Fathers

Early Childhood Programs Find Ways to Engage Fathers

The contributions fathers can make in the lives of their children are numerous, profound, and well-documented in the scientific literature. Yet, those who promote more father-friendly family services find that the importance of a father's role is not always something that staff or fathers themselves recognize.

"When we worked with family support centers introducing fatherhood into this system, one of our greatest challenges was to train the staff and get the staff to understand the importance of fathers," said Kathryn Rudy, Director of the Division of Community and Internal Services, University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development (OCD).

"Many men don't even understand the important role they play in their child's life. Some of them had no model in their lives to follow."

The lesson was one of many to surface from recent experience and research related to efforts to design, operate, and sustain effective initiatives to increase the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children.

These efforts include the project to introduce fatherhood into Allegheny

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Ranks, Standards, and Oversight

Child Care Report Card: Room for Improvement

States earned unimpressive grades overall for their regulations related to child care center standards and oversight on a report card that ranks them on criteria ranging from requirements for child development activities to the frequency of inspections.

Pennsylvania earned its highest marks in standards, ranking fourth in that category. It fared poorly, however, in oversight, ranking 40th among all states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense, which has its own child care system.

Pennsylvania earned a total of 79 points – good for an overall ranking of 15th in the report released in March by the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA).

The average total score among the states was 70 out of 150 possible points.

"The results of this report card should be a wake-up call to policy makers," said Linda K. Smith, Executive Director of NACCRRA. "With the well-being of nearly 12

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million children under age 5 at stake, states need to make sure that children are safe and learning in child care."

The Department of Defense received the highest score – 117 points – and had the highest point totals in both categories. The next highest overall score – 90 points – was given to Illinois and New York. Idaho scored the lowest, receiving 15 points. No state was in the top 10 for both the standards and the oversight categories.

States were scored based on a point system of 100 points for child care standards and 50 for oversight. To rank the states, NACCRRA scored them on several aspects of their minimum standards for child care centers, including staff:child ratio, group size requirements, educational qualifications of directors and teachers, pre-service and annual training requirements for teachers, criminal background checks, developmental domains programs must address, health and safety requirements, and parent involvement, communication, and parental access.

The states were also scored on elements of their oversight regulations, including whether both child care centers and family child care homes are licensed, frequency of inspections, the number of programs per inspector, educational requirements for licensing staff, and whether inspection reports and complaints reports are available online to parents.

NACCRRA said the benchmarks were developed from available research in the field.

Among the common problems found among the states were infrequent inspections, deficient safety requirements, and low hiring standards for center employees.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the primary federal funding source for child care in the United States. Under the block grant, minimum health and safety requirements for states are extremely broad.

NACCRRA, as part of its report, recommends that Congress strengthen the CCDBG to ensure that children are safe and learning while in child care. The organization also calls on states to strengthen their standards by reducing staff-to-child ratios, requiring more extensive training and education of the workforce, and requiring that child care centers meet 10 basic health and safety standards.

The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare had no comment on the specifics of the report pending the completion of a review of the findings and data being done by the state Office of Child Development and Early Learning, said Stacey Ward, a department spokesperson.

Pennsylvania's low ranking in oversight appears largely due to findings that it does not meet recommendations for programs-to-licensing-staff ratios and that it does not make inspection reports and complaint reports available online to parents.

Inspectors in Pennsylvania are each responsible for an average of 153 child care programs. NACCRRA scores are based on the recommendation that each inspector be responsible for no more than 50 programs. In Pennsylvania, monitoring visits of child care centers are done once a year, according to the NACCRRA report card. The recommended frequency of those visits is four times a year.

In the key category of child care standards, however, Pennsylvania received much higher marks overall.

Adequate child care standards are considered the foundation for ensuring the quality of early care and education, and a safe environment for young children.

"From a practitioner point of view, a standard gives you a clear, concrete picture of what quality is, so you know what you are striving for. You know what it should look like," said Laurie Mulvey, Director, Division of Service Demonstrations, University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development. "Without standards, there is a general sense among practitioners that they want to be quality, but everybody has their own ideas about exactly what that is ."

