.

The most important component is the educational and support groups. The group focuses on fathers' involvement in the lives of their children. To do this, participants define the meaning of maleness, being a man, and being a father—fatherhood versus "father-in-the-hood." They talk about difficulties they are having in handling their children and share their successes. They discuss the barriers they

have to showing love and affection. They also develop practical plans for reaching out to their children, such as buying school supplies.

The support groups also focus on other life needs—such as job linkages. Daddy's Here works with several job training programs and job referral programs, including Jubilee Jobs, Jobs DC, and Strive.

Initially, the support groups used discussion and sharing, but recently, Mr. Coates-EL and his colleagues have developed a culturally competent curriculum that they use to cover important topics. For example, one focus of the curriculum is the images of fatherhood. Mr. Coates-EL asked, "Do you want to be the man on the corner in expensive shoes hustling? If so, your kid is learning the art of hustling from you. That's one image of fatherhood your kid can learn. Do you want to be the man who simply buys a pair of tennis shoes for your kid, or do you want to be involved in teaching him some important things about life?"

The groups meet at two different neighborhood sites in the District of Columbia. The program is working with local agencies to establish a new, open, and neutral meeting place and space for individual consultation.

Daddy's Here also establishes direct links between the North Capitol Collaborative, the fathers, and other agencies and programs including Child Support Enforcement, the D.C. Department of Employment Services, and the Court Services and Offenders Services Agency (parole and probation). These connections are important because these agencies serve

the same population, and, through these relationships, Mr. Coates-EL and other North Capitol Collaborative staff can advocate for their clients.

Planning for the future

What's next? "We've been very successful so far. We've already learned a lot in a short time," Mr. Coates-EL explains, "But we've learned that if we're going to be even more helpful to our men, we need to be able to provide them with case management services."

Many of the men are at the fringes of being reintegrated into their community; it is often difficult to keep track of them and maintain their involvement in an organized and productive way.

"These men really need case management to help them access necessary services, for example, employment, counseling, and wrap-around services," Mr. Coates-EL continued. "We use a team approach; the client and the facilitator identify his strengths and needs. Then the team focuses on the identified need, such as employment, or mental health issues, and wraps services and supports around the client to help him achieve his goals."

Mr. Coates-EL is planning a retreat with participants and community stakeholders to evaluate the program: what's working and what is not, how to shape services to meet the changing needs of the target population, and the program's growth needs. Clearly his program in the Collaborative cannot meet all the needs of the city. In fact, in May 2002, D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams announced plans to create a citywide Father Initiative with initial funding of \$1,000,000.

A Father Finds His Way

When he heard the news he was a father again, Andre Galette was a drug-dealing street hustler sitting in a prison cell, wondering if he was the one getting hustled.

It was the spring of 1995 and Galette was serving a two-year sentence at the Suffolk County House of Correction. He stared at the baby picture that arrived in the mail. And he stared again. It was from a woman who claimed she had his baby. "I met her through dealing (drugs)," he recalls. "She sent a picture of a newborn and she said, 'This is your son.' I didn't even know she was pregnant. It blew my mind. I went around with the picture and said, 'Does he look like me?'"

Correction officers and inmates, who rarely agree on anything, offered a unanimous decision. "They said, 'You couldn't deny that in court.' And he does look just like me, a handsome fella."

Galette explodes in a belly laugh that the neighbors in his two-bedroom apartment in Roxbury could surely hear. Then he gets up because he's got laundry and food shopping to do, and he has to get to the corner before the bus delivers his five-year-old son, Darien, from day care.

"It's not easy being a single dad," he says. "I now have a lot more respect for single moms."

This is a story of pain and loss, of addiction and rehabilitation. But mostly this is a story of love.

Andre Galette, 39, was born and raised in Brooklyn. "I was always on the other side, the black sheep of the family. Nobody in my house drank or smoked."

Galette started smoking marijuana at 15. "In order to survive I started selling it, then crack came out and it was better money.

"Everything was brought to you. You never stopped and took a look at where you were going. It was too wild, nonstop until you passed out, girls all around, everything you wanted was coming from crack. It's amazing how a little thing like that can take over your life. I was totally out of it."

In 1985, he moved to Massachusetts. But the drugs ruined his first marriage and he was in and out of jail for drug possession. He barely knew his first son, now 11. "It was all my fault. I had a beautiful wife. I was a zombie."

But old habits are hard to break. When Galette got out of jail in 1996, he went back to the projects and his life of drugs. "It

Editor's Note: This *Boston Globe* news story shows how many individuals and services supported this man's decision to be an active father for his young son: the prison system provided substance abuse programs; the child's mother encouraged his relationship; the Department of Social Services provided parenting and anger management courses; the school welcomed and encouraged his involvement, and the employer adjusted his work schedule to accommodate his son's school schedule. His neighborhood found him a "hero." Yet, tucked away into this article are the societal misconceptions, including those within social services, that black men are unlikely to succeed in rearing a child.

