

Collaboration Network Calls Document

Notes from Collaboration Network Calls Fiscal Year 2005

October 12, 2004: Parenting and Relationship Building in Fatherhood/Male Involvement Programs

I. Welcome and Introductions: Mike Vicars and Kathleen Penak, Region V, welcomed all on the call, after which participants introduced themselves.

Region V:

Hich Yamagata, Child Care
Geneva Bishop, Child Support
Mike Vicars, Child Support
Constance Miller, Child Welfare
Ronald Stevens, Child Welfare
Krista Thomas, Child Welfare
Terry Davis, Head Start
Kathleen Penak, Head Start
Richard Nystrom, Head Start
Jennifer Gardner, Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY)
Gene Niewoehner, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Child Support Enforcement:

Illinois:

Mary Carter

Indiana:

Thelzeda Moore

Head Start:

Illinois:

Jeffery Wieneke, Two Rivers Head Start
Mark Podolner, Chicago Commons Head Start
George Haley, Springfield Urban League Head Start
Melanie Jones, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale
Shannon Pargins, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale

Indiana:

FeyFey Moussou, CANI Head Start

Michigan:

Mark Cavis, BHK Head Start

Minnesota:

Gene Banks, Lakes and Pines
John Titcomb, OTWCAC

Ohio:

Mary Bishop, Akron Summit Community Action, Inc.
Terry Smith, Child Development Council of Franklin County, Columbus

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Tommy Rae Jackson, Wayne Medina Head Start, Wooster

Wisconsin:

Amy Junker, Jefferson County Head Start

Terry Gay, CESA 7

Becky Minning, Jefferson County Head Start

David Pate, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Booz Allen Hamilton:

Diannya Bryson

Lois Rakov

Adrian Dominguez

II. Topic: Parenting and Relationship Building in Fatherhood/Male Involvement Programs

Presenters:

- **Mark Podolner**, Education Coordinator/Fatherhood Initiative Coordinator, Chicago Commons Head Start, Chicago, Illinois
- **Jeffrey Wieneke**, Father Involvement Coordinator, Two Rivers Head Start, Batavia, Illinois
- **George Haley**, Transportation Coordinator, Springfield Urban League Head Start, Springfield, Illinois

Mark Podolner highlighted major considerations that Father Involvement efforts need to keep in the forefront in building their programs including:

- Meeting Father's Needs
- Young Un-Employed Fathers
- Unconditional Support to Fathers
- "Stop Pushing Agendas and Listen to Fathers"
- Build-Up Father's Self-Esteem
- Accept Mothers are the Gatekeepers
- Involve the Mother's Current Partner
- Cannot Forget Grandparents or Other Relatives

Jeffrey Wieneke discussed the different types of actions he had taken to keep the parents involved and how he developed and maintained his relationships with the parents. Some of these actions are as follows:

- Having Individual contact with the staff and parent(s) that resulted in strong turnouts
- Created a database that contained information on the father or stepfather (name, address, etc.)
- Modeled in the classroom male appropriate behaviors
- Wrote personal hand-written thank you notes

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- Individual phone calls to the parents
- Encouraged fathers to discuss “hurts” and feelings
- Tried to break down any barriers, for example moving meetings into safer communities
- Need to work with staff who can be the greatest inhibitors for father involvement and need to address the total family needs
- Build from the internal strengths of the fathers
- Model respect for the child’s mother

As a result of using some of these methods, there has been an increase in parent participation by 25 percent, confidence of the fathers has increased, and participants have learned to lean on one another to gain strength.

George Haley spoke about a Healthy Relationship workshop held at Head Start in 2002. Mr. Haley then discussed another workshop/ training before which he had the parents complete a survey on the issues they wanted to discuss. He found this method to be more productive, stating that the turnout for this workshop had doubled in size over the prior one.