In the standards category, Pennsylvania received its highest marks for requiring parent involvement, communication, and allowing parental visits, and for requiring programs to address six developmental domains: social, physical, language/literacy, cognitive/intellectual, emotional, and cultural.

Child care advocates and experts familiar with programs in Pennsylvania say the state's Keystone STARS program played a key role in raising the state's ranking in the standards category.

Keystone STARS is an initiative of the Department of Public Welfare's Office of Child Development and Early Learning to improve, support, and recognize the continuous quality improvement efforts of early care and education programs in the state. It is designed to encourage providers to improve the quality of their programs by offering them incentives, support, and assistance. Providers, for example, can earn financial rewards for achieving up to five levels of performance standards.

Each level builds on the previous one and uses research-based best practices to promote quality early learning environments and positive child outcomes. These standards address issues such as staff qualifications and professional development, early learning, partnerships with family and community, and leadership and management.

"The standards that we have under Keystone STARS

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States Struggle To Offer Affordable Child Care To All Families In Need

Affordable child care remains out of reach for many low-income families, according to a 50-state analysis by the National Women's Law Center of state reimbursement rates, waiting lists for assistance, and other factors.

In Pennsylvania, the state has taken important steps in recent years to make quality child care more accessible to low-income families. The study suggests there is room for improvement, however, noting that the state has a waiting list of several thousand children and that provider reimbursements remain below recommended levels.

The report by the Washington, DC-based National Women's Law Center (NWLC) found that most states fall short of adequately compensating providers who serve low-income children. The number of states that meet recommended reimbursement rates fell from 22 in 2001 to nine in 2006.

The report also examined income eligibility requirements, co-payments, and waiting lists. In these policy areas, the report shows a more mixed picture. Some states made small improvements during the past year, but, in most cases, states have lost ground since 2001.

In addition, the report warns that these problems are likely to worsen if, as expected, welfare work requirements enacted by Congress last year increase the need for child care assistance.

"The new federal welfare work requirements create more demand for child care assistance without providing enough funding to meet that demand," said Nancy Duff Campbell, Co-President of the NWLC. "States that have fallen behind in the last several years will have to work even harder to both make up for lost ground and ensure that low-income parents and children have the child care support they so desperately need."

States rely heavily on federal money to support child care. That funding, however, has failed to keep up with rising demand in recent years. The federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the major source of funding for child care assistance for low-income families. States can also transfer up to 30% percent of their TANF Block Grant funds to support child care. Even before adjusting for inflation, CCDBG funding declined slightly from a peak of $4.82 billion in fiscal 2002 to $4.8 billion in fiscal 2005.

Pennsylvania's share of federal funds for child care services slipped from $408 million in 2005-2006 to $406 million in 2006-2007.

"We need more subsidy money out there so that families who are struggling to make a living will have the access to the resources that will point them toward quality programs. And we need more quality programs in the neighborhoods where these people live," said Laurie Mulvey, Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development's Division of Service Demonstrations.

State Reimbursements

Compensating child care providers for serving low-income children is considered a critical part of giving those children access to high quality programs that research shows improves their chances of later succeeding in school and enjoying better outcomes as adults.

"The basis of all program quality starts with reimbursement rates," said Terry Casey, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Child Care Association. "The biggest cost factor in a child care program is staff. If you don't have adequate reimbursement rates, you cannot recruit and retain qualified staff."

In the report, each state's rate for child care reimbursement is based on a percentile of the highest private fees that all of the child care programs in a county charge. The federal government recommends that the child care reimbursement rates be set at the 75th percentile, meaning that 75% of the early childhood programs in a county charge less than that rate and 25% charge more.

Only nine states met the federal recommendations by setting rates at the 75th percentile in 2006 – six fewer than the previous year and a significant decline from 2001, when 22 states met the standard.

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touch on all aspects of quality — everything that the literature says you should do to improve the lives of children and their families, help educate children, and help nurture them," said Mulvey. "They pull quality apart and give providers clear standards at increasing levels so they keep trying to get higher and higher."

