

FROM DADS TO GRANDPARENTS
TO PARENTS IN RECOVERY:
STATES' EXPERIENCES IN
SUPPORTING DIVERSE POPULATIONS

**From Dads to Grandparents
to Parents in Recovery:
States' Experiences
in Supporting Diverse Populations**

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Introduction

Parenting is a learned behavior. No parent comes ready-made with the gene that enables them to know exactly how to handle every parenting situation that comes his or her way. All parents, young and old, rich and poor, new and seasoned, urban and rural, book smart and street smart can use some help. Raising children is an incredibly rewarding yet demanding and often difficult task. No one should have to feel isolated from resources and support.

Circle of Parents programs operate across the country to provide parent-led, self-help groups where parents and caregivers can share ideas, celebrate successes and address the challenges surrounding parenting. These programs provide a safe, nurturing environment in which parents or anyone in a parenting role can openly discuss the process of raising children.

All parents face a variety of challenges, yet certain groups of parents encounter a unique set of issues that compounds their job. It is our hope that this document will serve as a resource to organizations interested in providing services to parents, particularly to parents who comprise the populations highlighted here.

This resource profiles the experiences of efforts in nine states to provide mutual self-help parent support groups to:

- Fathers
- Grandparents raising grandchildren
- Incarcerated parents
- Parents raising children with special needs
- Parents in recovery
- Rural parents

This document describes the contextual factors these groups face, and provides information on the different strategies states used to best meet the needs of families. Some strategies worked well in certain states and not as well in others. Geographic, demographic, and cultural variables impact service delivery. A range of references through which to access additional information is also provided.

Qualifier: This document is not exhaustive. A limited window of time prevented us from speaking with all states providing parent support groups. We know there are many other states using creative approaches to provide services to families who were not included in this document. We hope the future brings opportunities to share information about services provided in these states.

FATHERS

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Study after study point to the important role that fathers play in the health and happiness of their children. These studies suggest that a father's loving presence is associated with better cognitive development, higher self-esteem, a greater sense of social competence and fewer depressive signs¹. Children who have frequent opportunities for physical play with their fathers have better, deeper friendships with peers. These children learn self-control, how to manage and express their emotions and recognize others' cues². A strong father-child relationship, even in infancy, facilitates intellectual competence³.

On the other hand, father-absence studies conclude that non-residence of fathers has a negative effect on child development. This negative effect has been examined in terms of intellectual, psychosocial and psychosexual development of children in relation to family structure and functioning. Studies of father absence have identified children's behavioral, academic, and social problems, each with unique features linked to their developmental stages⁴.

As a generalization we can say that fathers, regardless of their status with their children, tend to be a hard group to recruit to participate in parenting programs. Men often are reluctant to ask for help and support. In addition, men sometimes feel void of nurturing skills and inferior to the mother in their parenting abilities. It is important to overcome these barriers because men provide a critical role in parenting and contribute greatly to children's social, emotional and physical health.

The fathers' groups profiled in this section operate in Illinois, the Milwaukee region, North Carolina, and Rhode Island. All these states stress the importance of creating an environment in which men, who are often reluctant to share their feelings, can feel comfortable opening up to show vulnerability and emotion. Finding the right facilitator makes all the difference. The facilitator needs to be aware that it can be difficult for men to admit that they might need help.

¹ Dubowitz, H., Black, M.M., Cox, C.E., Kerr, M.A., Litrownik, A.J., Radhakrishna, A., English, D.J., Schneider, M.W., and D.K. Runyan. 2001. "Father Involvement and Children's Functioning at Age 6 Years: A Multisite Study." *Child Maltreatment* 6(4): 300-309. Father Facts – Top Ten Father Facts. Downloaded on November 29, 2004 from http://fatherhood.org/fatherfacts_t10.asp. Tamis-LeMonda, CS. & Cabrera, N. (1999). Perspectives on Father Involvement: Research and Policy. *Social Policy Report: Society for Research in Child Development*, Vol XIII, Number 2, 1999.

² MacDonald & Parke, "Bridging the Gap: Parent-Child Play Interaction and Peer Interactive Competence," *Child Development* vol 55 1985. pp. 1265-1277.

³ Bill & Salter, "Father Loss, Cognitive and Personality Functioning," *The Problem of Loss, Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, Dietrich & Shabad, eds. Madison, Conn: International University, 1989. p. 345.

⁴ Johnson, D.J. (1996, January). Father presence matters: A review of the literature [LR-CP-96-02]. Philadelphia: National Center on Fathers and Families, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania.