III. Discussion on Best Practices on Parenting and Relationship Building

Listed below are some best practices given by the presenters and some of the participants on the call involving Parenting and Relationship Building:

- Involve biological non-resident fathers and/or significant others in the children’s lives
- At the time of enrollment, have release forms that give the parents the option of saying if they want other family members given information about the programs
- Get the grandparents involved
- Teach parents how to read to their children
- Provide parents with awards for achievements
- Try to recruit families instead of only fathers
- Provide support groups

Participants also briefly discussed the role Child Support Enforcement policies have on father involvement in their children’s lives. Of particular concern was the question of “pass through” payments and how much money families and children’s got from the child support fathers pay and how much money is kept by the state. Participants brought out the need for Head Starts and community groups to understand their state’s policies and to bring Child Support speakers to the parents to answer questions. This topic will be followed up with information to be presented on the Listserv.

IV. Follow Up From August Collaboration Network Call: Participants’ Questions on TANF, Department of Labor Programs and Welfare-to-Work Gene Niewoehner, Region V Program Specialist, TANF Program

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Gene Niewoehner's presentation was in answer to the many questions raised on the prior Collaboration Network Call about employment and training programs and TANF. Notes from Mr. Niewoehner's presentation begin on page 8.

V. Future Topics

One participant made a suggestion for a future topic on how to work in partnership/ collaboration with private entities to obtain funding. A list of future topics will be placed on the Listserv.

VII. Speakers' Materials:

Mark Podolner:

Hi, I'm Mark Podolner the Director of the Nia Center of Chicago Commons, not surprisingly in Chicago. I am also the Coordinator of the Fathering Initiative at Chicago Commons. Most importantly, I have been actively involved working with fathers of all types in various capacities for almost 30 years now. So what I'm going to briefly talk to you about here is based on the totality of my experience since my work within Head Start is relatively new. However, nothing I've experienced in working in a Head Start context is significantly different than any of the other parameters I've worked with in other institutions (hospitals, child welfare agencies, family support programs, fathering organizations, etc.) The only difference is that Head Start has made an official effort to try and deal with the problems involved with father absence whereas many of the other efforts are unofficial, idiosyncratic and dependent upon a given fathering activist being there at a given program at a given time.

I was asked to talk about the issue of relationships in working with fathers and this question is much more complex and revealing than one might think initially. We generally focus on the tenuousness or non-existence of the child's relationship to his father and try to think about ways to enhance that relationship. However, what I'd like to suggest is that the problem is much deeper than that and when we look at the whole system of relationships involved it may cause us to think about changing our focus or our approach in some ways.

Fortunately, we have not (yet) gotten to the point where reproduction can occur without male involvement (minimal though it might be) in the reproductive process. But the fact that we're looking at that issue scientifically is just one more example of the evolving societal prejudice that fathers are irrelevant to the child rearing processes. But, for now, we can presume that every child, at least at one point, had a mother and a father. What the research, and our own experience, clearly demonstrates is that children, boys and girls, are at significantly increased risk for psychosocial damage for all types if they don't have a warm and loving relationship with their father. So what this tells us about the issue of relationships is that children appear to need a warm and loving relationship with their fathers to develop optimally. At a minimum, they need to feel that they have not been abandoned by their father or have a father who is absent and vilified by the

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mother. It is fascinating that the children of widows do almost as well as the children in two-parent households probably because at least they have an image in their minds of a father who loved them and no sense that they were abandoned because their father didn't love them.

Because this problem has been going on for generations now in the United States it is a much deeper than the current problem would indicate. That's because many of the mothers and fathers of today, especially but not exclusively in low-income, disadvantaged communities, have not experienced the love of their own fathers and so they are starting out the parenting process deeply damaged to begin with. This problem is sometimes seen superficially as the father having the lack of a role model for good parenting. If it were that simple and superficial of an issue it would be relatively easy to correct by providing alternate models through mentoring, using mothers as models for most aspects of fathering and providing good training. But the relationship problem is not that simple. Mothers and fathers who have not had good mothering and fathering themselves have internalized a profound sense of rejection that damages their self-esteem and poor self-esteem results in an inability to parent effectively, among other problems, and the cycle goes on.

