

VII. FORMATION AND MAINTENANCE OF TWO-PARENT FAMILIES

The 1996 welfare reform law provided States with a great amount of flexibility in designing and implementing their programs. In designing programs States were required to meet the goals Congress specified in TANF. The four goals are to: (1) provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; (2) end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and (4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

While welfare reform goals specifically mentioned promoting job preparation, work and marriage; preventing and reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families, direct efforts related to goals three and four have been minimal. In FY 2000, States expended less than one percent of combined State and Federal expenditures on these goals. One hundred two million dollars was spent on pregnancy prevention and \$113 million was spent to promote marriage and reduce the incidence of divorce.

Though the direct activities to date addressing family formation goals in TANF have been very small, States are beginning to explore intensive programs and policies that hold promise for helping families and couples build skills that can contribute significantly to forming strong, healthy marriages. Below are some examples of these efforts.

Family Formation Activities

- Arizona's State legislature has established a Marriage and Communications Skills Commission. In addition the governor signed a bill that allocates \$1.65 million of TANF funds for: grants for community-based marriage and communication skills programs; vouchers for married or cohabiting parents whose income is less than 150 percent of poverty to attend marriage skills training courses; and the development and printing of a marriage handbook by the Marriage and Communication Skills Commission.
- In Oklahoma, the governor set aside \$10 million out of the TANF reserve fund to be used to strengthen marriages and reduce the incidence of divorce. Strategies include: statewide nurse home visiting programs to help strengthen and stabilize young parents' relationships and promote marriage; training State employees and communities to offer education and relationship skills workshops; and piloting a married couples mentoring program to serve as a follow up support for couples participating the skills workshops.

- Oklahoma's marriage initiative also includes training for TANF caseworkers so that they are able to discuss with clients the availability of marriage services and refer clients to relationship education. A two-day training is planned for the "gate keepers," the State staff who will make referrals to the program. Training is planned for 80-100 DHS and other agency staff, as well as faith-based organizations. The training will include participation in portions of the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement (PREP) curriculum, which will be offered to TANF clients themselves.
- Utah has a Governor's Commission that is focusing attention on strengthening marriages in Utah. The commission was charged with gathering information and studying the best marriage-strengthening practices in the country and then making recommendations to the governor and the first lady for actions that should be taken in Utah.
- The Governor's Commission has been awarded \$600,000 from the Utah Department of Workforce Services for four specific projects designed to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.
- Michigan has implemented a number of pilot initiatives to reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies and promote family formation. The pilots will be in five counties: Berrien County, Charlevoix/Emmet Counties, Genesee County, Kent County, and Wayne County/Detroit Medical Center. These communities will develop resources for classroom training and peer support. The curriculum will be developed by faith-based and other community-based organizations using TANF as the funding source. The pilots require the collaboration of the local TANF agency, hospitals, the local health department, and others in the community.
- Virginia's Partners in Prevention program began in FY 1998 and receives \$1 million from TANF each year. The program educates young adults and teenagers on the benefits of waiting until marriage before a child is conceived. Strategies include media campaigns, direct intervention, and public forums. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) sets general policy parameters, and then allows local coalitions the flexibility to design the precise delivery of services to meet the needs of their own communities. The VDH requests that applicants focus on areas such as: discouraging high-risk sexual behavior; delaying sexual involvement until marriage; discouraging cohabitation outside of marriage; encouraging marriage before a child is conceived; and encouraging male responsibility.

Partners in Prevention works in cooperation with similar initiatives such as the Virginia Abstinence Education Initiative, the Virginia Fatherhood Campaign, and the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative.

Beyond the activities mentioned above, other States are addressing family formation through State funded local programs. For example, States are encouraging premarital education and taking other steps to encourage marriage.

Fatherhood Activities

It is not always possible of course, for children to be raised in married two-parent families. In cases where children are raised in single-parent households, it is still crucial for the health and well-being of children for fathers to be emotionally and financially involved in their children's lives. Therefore, it is important to help fathers establish constructive, positive relationships with their children. States are now operating a significant number of State and federally funded initiatives aimed at improving father involvement in the emotional and financial aspects of their children's lives.

About half of all States are using some of their TANF funds to promote greater involvement by fathers in their children's lives. Included in TANF funded programs are: activities that reconnect divorced, separated, and other nonresident fathers with their children and help them be better parents; employment related activities such as skill development, job search, and career advancement that provide opportunities for low-income fathers to financially support their children; and relationship building activities that help never-married couples improve their relationship both as couples and as parenting partners, including considering the benefits of marriage. Below are specific examples of State activities.