In the Milwaukee region, the Dads Matter program is co-facilitated by two fathers, one African American and one Caucasian. The perspectives and experiences of these facilitators provide a nice balance for the group. Although the group is small, the participants are fairly consistent in their attendance.

The Milwaukee group meets every Monday night to discuss topics identified by the fathers that include: discipline, anger management, voicing feelings, and nurturing. Recently, the facilitators created a 12-week curriculum that they are in the process of implementing. Designed to enable new members to join the group at any point without feeling like they are coming in mid-stream, each week is focused on a single, stand-alone topic. The current participants are excited about the new material as it addresses a range of issues the fathers are facing.

Although the groups are mainly discussion-based, the facilitators do utilize videos as a complementary learning tool. In addition to the weekly meetings, the group hosts quarterly socials to include the mothers. Participating fathers are responsible for planning these events.

In Rhode Island the fathers' group facilitator is a licensed psychologist who works with participants to address a range of issues. Participants, who tend to be non-custodial fathers, some of whom were recently released from prison, typically want to learn about their rights and responsibilities as a father. A lot of fathers want to play a role in their children's lives but do not know how. Child support laws in the state complicate matters for fathers for if they fall behind in child support, they are sent to jail. A father cannot earn an income in jail so arrearages begin to accumulate and an unfortunate cycle is set in motion. Some mothers are angry and/or frustrated with their child's father and may keep him completely shut out of the child's lives. The group helps fathers learn how to become advocates and work within the system.

Meeting frequency and duration varies by group. Groups meet at least monthly. Groups tend to run about 1 1/2 hours and food is typically provided. The average group size is about six to eight men. Matthew Cox, associate director for the Rhode Island Parent Information Network, noted that turnover tends to occur about every eight months as fathers' needs and situations change.

Mr. Cox reinforced the importance of recruiting the right facilitator. Regardless of the group being served, the facilitator must have the ability to bond with participants, maintain their attention and earn their respect. The facilitator is often viewed as a referee and is expected to keep the group on track. Mr. Cox believes the facilitator needs to be someone who is interested in everyone and is an effective communicator and active listener.

The fathers in the Rhode Island group strive to make participants feel welcome. New participants tend to know at least one active participant so that makes for a more comfortable transition. The fathers work to build relationships among each other and

often exchange phone numbers. They have created a calling tree and utilize this to encourage each other to attend upcoming events. In addition, the group periodically organizes events outside of their meetings such as a Super Bowl party held at a local children's hospital.

Participants in the program in DuPage, IL set the agenda for their fatherhood group. Typical topics discussed include: temperament, discipline, child development, family planning, positive parenting, the importance of fathers, cultural diversity, and self-esteem.

In North Carolina, the Males Exclusively or ME program is available to all fathers or father figures who participate in Early Head Start or Head Start. The typical group size is about 20. Participants represent a range of ages and races. About half of the men are married and/or reside with the mother of their baby.

The group meets two times per month. The host agency provides food and transportation. As is the case with the other groups, child support and fatherhood rights are of interest to these dads. Employment is another hot topic. To address this need, the group focuses on job training and provides information about the variety of community resources available to men to enhance their employability.

There are a range of barriers to member participation, and programs have found that providing food and transportation in particular helps to recruit and retain participants. But Daniel Hooper, male involvement/parent involvement coordinator for WAGES in North Carolina also identified language as a barrier that could have led to participant drop-out. While pleased to welcome several Hispanic men to the group, Mr. Hooper was discouraged with his ability to communicate in Spanish with these new members. A bilingual participant who has evolved into a parent leader and serves as the interpreter for the group provided the solution in this situation. Mr. Hooper says these Hispanic men are some of his most reliable participants in spite of the communications challenge.

To encourage participating fathers to feel a sense of ownership of the program, Mr. Hooper created wallet-sized laminated ME membership cards. He presents these to new participants as a way to welcome them and let them know they are part of a group that is dedicated to the importance of fatherhood.

Feedback from the Milwaukee group has been very positive. In fact, one participating father stated that even though he had to travel some distance to attend the group, it was well worth the effort.

Recruitment

The success of recruitment strategies varies from region to region. In Milwaukee, the group recruits participants primarily through a local parent help line. However, courts and other parenting and fatherhood resources throughout the city also provide referrals. The facilitators e-mail the program administrator after each session to provide an update on how the group went and the topics that were discussed.