FOR MORE INFORMATION, see the report, "We Can Do Better: NACCRRA's Ranking of State Child Care Center Standards and Oversight," at: www.naccrra.org/

(Child Care continued from Page 3)

Pennsylvania is among the majority of states whose compensation of child care providers falls below the recommended level. However, the trend in Pennsylvania is one of improvement at a time when most other states are falling farther behind.

The state's 2006 maximum payment, for example, is set at the 60th percentile for center infant/toddler/preschool rates and the 70th percentile in the counties with a high concentration of young children in poverty. These new rates, which are set by the Department of Public Welfare's Office of Child Development and Early Learning, represent an increase from 2005, when rates were set at least the 52nd percentile for centers and at least the 60th percentile for the 13 counties with a concentration of young children in poverty.

"Despite no increase in federal dollars, Pennsylvania has been committed to raising reimbursement rates for providers and has increased funding each year in our efforts to move closer to the 75th percentile," said Stacey Ward, Department of Public Welfare spokesperson.

New funding in 2006-2007, she said, will enable the state to move closer toward achieving the federal recommended reimbursement rates.

Income Eligibility

Annual increases in a state's income eligibility requirement are essential to prevent low-income families from losing eligibility for child care subsidies when their incomes rise just enough to keep pace with inflation.

The NWLC report found that from 2005 to 2006, about two-thirds of the states raised their income eligibility limits enough to keep pace with, or exceed, increases in the federal poverty level. Looking back to 2001, however, fewer than one-third of the states increased their income cutoffs enough to keep pace with, or exceed, increases in the federal poverty level.

In Pennsylvania, the state's income cutoff was raised $840 in 2006 to $32,180 for a family of three, or about 194% of the $16,600 a year poverty level income. The 2005 income cutoff of $31,340 was 195% of the poverty level. In 2001, Pennsylvania's income cutoff of $29,260 was 200% of the poverty level income for a family of three, according to the NWLC report.

Waiting Lists

The NWLC report found that 18 states had waiting lists or had frozen intake for child care assistance in 2006, a slight improvement over 2005 and 2001. Some states had high numbers waiting for subsidized care, such as Florida, which had a waiting list of 54,000 children.

Waiting lists are fluid, fluctuating by season and often peaking during summer months when school is out. And some children on a waiting list may, in fact, be enrolled in child care due to scholarships and other non-government support.

In February 2006, there were 7,350 children on Pennsylvania's child care assistance waiting list. That number fell by about 1,000 a year later, according to the Department of Public Welfare. Increased funding in Gov. Ed Rendell's proposed 2007-2008 budget would enable the state to serve additional low-income children, Ward said.

Co-payments

States generally require families who receive child care subsidies to pay at least a portion of their child care costs.

The NWLC report found that in more than two-thirds of the states, families receiving child care assistance paid the same or a lower percentage of their income in co-payments in 2006, compared to 2005. However, in more than one-third to one-half of the states – depending on the family's income – co-payments in 2006 were higher as a percentage of income than in 2001.

In Pennsylvania, the percentage of family income spent on co-payment costs held steady at 8% from 2001 to 2006 for a family of three with an income at 150% of poverty.

Keeping co-payments manageable for struggling families is essential for several reasons, said Casey. "When we saw high co-pays, we saw a lot of kids having to go into unregulated care or families having to go back on welfare because they just couldn't afford it."

FOR MORE INFORMATION, see the National Women's Law Center report, *State Child Care Assistance Policies 2006: Gaps Remain, With New Challenges*. The report is available online at: www.nwlc.org/pdf/StateChildCareAssistancePoliciesReport2006.