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was like I was missing something up here,” he says pointing to his brain. “I went right back to what I left, and you go back to that area, there’s nothing to go back to but use. It was like I never left. At first I thought it was great. But then I knew it was over when I got a flashback of me laying in the cell, counting time. I thought, I’m better than that.”

Then a chance meeting changed his life. “I was driving my friend’s car without a license. I was goin’ to get high and a guy was stuck in a van with his hood lifted up, and I knew the guy. I pulled over to give him a boost and who is in the van? Darien’s mother. She says, ‘Oh my God, c’mon let me take you to see something.’”

They went to her apartment two blocks away.

“He (Darien) was something like a year old and he just ran to me like a speeding bullet, and just jumped on me and held me so tight. And I left with him that day. That was one of the best feelings I felt in my whole life. The way he charged me and hugged me and didn’t want me to let him go. I felt his heart beating against mine. It was like he went right inside of me. That was one helluva feeling.”

Darien started spending the weekend with his father, but during the week, Galette slipped, got involved with drugs again, and was sent back to jail for the last time in 1997. For reason it refuses to divulge, DSS eventually took custody of Darien from his mother.

“My last trip, I noticed they had recovery units,” Galette says. “People I used to use with had stopped using. They were telling me I didn’t have to live like that no more, and to hang with the winners. And

they looked good. I took their advice and started going to Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous.”

When he was released in late 1997, “I stopped using and went to detox.” When he got out he contacted DSS and asked for Darien back. Officials encouraged him to complete a battery of social programs including parenting and anger management. DSS said it required two-bedroom housing, and a steady job. “I told them, ‘No problem. I’ll get on it.’”

He did more, according to Keith Williams, who runs the Family Nurturing Center, a 13-week, DSS-supported program in Dorchester, and the Nurturing Father’s Program for single fathers. Galette completed both with flying colors, Williams says.

“He’s a great guy, a hard-working father, and one of the few fathers who go the extra mile for their son,” says Williams.

Two years ago, Galette landed a job in the paint department at the Home Depot in Dorchester, where he was honored as employee of the month in October 1999. They also adjusted his schedule so he could get Darien off to day care, and meet him at the bus stop.

A visit to Darien’s day-care center is a lovefest for Galette. Upstairs, the teacher offers him lunch, downstairs the principal wants him to taste the homemade yams, and in between, one mother wants to take him home for dinner. A single father in a world of single mothers. “Life is good,” he says.

Galette says he’s doing his best to spend as much time as possible with his older son, Patrick. “I wish I could do

more, but right now taking care of Darien is like a full-time job,” Galette says.

His life has totally changed. “I’m up at six every morning, making breakfast. Then I get Darien off to day care and go to work. I meet the bus, make him dinner, and make sure he’s brushed his teeth and in bed by 8:30. Then I lay out his clothes for the morning. Sometimes in the morning when the alarm rings he comes in and pushes me. ‘C’mon, dad, get up.’”

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” says Kelly O’Hara, who has worked as a DSS social worker for five years. “He’s a hero. For society as a whole, but especially

black men. They need more of this. He changed his lifestyle and everyone from here to the courts loves him. You can see the difference in Darien. Before he was very angry and aggressive and always getting into fights. He wouldn’t listen to anyone. Now he’s really happy.”

On a stroll through the neighborhood, Galette accepts the praise with his customary smile. Shy, he is not.

“That was my weakest thing—being responsible. Today I realize my main responsibility is Darien. For all my 39 years this is the best time. Today I am living. Before, I was surviving.”

Check out our Resource Center’s Web site

- ✓ Complete previous issues of *Best Practice/Next Practice*
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 - ◆ Adoption and Safe Families Act
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- ✓ Services that our Resource Center provides to States and Tribes including
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- ✓ Useful resources and publications



The National Family Preservation Network's Fatherhood Training Curriculum

Principles, Policies & Practices to Engage Fathers in their Children's Lives

In response to the lack of resources to engage and involve fathers in their children's lives, the National Family Preservation Network is now offering its *Fatherhood Training Curriculum* with principles, policies, and practices to engage fathers.

This curriculum shows that everyone working in the child welfare agency, from administrators and supervisors to frontline workers and clerical staff, plays an important role in making the agency father inclusive. In addition to program changes, even facilities can be redesigned with pictures, magazines, meeting areas, and hours of operation that accommodate interests directed to fathers.