Rhode Island did attempt to do what they called cross-referrals (encouraging mothers in groups to refer their children's fathers to the dads group), but they found this to be unsuccessful. The mothers tended to be in adversarial relationships with the fathers and preferred that they not interact with the children.

They found the opposite to be true in Illinois. Christine Favazza, coordinator for the Northwest Suburban Region of Parents Care & Chare of the Children's Home & Aid Society said that getting fathers to attend groups is the biggest challenge. They have found that the most effective way of getting dads to come is through the wives, girlfriends, or mothers of their children. The dads' group is offered at the same time as the moms' group, so couples often come together and attend their own groups. They also promote the program at every opportunity, attending community events and distributing flyers at local agencies and stores.

Fatherhood Resources

Contact Information

Matthew Cox, associate director of Rhode Island Parent Information Network, cox@ripin.org or 401.727.4144

Christine Favazza, coordinator for the Northwest Suburban Region of Parents Care & Share of the Children's Home & Aid Society of Illinois, Cfavazza@NC.CHASI.ORG or 847.640.9590

Daniel Hooper, male involvement/parent involvement coordinator for Head Start and Early Head Start of Wayne Action Group for Economic Solvency (WAGES) in North Carolina, dhooper@wagesnc.org or 919.734.1178 ext. 210

Sharon Koziczkowski, parent support group manager for The Parenting Network in Milwaukee, WI, skoziczkowski@theparentingnetwork.org or 414.671.5575

Resource Information

- *Father Involvement -- Building Strong Programs for Strong Families*, a series of booklets intended as a resource to help Head Start, Early Head Start, and other early childhood programs develop and sustain father involvement. The bulletin is available on the Head Start Information and Publication Center Web site at www.headstartinfo.org/publications/hsbulletin77/cont_77.htm or www.headstartinfo.org/pdf/father_involvement.pdf.
- The *Fatherhood Project* is a national research and education program that is examining the future of fatherhood and is developing ways to support men's involvement in childrearing. www.fatherhoodproject.org
- The *National Center of Fathers and Families* works to expand knowledge about father involvement, family efficacy, and child well-being. www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/

- The *National Fatherhood Initiative* (NFI) utilizes media outreach, public service advertising and national fatherhood summits to affect public opinion about the importance of fatherhood. NFI works with local communities to provide technical assistance and training. www.fatherhood.org
- Nurturing Fathers Program www.nurturingfathers.com

GRANDPARENTS

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According to data from the Census 2000 Brief, there are 5.8 million households in the United States in which grandparents lived with grandchildren under the age of 18⁵. Of these co-resident grandparents, 42% were also characterized as having primary responsibility for their co-resident grandchildren. Contrary to the media-created image of a rosy-cheeked, silver-topped grandmother taking Junior out for an ice cream and a day at the zoo, many of these parenting grandparents are responsible for all aspects of child-rearing while struggling to lead active, productive lives of their own. Census data indicates that nearly two-thirds of grandparents raising grandchildren in 2000 were aged 40 to 59⁶.

Circle of Parents groups for grandparents raising grandchildren are in various stages of development throughout the country. Illinois and Kansas have been operating groups for over five years while Wyoming and Milwaukee are in an earlier stage of program development

Illinois and Wyoming began providing services to this particular population when they learned about the high percentage of grandparents assuming the parenting role due to circumstances such as the substance abuse, mental illness, or incarceration of a parent thus rendering them incapable of taking care of their children. In other cases, the children's previous primary caregiver was deceased. The Kansas Children Services League noted a growing pattern of calls coming into their parent hotline from grandparents who were thrust back into the parenting role and needed guidance and thought it would be useful to begin offering services.

Some of the contextual factors that affect these grandparents and the challenges of providing supportive services are described here.

In some cases, the grandparents have no knowledge of any problems taking place within their children's homes. Sometimes grandchildren are "dumped on" the grandparent without any warning. In other cases, the grandparents have poured endless resources into the family to support it and keep it intact. There may be issues with one parent or the other that have kept the grandparent from playing a role in the child's life. On occasion the grandparent may not have even been aware of the existence of the grandchildren they are now charged with raising.

Parenting grandparents are dealing with a range of emotional issues including guilt for what they may perceive as failure in their first experiences with parenting. They may feel like they contributed to the situation that has rendered their own children incapable of effective parenting and they want to avoid making the same mistakes the second time

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. Grandparents living with Grandchildren: 2000. Census 2000 Brief. Issued October 2003. Downloaded on November 29, 2004 from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-31.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.

around. Some may also mourn the loss of their former role of being the “fun” grandparent. Their new role demands that, in addition to entertaining their grandchildren, they are also responsible for all aspects of parenting.