Children And Adolescents In Organized Activities: The Developmental Consequences Of Participation

Participating in organized activities ranging from after-school programs to sports and clubs is a common experience for American children. The National Survey of America's Families suggests that more than 80% of children ages 6 to 17 years spend part of their free time in one or more sports, lessons, or clubs during the year,[1] and nearly 7 million children are enrolled in after-school programs.[2]

Several factors have led to an expansion of organized activities for children. They are widely seen as offering children of working parents safety and supervision during off-school hours. Local, state, and federal spending to support these activities has also increased significantly. For example, support of after-school programs has risen sharply, with federal grants for 21st Century Community Learning Centers alone increasing from $40 million in 1998 to $1 billion in 2002.

More importantly, the majority of studies on organized activities have found that for most children, participation in organized activities contributes to their educational, social, civic, and physical development in positive ways.

At the same time, concern has been raised that some children become too involved in organized activities and that over-scheduling may result in poor psychological and social adjustment and undermine relationships with their parents.

A review of available research, published in the Society for Research in Child Development's *Social Policy Report*, provides an overview of what is known about children's participation in organized activities and the consequences. In addition, the report examines over-scheduling concerns, concluding that only a small group of children appear to qualify as being overly involved in organized activities and, even then, indicators of their well-being tend to be more positive than, or similar to, those of children who do not participate at all.

The Over-Scheduling Hypothesis

Concern that children's lives today are filled with hurry, stress, and pressure due, in part, to being overly involved in organized activities has been the topic of several news reports[3, 4] and some popular parenting books.[5, 6] News reports on the topic, in particular, are largely drawn from anecdotal evidence.

This over-scheduling hypothesis is based on several propositions. One suggests the chief reason children take part in organized activities is perceived pressure from parents or other adults to achieve long-term educational and career goals. Another argues that the extensive amount of time spent in organized activities comes at the expense of traditional family activities, such as dinner together, family outings, and casual conversations between parents and children. A third suggests that these children are at greater risk of having adjustment problems and poor relationships with their families due to the inordinate amount of time spent in organized activities and the disruption to family functioning.

Some scientific evidence does indicate that some children are over-scheduled and the consequences can be harmful to optimal development. This evidence, however, primarily draws on qualitative studies of how participating in organized activities affects family life and quantitative studies that suggest perceived pressure from parents and other adults can result in poor adjustment, particularly among children of more affluent American families. Further, several studies suggest that children are more likely to become involved and

stay involved in activities when their parents value and encourage their participation, provide the resources necessary to participate, and participate themselves.

Other studies suggest that an over-scheduled child may face certain risks. For example, one reported that the time and schedule commitments of organized activities is demanding on parents and participation in many activities tend to limit children's down time and constrain the nature of child-parent interactions.[7] However, the study relied on a small sample of 12 families and did not examine the children's well-being.

Another study found that 6th and 7th graders from affluent families were at greater risk for substance use, depression, and anxiety than those in less affluent families, and that excessive pressure to achieve and isolation from parents may explain the higher levels of risk.[8] However, the study did not assess the association between the time children spent in organized activities and achievement pressures or adolescent adjustment.

Children's Participation In Organized Activities

However, the preponderance of evidence suggests such concerns are not pervasive.

Time Spent In Organized Activities

Although participating in organized activities has emerged as a common experience among American children, few appear to be overly involved, according to data related to how they spend their time outside of school.

An evaluation of data from the Child Development Supplement (CDS) of the Panel Study for Income Dynamics (PSID) suggests that, on average, children spend about five hours a week in organized activities. Many alternative activities consume significantly more hours of children's time. The data show that watching television consumes the most, with white children spending an average of 13 hours a week and of African American children more than 17 hours each week. The PSID is a nationally representative sample of 5,000 American families. Data collection began in 1968. Interviews were conducted annually until 1997, then were done on a biennial basis. The CDS was added in 1997 to provide a long-term database of children and their families to support studies on human development.

The number of hours a child has to spend in organized activities to be considered "over-scheduled" has not been defined. However, the PSID-CDS data on adolescents suggest only a small percentage of children likely fall into that category. For example, about 7% of all children ages 12-14 years and only 5% of 15- to 18-year-olds spent 20 or more hours a week in organized activities.

