
Notes on the Collaboration Network Call –November 2, 2005

Thank you very much to Ms. Lydia Velez Herrera, President of Sin Barreras/Without Barriers, who gave the November 2, 2005 presentation on the Collaboration Network Call on “How Fatherhood Initiatives Empower Women.”

- **Please save the date: The next Collaboration Network Call will be on February 7, 2006, 1:30 PM CT, 2:30 PM ET.** The topic selected by participants is “Helping Children with Incarcerated Parents.”

You will find the announcement of the next call and information on how sign up for it on the Fatherhood Listserv approximately a month prior to the call.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Mike Vicars, Region V Child Support, and Kathleen Penak, Region V Head Start, welcomed the participants on the call and participants introduced themselves.

Illinois Participants:

- Bailey, Emma – PCCEO Head Start, Peoria
- Carter, Mary - DCSE, Marion
- Englert, Joe – Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, Chicago
- Frizzell, Tracy, Economic Awareness Council
- Harris, Kirk - Family Support America, Chicago
- Pargin, Shannon - Southern Illinois University Carbondale Head Start, Carbondale
- Stevenson, Norris, Division of Child Support Enforcement
- Wieneke, Jeffrey, Two Rivers Head Start, Batavia
- Wood Harris, Barbara – PCCEO Head Start, Peoria

Michigan Participants:

- DeFeyter, Melanie - Child Development Services of Ottawa County, Holland
- DeKraker, Brian - Eight CAP, Inc., Greenville
- Durnan, Ellen – Child Support Enforcement, Department of Human Services
- Goorhouse, Ruth - Sault Ste. Marie
- Mishigaud, Mindy - Wilson
- Wilson, Duane - Michigan Fatherhood Coalition, Detroit

Minnesota Participants:

- Martin, Barb - Mahube Head Start, Detroit Lakes
- Titcomb, John - Otter Tail-Wadena CAC Head Start, New York Mills
- Larsen, Trygve –Department of Human Services, Child Support
- Auten, Lynn, Child Support

Ohio Participants:

- Killpack, Steve - Healthy Fathering Collaborative of Greater Cleveland, Cleveland
- Price, Peggie - Council for Economic Opportunities, Cleveland

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- Shadd, Ronald - Council for Economic Opportunities, Cleveland

Wisconsin Participants:

- Green, Nichole - Dane County Parent Council, Inc, Head Start, Madison
- Taylor, Mark – Dane County Parent Council, Inc. Head Start, Madison

Washington D.C.

- Langrock, John – Child Support Enforcement

Region V Participants:

- Clair, Bill - Runaway and Homeless Youth
- Krasner, Steve – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- Lawrence, Linda - Child Support
- Lee, Niki - Runaway and Homeless Youth
- Miller, Constance - Child Welfare
- Penak, Kathleen - OFCD
- Smith, Harlan – Child Care
- Smyth, Joe - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- Thomas, Krista – Child Welfare
- Vicars, Mike - Child Support
- Weiser, Jenny – Runaway and Homeless Youth

Booz Allen Hamilton Participants:

- Baker, Dean
- Rakov, Lois

** There were possibly other participants whose names or organizations names were not captured clearly on the call and we'd like to add you to the participant list. Please e-mail Rakov_lois@bah.com with this information. Thank you.*

Lois Rakov, Booz Allen Hamilton, introduced the presenter, Ms. Lydia Velez Herrera.

Ms. Velez Herrera is an advocate with twenty years of experience working with families on issues of health, education access to the legal and social services for families. She has over 10 years of experience working with fathers in the area of child support, visitation and promotion of healthy parenting. Lydia is a strong believer that a child's development is hindered when fathers are not equally involved as mothers are in the life of a child. Her work is about helping fathers remove barriers that impair their ability to participate to the fullest in the life of the children.

Lydia is the proud mother of a beautiful daughter who struggles with a bipolar disease. Its through her daughter's love for her father and his lack of participation in her life that she has learned first hand about the importance and vital need to have fathers participate to the fullest in the life of their children. She speaks to audiences across the country about the importance of fatherhood and points out the value of mothers and the benefits of co-parenting for both parents.

She shares her journey with all that want to hear it in order to highlight that both parents are the orchestra behind their children. It's her unique style which allows participants at trainings and at her keynote speeches to learn about the magical combination of both parents working together. She is not naive to the many barriers that parents will confront at trying to work together and offers realistic solutions as well as demonstrates how they can be implemented. Lydia is the president of Sin Barreras/Without Barriers her own consulting firm. She is also the Director of Sin Barreras a Latino outreach Project of Advocacy for Patients with Chronic Illness. Inc., where patients can get free information, advice and advocacy services from attorney Jennifer C. Jaff, jenniferjaff@sbcglobal.net and other volunteers trained to help secure their rights.

I. Topic: How Fatherhood Initiatives Empower Women

Ms. Lydia Velez Herrera, President of Sin Barreras/Without Barriers, began the discussion by explaining that she believes we have the energy to change the world.