A two-year study on fatherhood conducted by the National Family Preservation Network has concluded that in every state the child welfare system must work on bridging the gap between a historical "mother-and-child-only" focus and one that now includes the father. The system must be expanded to accommodate the important role an involved father can play in creating a healthy family. Utilizing a research-based review of literature, contacts with child welfare and fatherhood programs in many states, and discussions with focus groups, the

Network uncovered no written policies, resources, or training curricula in the child welfare system to engage and involve fathers in their children's lives.

The *Fatherhood Training Curriculum* includes:

- ◆ A summary of research on fatherhood and key issues
- ◆ Current child welfare practices regarding fathers
- ◆ Methods to establish father inclusive policies
- ◆ Means of understanding and communicating with fathers
- ◆ Principles of practice including three case examples
- ◆ Evaluation tools

The *Fatherhood Training Curriculum* has been field-tested in four sites across the country including: El Paso County, Colorado; Sarasota, Florida; San Antonio, Texas; and Indianapolis, Indiana. Site responses are being used to develop further resources including a specialized training guide for child welfare agencies.

The National Family Preservation Network announced that their work on fatherhood has resulted in a three-year, \$435,000 grant from the Stuart Foundation. The grant will be used to implement fatherhood principles, policies and practices

based on the curriculum at two child welfare agencies in California and Washington. Agency staff will receive training and learn skills for engaging and involving fathers in their children's lives. A research component and training materials on best practices will be developed during the three-year project.

Summaries of the fatherhood findings have been produced in two revealing position papers, including: *Fatherhood in the Child Welfare System* and *An Assessment of Child Welfare Practices Regarding Fathers*. The funding for these important fatherhood studies was provided by The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and The Annie E. Casey Foundation. For further review, both documents are available at www.nfpn.org.

The *Fatherhood Training Curriculum* is \$50. Ordering information, on-site training, and a more detailed review of the curriculum can be obtained by calling Priscilla Martens, Executive Director, National Family Preservation Network, toll-free at 1-888-498-9047; e-mail her at director@nfpn.org or visit www.nfpn.org.

Resources—Building a Five-Foot Bookshelf

Best Practice/Next Practice *hopes to help readers sort through the many resources that are related to family-centered practice. As a part of this process, we are building a “five-foot bookshelf” of important resources, old and new, by reviewing new books, videos, and other resources, and recommending older, “classics.” The*  *symbol indicates “highly recommended—add it to your list.”*

 **Roberts, Dorothy. *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 250 pp. ISBN 0-455070582.**

Occasionally, a book comes along that taps into an especially important topic, one that synthesizes a wide array of information and creates an urgency that cannot be ignored. Books like this send a rumble like an earthquake through the child welfare system and, going beyond reporting, can initiate change. *Shattered Bonds*, an analysis of the devastating effects of child welfare on black families, is such a book.

Roberts presents a painstaking analysis of the child welfare system with a focus on the over-representation of black families in the system. The portrait she paints is serious and severe. Contrary to the self-professed intentions of the system, child welfare has little to do with the welfare of children. Roberts claims that it is a system of child protection that seeks to protect children from a society that refuses to promote the genuine welfare of children. The system is punitive and disrespectful of families and children. It is focused on identifying allegedly abusive parents and then removing their children to substitute care, often without sound evidence or rationale.

The result of this, she finds, is that more than a half a million children are in substitute care, often for very poor reasons. In her analysis, decision making in child welfare is so idiosyncratic as to be almost random. One researcher describes placement as a lottery. One factor, however, that does correlate strongly with the tendency to place children is their Medicaid eligibility. Children of the poor are disproportionately reported, investigated, and committed to the child welfare system. Given the fact that a third of black children live in poverty and the compounding legacy of institutional racism that exists within the system, black children comprise 42 percent of our country's foster care population.

Once in the system, families' problems become compounded. After a family is found to be neglectful, the child welfare system turns towards proving the legitimacy of the complaint against a family and justifying the casework decision concerning the family. Families find themselves open to additional charges and complex service requirements that make it

often difficult to get children out of the system.

This is a rich and complex book, especially as Roberts looks into the combined effects of recent policy initiatives, such as the intersection of welfare reform and child welfare reform, and probes for the long-term effects and implications of this social condition on community well-being. Roberts' study comes full circle in a way that supports the urgency of our current project at the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice—building momentum for family-centered systemic reform through the Child and Family Services Review. Roberts calls for reforms that include authentic family participation in child welfare services, as well as greater accountability to communities on the part of the state for child welfare services. These are core strategies currently pursued as family-centered systemic reform. This book has much to offer anyone who is concerned about the current state of child welfare in the United States and wants to promote meaningful change.



National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice

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