Why Children Participate

Modern perspectives on expectancy-value theory suggest children make choices about participating in activities based on how important and relevant the activity is to them, their expectations for success or failure, and whether they consider the activity interesting and enjoyable.

The over-scheduling hypothesis suggests a more limited reason for children's participation in activities: pressure from parents and other adults – whether real or perceived – to achieve and attain long-term educational/career goals.

Several studies have examined why children take part in organized activities such as sports, art, science, civic activities, after-school programs, and community-based organizations (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs and YMCA). Children in these studies ranged in age from 9- to 19-years-old and were diverse in their racial/ethnic and economic backgrounds. Researchers typically gathered their data by asking children to describe the reasons they participated.

The most common reasons adolescents and preadolescents gave for participating in organized activities were enjoyment and excitement; encouragement and support from friends or parents; opportunities to challenge themselves, build their skills, and increase their self worth; the desire to interact with other children who were participating; and personal safety. Pressure from parents and other adults was seldom mentioned as a chief reason for participating in organized activities. These results were seen among talented and highly involved adolescents, suburban adolescents from an economically diverse range of families, and those from affluent families.

In one study, for example, the chief reasons affluent 8th grade students gave for participating in organized activities were enjoyment and the perception that participating would benefit them in the future.[9] Pressure from parents and other adults was mentioned the least often. In another study, 9th and 10th grade students in two large suburban high schools that included students from economically diverse backgrounds reported that the top reasons students gave for participating were that they liked the activity and that it interested them.[10]

Benefits Of Participation

Research provides considerable evidence to support the argument that children benefit from participating in organized activities that offer positive developmental experiences ranging from physical safety and supportive relationships with peers and adults to exposure to positive social norms and opportunities for skill building.

Studies that examine youth adjustment in relation to time spent in activities or the number of activities children participate in at the same time have generally reported that participation is associated with positive development. For

example, a study of more than 400 adolescents in grades 6-12 reported a significant positive association between the number of hours spent in organized activities and performance levels on achievement tests.[11]

Other examples of potential benefits include the findings of a study that examined indicators of adjustment among students in grades 10-12 in relation to the number of activities they were involved in.[12] Most of the students participated in at least one activity. Very few were involved in more than two at the same time. Students who were involved in at least one organized activity showed either more improvement or less decline over time in school achievement – measures such as grade point average, and college attendance and completion – and improvement in feelings of school belonging and self-esteem. Involvement in volunteer activities and faith-based activities predicted lower rates of drug and alcohol use over time. In addition, participating in high school sports predicted higher income and better jobs at age 25.

Analyses involving PSID-CDS data also suggest that involvement in organized activities relates to the well-being of adolescents and that a high level of participation has few negative consequences, particularly when compared to adolescents who do not take part in activities. Reading achievement among both white and African-American adolescents, for example, tends to increase with participation in organized activities up to 20 hours a week.

The analysis of the PSID-CDS data also found that, among white adolescents, self-esteem increased when participation in organized activities ranged between 5 and 10 hours a week, after which the benefits leveled off. Among African-American adolescents, increases in self-esteem were seen among those who spent up to 20 hours a week in organized activities.

Among both white and African-American adolescents, cigarette use declined as the hours they spent in organized activities increased. Their use of alcohol followed a similar pattern, decreasing as their participation in organized activities increased up to about 15 hours a week.

Measures of adolescent-parent relationships also showed higher levels. For example, data suggest that among white adolescents, the frequency of eating meals with their families and having discussions with their parents are higher when they spend between 5 and 10 hours in organized activities, then level off when involvement in activities consumes more of their time. Increases in the same measures were reported among African-American adolescents who spent up to 20 hours a week in organized activities.

Highly Scheduled Youth

Research does suggest, however, that there may be a point of diminishing returns among the small proportion of adolescents whose involvement in organized activities is extremely high. In most cases, however, measures of well-being, even among highly scheduled adolescents, have been found to be similar to or greater than those who do not participate in activities at all.