- Arizona funds its statewide fatherhood initiative with TANF funds through contracts with local organizations to provide services. The State also funds mentoring programs for young fathers to assist them with parenting skills, employment, and visitation arrangements.
- California is funding a seven county program targeted at fathers, based on proposals the counties had submitted to the State. Program participation is voluntary in some counties and mandatory in others. Sites offer a range of services around employment, including support services, (e.g., substance abuse), as well as courses in parenting skills, conflict management, relationship building and custody and visitation.
- In Florida, the local WAGES (Work and Gain Economic Self-Sufficiency) coalitions that administer the TANF program are funding programs targeting fathers, including employment-focused programs that require that fathers who are delinquent in child support find work or go to jail. Another project targets fathers of Head Start children for help with computer training, entrepreneurial skills and self-empowerment. Additionally \$10 million in TANF funds are being administered by the Florida Commission on Responsible Fatherhood to fund local efforts to help fathers remain involved with their children.
- Georgia's Fatherhood Program helps parents who are unable to pay their child support. The program offers job placement, vocational training, counseling, a chance to earn a GED and the opportunity to play a supportive role in the lives of their children. Georgia's Department of Human Resources, Child Support Enforcement office has contracted with the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education to provide the training and other services at each of Georgia's 33 technical institutions and at three colleges with technical divisions. This makes the Fatherhood Program available within 50 miles of every Georgian.
- Indiana is using TANF funds for administrative costs associated with outreach to fathers, and to support community-based efforts that promote responsible fatherhood. TANF funds are

also used to fund projects that establish or expand effective father involvement strategies that serve to promote fathers' emotional and financial involvement in their children's lives.

- Iowa is using TANF funds for its Parental Obligation Program. This program is intended to help parents, especially fathers living apart from their children, to develop and maintain relationships with their children and meet their full range of paternal responsibilities. In collaboration with existing community resources, an array of services is provided that includes: family counseling; legal services; mediation; job training; substance abuse treatment; health maintenance; and personal mentoring.
- Michigan provides employment services to noncustodial parents who are unemployed or underemployed in order to enable them to meet their responsibilities to support their children.
- Missouri is expanding its Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Program statewide. Missouri's PFS program is based on the idea that both parents are responsible for supporting their children, both emotionally and financially. To participate in the program, an individual must: live in the State; be a noncustodial parent; be unemployed or underemployed; and be at least 18 years old. Parents' Fair Share offers a wide range of fatherhood-related services including parenting education, peer support, and substance abuse intervention.
- Mississippi has proposed using TANF funds for new initiatives to increase the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children and to provide supportive services to help fathers become more self-sufficient.
- North Carolina and Ohio are allowing counties to submit proposals to run their own fatherhood programs with TANF funds.
- Tennessee has been using TANF funds for its fatherhood pilot project in Davidson County (Nashville) since implementation of its waiver/TANF plan in 1996.
- West Virginia's Bureau for Children and Families (the TANF agency), the West Virginia Court of Appeals, the Human Resource Development Foundation, Inc., and the Domestic Violence Coalition have formed a partnership to fund and support a four-county pilot initiative called Parents Work-Families Win. Beginning in October 2000, the pilot project will operate in four counties: Monongalia, Preston, Wyoming, and Raleigh. The project is designed to assist noncustodial parents who are unable to meet their child support obligations because of underemployment or unemployment. The objective of the program is to assist noncustodial parents in obtaining and retaining employment. In order to qualify for the project, the parent's child or children must have received or must currently be receiving a public assistance check, Medicaid, Food Stamps, Social Security, or be covered by the Children's Health Insurance Program. Eligible participants will be offered assistance with employment, transportation, special clothing needs, car repairs and insurance, professional license, counseling and relocation services if necessary.

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage

The Bush Administration's FY 2003 budget proposes \$200 million to promote innovative approaches to strengthening families and promoting healthy marriages. \$100 million would fund research and demonstrations and provide technical assistance. \$100 million would fund a competitive grant program to a limited number of states, territories, and tribal organizations. A dollar-for-dollar match to participate in this program will be required.

In an effort to increase non-custodial parents' involvement in their children's lives, the 1996 welfare reform law authorized grants to help States establish programs that support and facilitate non-custodial parents' visitation and access to their children. In October 1997, DHHS announced the first award of \$10 million in grants to all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories to promote access and visitation programs. The minimum allotment for FY 2000 was \$100,000 per State. The minimum allotment for FY 2001 was also \$100,000 per State.