Fatherless mothers are enormously important in transmitting the anger and depression that comes from the sense of abandonment, which includes the lethal feeling that your father didn't love you and the equally lethal feeling that your mother hates your father. In a nutshell, despite everything and the fact that out-of-wedlock marriage, divorce and separation, increasingly short term parenting relationships, and the very confusing situation of serial "fathering," children often sustain the two critical wishes that drive their inner psychological life: (1) They want their fathers to love them and be with them and (2) they want their mothers and fathers to love each other. These feelings that children have are very inconvenient for us because adults in an era of unbridled freedom and self-absorption often do not want to make a life-time commitment to their mate or their children.

We have often presumed that it is basically the father's fault that he is no longer in the family and there certainly are many cases of outright abandonment based on immaturity, irresponsibility and ignorance. But we keep forgetting that mothers and fathers used to stay together for a lifetime in every cultural and economic grouping in the not too distant past. Did fathers suddenly become irresponsible bums in the last 30 years ago for no reason other than their inherent selfishness? Have we reverted to our primitive primate nature in which our only parenting role is to impregnate as many females as possible? That would appear patently absurd on the face of it. If millions of people are doing something we don't like socially you can be assured that there is a societal cause for such behavior, and a partial, at least, societal remedy as well.

But to find such a remedy we have to look very deeply at all of the relationships in the complex degenerating systems of the modern American family and also look at some of the evolving positive alternatives because we're not going to return to the 50s model of marriage and family anywhere. It's going to look very different, but whatever evolves

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has to meet the core need of our children: a mother and father who love them, recognize each other's importance and differences, and at least remain civil to each other. Intense, uncontrolled conflict between a mother and father that the child is aware of is about the same as hitting that child over the head with a hammer.

I'm just going to outline the implications of my assumptions here so that we leave enough time to discuss them in depth in an ongoing dialogue:

(1) Connecting or reconnecting fathers to their children has to start with meeting fathers' needs since they have probably been damaged by lack of involved fathering themselves.

(2) To meet father's needs involves a kind of re-parenting that is often written off with the assumption that we have to focus almost exclusively on employment and employment related issues especially low income fathers.

(3) Even young, unemployed fathers are much more capable of dealing with the emotional issues involved with the situations they find themselves in than we think though they may not express it in the way women do it because of the social prohibition on even the appearance of masculine weakness. Look at our current Presidential elections for a powerful example of that ethos.

(4) Rather than sharing in groups (which can be done) there has to be a lot of unconditional support provided to fathers by the professionals in their lives and this includes fathering advocates, family workers, teachers, center directors and others.

(5) We have to stop pushing an agenda and listen to what fathers are actually saying once we truly give them that opportunity. It may not be what you think or want but we have to start there.

(6) We have to build up fathers' esteem by considering them full parents even if they don't have custody of their child unless they've been legally restricted from involvement at the center.

(7) We have to accept the reality that the mothers and their mothers are the gatekeepers of the children in most cases and we have got to work to engage them in the process of facilitating the biological father's involvement with his child. This is a very difficult task but extremely important. Our fathers in Head Start are rarely going to have the legal resources to litigate for access and increased involvement so we are left with negotiation and mediation as the only routes (and probably the best route anyway) to addressing the critical issues with involving the father and limiting the conflict between mother and father.

(8) We also must involve any mother's current partner in the process if he is now playing a care giving role. We are deluding ourselves if we over-focus on the biological father in cases where the current boyfriend provides a significant amount of care to the

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child and the biological father does not. Though involving the biological father should be our first goal it's not going to happen in every case and the next best thing is to have an involved, long-term father figure in the child's life that is also open to acknowledging the unique importance of the biological father, even if the child rarely or never sees him.

(9) We can't forget grandma, grandpa; auntie, uncle or whomever else is involved in the child's life and may be affecting the mother's attitude towards cooperating with the father.