For example, a study that reported a significant positive association between the hours spent in organized activities and the achievement test scores of more than 400 adolescents in grades 6-12 noted that the scores of the 2% who spent more than 20 hours a week in activities were only modestly above average. Nevertheless, the scores of those highly scheduled students were higher than the scores of students who were not involved in any organized activities.[13]

Analyses of PSID-CDS data suggest similar patterns among highly involved adolescents. Reading achievement, for example, was found to be higher among white adolescents who spent up to 20 hours a week in organized activities, then declined when their involvement took up more than 20 hours a week of their time. However, no significant differences in reading achievement were found between those who spent more than 20 hours in organized activities and adolescents who did not participate in organized activities at all. Among African-American adolescents, reading achievement among those who were involved in organized activities was always found to be significantly higher than those who did not participate.

Policy Implications

Local, state, and federal spending to support organized activities for children has increased significantly in recent years, resulting in greater opportunities for children and adolescents to participate. An important policy question related to this investment is whether involvement in organized activities benefits children or undermines their development in some way.

The over-scheduling hypothesis as it relates to children's participation in organized activities raises concern. It suggests that children are at greater risk of adjustment problems and poor relationships with their families because they spend an extensive amount of time in organized activities, and that this over-involvement is largely driven by perceived pressure from parents or other adults to achieve long-term educational and career goals.

In contrast, research suggests that only a small proportion of children spend an extensive amount of time in organized activities. In addition, parent and adult pressure is only rarely mentioned by children and adolescents as a reason for their involvement. While some studies suggest that benefits to participating in organized activities tend to diminish when involvement is extremely high, measures of well-being

even among highly scheduled adolescents have mostly been found to be similar to or greater than those who do not participate in activities at all.

More importantly, the majority of studies suggest that for most children and adolescents, participating in organized activities contributes to educational, social, civic, and physical development in positive ways. If existing research on participation in organized activities raises a concern, it is that children who are not involved at all appear to have the most to lose. The well-being of these non-participating children and adolescents is consistently less positive compared to those involved in organized activities ranging from sports to after-school programs.

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Upcoming Family Support Conference Focuses On School Readiness, Success

School readiness and success is the focus of the 14th annual family support conference in Pittsburgh on May 16 and May 17.

This year's conference, *Everybody Ready = School Success* will be held May 17 at the Westin Convention Center Pittsburgh Hotel, 1000 Penn Avenue in Downtown Pittsburgh.

A pre-conference will be held May 16 at the Human Services Building, 1 Smithfield Street, Pittsburgh.

Keynote presenters this year include:

· Paul Gasser, a national and international educator with expertise in parent and school engagement. Gasser is an instructor at the University of Wisconsin at Platteville and a marriage and family therapist. He has 28 years experience as a therapist and educator in the United States and Russia. His workshops are lighthearted and filled with practical ideas to use with your children.

· Evelyn Harris, Director, Division of Community Services, New York Department of State, and founder of the Family Development Credential. Her responsibilities in New York state government include the community services block grant (CSBG) and community food and nutrition. She has testified before Congress on the reauthorization of CSBG and has developed and coordinated a number of initiatives to provide opportunities for professional development for community action agencies.

· Lynn Amwake, specialist, SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She has extensive experience working with families, child care providers, teachers, administrators, and community partners. Her experiences as an educator and parent led to an interest in improving the quality and continuity of early childhood transitions for children and families, and she has worked with schools and districts to develop transition plans.

The conference also offers more than two dozen workshops related to young children, families, early learning, school readiness, and school success.

The objectives of the 2007 conference include:

· Increase the awareness of "family readiness" in school readiness and success.

· Enhance understanding among families, schools, services, and communities of their important roles in school readiness and helping children reach their fullest potential.

· Expand understanding of how to prepare children and families for school readiness and success using a strengths-based family development model.

· Enhance partnerships between families, schools, services, and communities so children can be successful.

· Promote policies, approaches, and services so schools, services, and communities work together to support families and children.

The conference is designed for parents, educators, human service agencies, neighborhood leaders, faith-based groups, family support participants, community and economic development organizations, advocacy groups, foundations, child care practitioners, counselors, mental health providers, social services workers, public agency staff, policy makers, and elected officials.