Most States focused their Access and Visitation grants upon the following goals: 1) increasing visitation between non-custodial parents and their children; 2) improving child well-being; 3) strengthening non-custodial parents as nurturers; and 4) improving the relationship between non-custodial and custodial parents. States pursued a wide range of services. The most often provided services were mediation and supervised visitation. Other major services provided included development of parenting plans, parenting education, and neutral drop off and pick up sites.

DHHS has also awarded funds for a number of studies and demonstrations including:

- an assessment of ways to improve the design of the child support program to increase payments, discourage 'default' or 'no-show' orders, and reduce arrearages;
- the development of computerized technologies to facilitate quick State/local access to income data in the New Hires Register and the State Employment Security Administration data;
- an assessment related to improved child support policies for incarcerated non-custodial fathers;
- an assessment of barriers to payment by low-income fathers;
- the development of collaborative approaches to assist low income fathers to find jobs and improve their incomes, pay child support, and stay involved with their children; and
- a study of efforts to assist fragile families, including the provision of a \$400 stipend to low income fathers while they participate in intensive job training and a parenting skills course.
- DHHS also has been involved in promoting more attention to the issue of keeping fathers involved in their children's lives through initiating demonstrations, sponsoring and participating in national and regional conferences, and distributing information on fatherhood program development and implementation. These efforts include the following:

- Early Head Start Fatherhood Demonstrations -- Twenty-one Early Head Start programs in 17 States have been awarded funds to develop replicable and sustainable father involvement components. These projects will receive funding of \$2.5 million in each of three years.
- Partners for Fragile Families -- A multi-State, multi-year project aimed at helping work with grass roots organizations to help unemployed and underemployed fathers become responsible fathers. This includes both financial responsibilities in paying child support, and emotional responsibility, by working with the mothers of their children to become “team” parents. Projects are funded in California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.
- Responsible Fatherhood Grants -- DHHS has funded eight child support enforcement demonstration projects (California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Maryland, Missouri, New Hampshire, Washington, and Wisconsin) that will help strengthen fathers' financial and emotional involvement with their children. Each State project is different, but they all provide needed services such as job search and training, access and visitation, social services, and/or case management. The initial implementation report, “DHHS Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Early Implementation Lessons,” has been released.

Ongoing DHHS Dissemination Activities

- DHHS maintains a website on fatherhood that contains information on DHHS fatherhood activities and links to related program and resources. The website address is fatherhood.hhs.gov.
- A study of the Department of Labor’s Welfare-to-Work (WtW) grant programs serving noncustodial parents has been conducted and released. WtW grants represent a valuable source of funding for local work-focused services to noncustodial parents. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, working with the Department of Labor, sponsored a study of 11 selected WtW grantees with a focus on noncustodial parents to identify how some WtW grantees have designed and implemented programs that address the employment and other service needs of noncustodial parents. The study report, “Serving Noncustodial Parents: A Descriptive Study of the Welfare-to-Work Programs”, documents a variety of recruitment strategies and service approaches being implemented and highlights key issues that must be addressed to serve this population.
- DHHS has developed a new tool to help fatherhood programs manage and assess their programs. The Responsible Fatherhood Management Information System (RFMIS) will help programs maintain information on the services needed and delivered to fathers in their programs. The system allows programs to track the progress of individual fathers and to aggregate data on program participants for reporting purposes. The RFMIS is available for use as a paper and pencil tracking system or as an electronic database that can be downloaded into any computer system that uses Microsoft Access.
- The Departments of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Education, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, and Labor, have issued a joint guidance, “Meeting the Challenge: What the Federal Government Can Do To Support Responsible Fatherhood Efforts.” The

guidance provides information to communities, States, and fathers about Federal resources to support the development and implementation of responsible fatherhood efforts. The guidance discusses the types of fatherhood programs being developed; potential funding streams, both direct Federal and State administered; partnership opportunities; and provides sources of information relevant to the development of fatherhood programs.

- A report on working with Hispanic fathers and families to increase educational achievement in Hispanic families was developed based on a meeting of community based programs serving Hispanic fathers and families, leaders in the fatherhood advocacy community, literacy program providers, and Federal staff to have a dialogue about Hispanic fathers and their role in promoting children's learning. The report, "Hispanic Fathers and Family Literacy: Strengthening Achievement in Hispanic Communities," provides a summary of that meeting and contains supplementary information that can help organizations in the development of programs and services for Hispanic fathers and their families.