It is important not to compare the roles of mothers to the roles of fathers. Although a father's function has traditionally been that of the "bread winner", now it is important for fathers to take an active role in raising their children. Fathers need to share the love and attention of the child with the mother. Both mother and fathers need to be taught how to co-parent. Parenting has been focused on the mothers, but it has been realized that a father is something that a child cannot live without. Mothers need to learn to share the parenting responsibilities with the fathers.

If the parents are no longer together as a couple, they still must maintain a relationship for the well-being of the child. The parents must work together to negotiate parenting roles with each other. If the father has an active role in the life of the child, that is what empowers women.

In order to empower women, the mothers must meet half way, and should not compete with the father over parenting. Ms. Velez Herrera gave the example of her own life and child. After years of being a single mother, Lydia made it her mission to locate the father of her child. Although this was ultimately not something that she wanted to do, Ms. Velez Herrera knew that she must because that is what her daughter craves and needs.

A question arose on how programs are handling this complex issue of involving fathers in the lives of their children. Ms. Velez Herrera mentioned that many programs are explaining what fathers are and what a good fatherhood program is. Fathers need to be shown that things are shifting, and fathers are not seen as an "open wallet," but more as taking a vital role in a child's development. Programs must teach that fathers are nurturing and take on more nurturing roles. Ms. Velez Herrera also stressed the importance that Fatherhood Programs do not belong at the state and federal levels, but serve better as local programs.

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A question arose on how to train staff to handle a situation where the mother will not disclose the contact information of the father. The mothers do not see the fathers as playing vital roles. Ms. Velez Herrera suggested that the staff educate the mothers on the importance of fathers in their children's lives. Also the mother needs to be assured that fatherhood programs are not hurtful to her or the relationship she has with her children. Some participants on the call stated that certain staff won't pursue getting information about the fathers from the mother, if the mother is reluctant to give it. There are mothers who threaten to take their children out of the Head Start program if father involvement is further urged. Lydia said the programs should not minimize what the mother has done so far in the life of the child.

Ms. Velez Herrera discussed what she has done in the past to convince a mother to contact the father. She has the mothers compile a list of five reasons why to contact the father and another list of five reasons why not to contact the father. Afterwards, most mothers see the importance of contacting the fathers.

With all Fatherhood Programs, it is important to establish what the interaction between the mother and father will consist of once the father is involved. If the mother is not comfortable with the father being at her residence, then a neutral location should be established. Many programs allow the transfer of the child to take place at their facility. We need to learn as a community to try to get both parents involved.

II. Possible Topics for future Collaboration Network Calls

Lois Rakov presented a list of different possible topics for the focus of future calls that have been suggested at various calls by participants.

- Partnerships and Collaboration in Fatherhood/Male Involvement Programs to Enhance Funding
- In-Service Training and Staff Roles in Father/Male Programs
- Revisiting "Fatherhood" curricula
- Fathers as resources
- Continuing partnerships and collaboration relationships after funding for a program runs out: How to continue the momentum of partnerships and collaborations
- Grandparents and Kinfolk – particularly Grandfathers in parenting young children
- Access and Visitation: What dads and moms want to know: Updates on policies, programs and challenges
- Healthy Marriage Initiatives
- Connecting Parents with Children During or After Incarceration

Call participants discussed various topics and then agreed that they would like to discuss children with incarcerated parents. Participants made several suggestions for possible speakers on this topic.

III. Discussion

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Participants discussed a question about Child Support raised by a call participant during the previous call. The question and discussion concerned how states are handling reducing child support debts and if they are forgiving arrearages under particular circumstances. Mr. John Langrock, from the Office of Child Support Enforcement, joined the call to answer the question.

Mr. Langrock started out by giving some statistics of Child Support issues. Nationwide there are about \$100 billion dollars in Child Support arrearages. Over the last several years there have been numerous programs sponsored by state IV-D (Child Support) operations which included a component of arrears adjustment and might include amnesty programs, debt forgiveness, interest abatement, etc. Most programs do not have state legislation or are granted for specific periods of time and generally do not get renewed. In addition, in those states known to have a debt compromising program, only the portion owed to the state was considered.

A segment of the IV-D Child Support population that is showing alarming increases in arrears is the incarcerated non-custodial parent. In fact, without intervention, child support arrears increase about 60% during prison. However, intervening in these cases is very controversial with about 40% of the states viewing incarceration as "voluntary unemployment" and the other 60% of the states either seeing incarceration as a significant "change of circumstances" or taking no position on whether incarceration constitutes a legitimate "change of circumstance." Consequently, a few states have implemented policies and programs to address this area of increasing arrears by developing automated data matches between IV-D Child Support and Departments of Corrections, implementing promotional programming encouraging pro se filing of review and modification, and creating reentry programs, etc.

Kathleen Penak concluded the meeting by asking the participants to determine the date, and time for the next Collaboration Call.

The participants set the date and time for the next meeting as **February 7, 2006, at 1:30 PM CT, 2:30 PM ET.**