This year's conference is supported by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Allegheny County Executive's Office, Allegheny County Family Support Policy Board, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC, the Heinz Endowments, Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children, the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, University of Pittsburgh School of Education, University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, and the Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic.

FOR MORE INFORMATION and a conference brochure, visit: http://www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/training/FamilySupportConference2007STD.pdf.

Or contact: Kathryn Rudy, Director, Community and Internal Services, University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, 400 N. Lexington Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA. 15208; 412-244-5358; FAX: 412-244-5440; e-mail: rudy@pitt.edu.

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County family support centers, which was funded with a grant from the Heinz Endowments; innovative programs, funded with grants from the Pennsylvania Child Enforcement Bureau, that help non-custodial fathers increase their ability to have positive access to and visit their children; an evaluation of Early Head Start fatherhood demonstration projects nationwide; and a related study of efforts to involve fathers at the Family Foundations Early Head Start Program in Pittsburgh.

Each provides insights into the obstacles facing efforts to increase father involvement, and the training, activities, and other strategies that helped programs overcome them and create more father-friendly environments.

Fatherhood Gains Momentum

Interest in getting fathers more involved with their children has been rising for more than a decade. The reasons include a growing body of research suggesting that involved fathers make significant contributions to their children's social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Their involvement also contributes to better outcomes for children in school, improved health among young children, higher self-esteem, better relationships with their families, and lower rates of depression.

Unfortunately, an estimated 25% of American children go to bed each night in fatherless homes. Research suggests that those children are at higher risk of experiencing a number of poor outcomes.

For example, while many children without fathers grow up without problems, reports revealed that children who grow up in fatherless homes are at greater risk of being physically abused, failing in school, abusing drugs, living in poverty, and developing emotional or behavioral problems, such as fighting, lying, cheating, and criminal activity.

Challenges To Overcome

Father involvement is particularly low in early childhood programs. Studies suggest that the reasons include the fact that many of these programs tend to be mother-centered and that public policies that influence their design tend to reinforce a mother-centered approach. Program staff also tend to be mostly made up of women.

Among the challenges to better engaging fathers is the lack of staff training related to including fathers in program activities. Programs also are not typically designed to address father-specific needs and often lack services of particular interest to noncustodial fathers, such as help with legal issues related to custody matters and help with finding employment. Also, it may not be clear who in the program is responsible for creating a father-friendly environment.

The attitudes of staff and mothers who participate in the program can present another set of challenges. Studies suggest female staff often have doubts about the ability of fathers to be good caregivers and a positive influence on their children. They may also have issues related to their experiences with current or former male partners. Mothers may harbor similar feelings. And male staff may have emotionally charged issues related to their relationship with their own fathers.

The Early Head Start study noted that another challenge to getting and keeping fathers involved was the perception that the program was only for mothers and children.

Fathers, themselves, may have feelings that can limit their involvement in their children's lives. Some feel incompetent when it comes to raising children or lack a basic understanding of child development. Unemployment, a criminal record, low education, and an inability to meet child support obligations are other obstacles.

What is not a barrier for most fathers is their willingness to be more involved with their children. The perception of noncustodial fathers as being disinterested in their children, for example, belies evidence reported in studies and the experience of local efforts to engage them in family support and other programs. "Most of the noncustodial men I've met want to be involved in their children's lives," Rudy said. "They just don't know how to do it."

Meeting The Challenges

Early Head Start programs and local family support centers found that one of the most effective ways to engage fathers

(**Fathers** continued on Page 11)

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(**Fathers** continued from page 10)

was for staff to build relationships with them, just as they do with mothers. They tried to treat fathers as full co-parents with access to the range of activities the program offers, and providing some services to address their specific needs.