(10) Though we're all necessarily under pressure to document the results of what we're doing in all areas of our programming we may be missing the boat if we look exclusively at the number of fathers we have engaged in support groups, trainings and activities. What may be more important is to analyze the progress involved in the relationship between all of the parties, mentioned above. It may be more difficult to measure but ultimately more significant. Surprisingly perhaps, I think the focus should be on staff training because if the teachers, many of whom may be suffering from father absence themselves) increase their awareness they could make an enormous difference in the fathers' sense of self-esteem. Then we have to do more outreach to the mothers and their support system to provide mediation services. Third on my list are the programs for fathers, themselves, which come much more easily if we break down the resistance from the mothers and the teachers, who greatly determine the degree of father involvement. A teacher who develops a relationship with one reserved father and gets him to come in and play with the children and utilize some of his talents and inclinations may do more than attendance at any large training. Sometimes it's the little things that add up to a shift in overall attitude that truly make for interpersonal and social change.

Remarks to the Fatherhood Region V Call by Gene Niewoehner

Regarding the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program:

Last week the House and Senate passed a Continuing Resolution (CR) to fund and operate the TANF Program as is through March 2005.

As for this fiscal year the prospects are very remote for TANF Reauthorization once the new Congress convenes in January. More likely there will be passage of a CR through the end of FY2005 with the hope that reauthorizing legislation can be completed to begin FY2006 with new TANF or Welfare Reform legislation and programs.

There are discussions among advocates and officials to develop legislation that looks at the whole US poverty and working poor situation to create new laws and funded programs that address that broader picture.

Right now everything will remain the same through March 2005, including the \$16.5 billion annual funding level and the current programs under TANF.

Regarding the Welfare-to-Work (WtW) and Workforce Investment Programs of DOL:

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Congress provided \$1.5 billion funding in each FY 1998 and FY 1999 for the Welfare-to-Work program of training and employment services provided by States and Discretionary funded grantees. In 1999 there was another year of welfare-to-work funds with revised eligibility for the programs approved by Congress for FY2000 but actually not awarded until FY2001.

The States and Discretionary Grantees awarded funds under the DOL Welfare-to-Work (WTW) Program were permitted to continue spending all remaining funds granted to them through FY2003. At present, no State or discretionary grantee has funding remaining under the now defunct Welfare-to-Work program of DOL.

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) is awaiting reauthorization like TANF and is now entering its second year without reauthorization action and like TANF is extended from month to month by Congress.

WIA combined some 106 employment and training programs into one program with five components which included the WTW program. Since it was originally authorized as Sunset legislation, the funding for this program has been reduced some 20 percent since its initial funding in 1999 of more than \$7 billion to a current FY 2004 level of \$6.2 billion. That figure is deceptive because it includes special unemployment compensation funding which was approved by Congress to deal with the recent recession's high job losses. If we take only the regular WIA programs that appropriation is still smaller.

Resulting Problems:

TANF caseloads have risen over the last year in all of the Region V States.

There are many that have left TANF to take employment but they are still in serious poverty situations.

Many of the working poor have lost their jobs, run the string on unemployment and/or TANF benefits, if they even qualified for any, and are now in record numbers seeking the assistance of food pantries and homeless shelters.

Few of the TANF leavers ever obtained jobs that paid a living wage with full benefits in the first place causing an increasing dependency on Food Stamps and Medicaid coverage during the recession-recovery period.

The urban and rural pockets of deep poverty are pretty much the same in numbers as before TANF was instituted. In fact Cleveland was reported several weeks ago to have the highest poverty rate in the country among major urban areas.

The Indian Tribes in the Region are struggling with large numbers of Indian families returning to their reservations after having lost their jobs in the larger off-reservation

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cities. Some Tribes have attempted to extend their service delivery systems to cover the members of their Tribes living in poverty in these areas. Most States in the U.S. and all in this Region are facing budget deficits restricting what they are able to do with non-Federal funding and programs to serve these needs.

Possible Solutions:

Encouraging prompt reauthorization or recomposition of the TANF and WIA programs and funding to better meet the needs of those who must rely on such aid.

Develop local public and private collaborations that maximize the optimal combinations of resources to address the existing needs for services and program administration.

Make better use of local employers and service organizations that might augment the public programs that focus on these residents in need.

Explore the option of better focusing community colleges, universities and vocational schools on the needs of the unemployed, underemployed, and those lacking the skills to compete effectively in today's job market.