The study of Early Head Start fatherhood demonstration projects across the United States, including the local Family Foundations program, reported several more specific strategies that helped to improve the involvement of fathers. The strategies included:

- Most programs had a fatherhood staff that included a coordinator and one or more specialists. This provided clear responsibilities for making the programs more father-friendly and responsive to the needs of fathers.
- Important qualifications for fatherhood staff included professional experience and an ability to connect with fathers on a personal level. Fathers reported that they appreciated men on what otherwise was a female-dominated staff and were more comfortable discussing personal issues with them.
- Staff training was essential to father involvement. Training often included sessions on staff attitudes toward involving men in the program. These sessions, which addressed such issues as personal experiences and the important role a father plays in his child's well-being, helped make female staff more receptive to the idea of including men.
- Staff were encouraged to engage fathers in conversation and make special efforts to invite them to participate in the classroom, during home visits, and in program activities.
- Positive images of men were displayed in classrooms and male staff and men were encouraged to be present in reception areas to give fathers the message that the program was not only for mothers and children.

Similar strategies were also found to be important in improving father participation at family support centers throughout the county.

Staff training at the family support centers proved to be an important strategy for helping staff members be more receptive to fathers. Each center involved in the project developed a fatherhood action plan, setting goals in father involvement and program development, and identifying areas for additional training. They also developed a father-focused group or special activities for fathers, and identified specific tasks to engage and sustain father involvement. As a result, more fathers are now taking on leadership roles within the family support centers.

Noncustodial fathers in Allegheny County have also been receptive to father-specific services offered through the Fathers Collaborative, a partnership of Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh, the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, and OCD. These services included a legal clinic addressing custody and child support issues, job training and job placement, intensive case management, and a program to improve parenting skills and fathers' understanding of child development.

Over a span of two years, for example, more than 400 noncustodial fathers have participated in the child development training, which uses, *A Man's Guide to Child Development*, a curriculum and training procedure developed specifically for the program. Those participating in the child development curriculum and training included fathers, uncles, grandfathers, and other men important in the lives of children.

Programs See Improvement

The Early Head Start study reported that after launching and maintaining fatherhood services, nearly all of the programs came to see themselves as more father-friendly.

In more than 75% of the programs, staff reported having an increased awareness of how to better involve fathers. They also said their fatherhood efforts helped to increase the number of fathers in Early Head Start activities. In about half of the programs, staff and parents noted that fathers gained knowledge of child development and became more confident with their children.

Fatherhood training and other efforts to engage fathers have also proven successful in most of the county's family support programs. "Engaging fathers and sustaining their involvement is very tough," said Rudy. "Some centers did very well and some struggled. But now we have more men involved in family support programming and we have more male staff than we ever had before."

REFERENCES used in writing this article include the following:

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Announcements. . .

Free Training Helps Men Become Better Fathers

It has long recognized that men need to be more than a footnote in the lives of their children. Now, the tools they need to fulfill that role and do it well are provided through a nine-session fathers training curriculum that is available free to nonprofit organizations.

The comprehensive fathers training curriculum was developed and successfully field tested by the Fathers Collaborative, a nonprofit partnership of Goodwill Industries, the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, and the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development. The project was made possible by support from the Children's Trust Fund of Pennsylvania and the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

The curriculum gives men the essentials they need to become responsible, effective, caring fathers, including an understanding of key child development stages and issues, how to build relationships with their children, how to work with the child's mother for the benefit of the child, and advice on a range of parenting topics such as age-appropriate play, discipline, and safety.

Included is a 135-page guidebook written specifically for fathers as an easy-to-read reference to all of the information covered in the curriculum. Fathers who complete the training receive the guidebook, a letter of attendance, and a certificate.

The curriculum was developed with the help of an advisory committee that included fathers, professionals who work with non-custodial fathers, mothers, and academics. Over the past year, the training has proved successful when tested on a range of fathers and in a number of settings, including the Allegheny County jail, local churches, and family support centers.

The training and accompanying materials are available free-of-charge to nonprofit organizations interested in working with fathers to improve their parenting skills, understanding of childhood issues, and their relationships with their children.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact Kathryn Rudy, Director of the Division of Community and Internal Services, University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, at (412) 244-5358.

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