These grandparents may also experience changes in their relationships with other individuals. Their own children may be upset with them for stepping in and usurping their parenting roles. Others may find that they have less time and common interests with friends and peers, and may see them slip away. Financial stressors may require a grandparent to re-enter the work force. In addition to the emotional changes these caretakers experience, the energy required to care for children may also impact their physical health.

Another primary concern for grandparents raising grandchildren is the process and cost of obtaining guardianship. Many of these caretakers have no idea what their rights are, or where they could access resources to support this new responsibility. Rules around guardianships are complex and vary from county to county, so it is important for grandparents to learn where they can obtain appropriate information on their rights and understand how to access available resources.

Some states have funds allocated through line items or general revenue to provide financial supports to grandparents raising grandchildren. The state of Illinois, for example, mandates that the Area Agency on Aging provide services to this group. The organization also receives federal funding; 10% of caregiver funding is earmarked for caretaking grandparents. Illinois also has a statewide task force specifically to address issues of grandparents raising grandchildren.

Another important issue for caretaking grandparents to consider is the creation of a legal plan to address the potential death of the grandparent. Most states have few supports in place to address these types of emergencies.

Recruitment

Identifying and engaging parenting grandparents can be quite difficult. Often, grandparents are isolated and very private about their situations. Sometimes their grandchildren’s schools are not aware that the grandparent is the primary caregiver. Some of these grandparents tend to be slow in trusting outsiders. They are typically skeptical of social service agencies and fearful that, once discovered, their grandchildren will be removed from their homes. In other situations, they may fear losing housing or other financial benefits if authorities become aware that the family status has changed.

Recruitment strategies utilized by some programs include:

- Conducting ongoing outreach through schools and local churches. Usually sending out flyers is not enough and there needs to be more active outreach, requiring time and staff. The program in Milwaukee is hoping to use a parent advisory group to help conduct this outreach and train their volunteers to go out into the community and promote the program.

- One agency in Illinois collaborated with local schools to host informational meetings to get a better understanding of grandparents' needs and how to address them. These meetings ultimately evolved into grandparent support groups. The agency recently received funding from their area agency on aging to run support groups, provide respite care, and convene conferences. They will be starting up two more groups early next year.
- A different agency in Illinois started by providing educational forums addressing topics such as teenagers and dating. Grandparents raising grandchildren attended and expressed a great deal of interest in learning how to relate to or monitor what was happening in their teenage grandchildren's lives. For example, the language used by teens today – such as when kids talk about “hooking up” was confusing to grandparents. While it sounds innocent, it can actually indicate sexual intercourse. This topic was consequently addressed during one of the educational sessions. These sessions also provide an opportunity for grandparents to learn about other services available in their community.
- Encourage current participants to spread the word to other grandparents in their communities who are in similar situations.
- On a daily basis, providing meals and homework supervision to grandchildren can be taxing for grandparents. When possible, it is helpful to market programs as a respite for overworked grandparents. Such programs need to provide a children's group or some other supportive services such as homework help or dinner so grandparents do not need to worry about fulfilling those responsibilities on that given night.
- Programs advise selecting group locations carefully, identifying familiar places that feel safe to grandparents. Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity is important.
- In Wyoming, programs use multiple approaches for outreach. These include doing outreach at parent-teacher conferences, posting flyers around town at local senior centers and libraries, as well as soliciting the approval of the major employers in town to post flyers around their premises. The program places ads in the local *Around Town* newspaper read by seniors. A local television station provides slots for public service ads promoting the program. In addition, the chapter collaborates with the state AARP office to increase awareness about this new program. A facilitator for one of the groups currently works in a caregiver support program and expects to recruit grandparents through word-of-mouth.
- In Kansas, many of the participating grandparents initially learned about the program through the parent help line which operates on a 24-hour basis, 365 days a year to address parental concerns, refer parents to resources across the state, and provide support.
- Many referrals in Kansas have also come via the state's Self Help Network which is operated by Wichita State University. This network serves as a clearinghouse for self-help support groups operating throughout the state. They also work closely with a number of community-based agencies such as Head Start, preschool programs, Social Rehabilitation Services (the state's welfare department), mental health and faith-based agencies to recruit participants. They also promote the groups through local newspapers. In addition, they work closely

with Go Zones, faith-based program providing services to children in different communities. Running both adult and children's groups in conjunction with one another eliminates grandparents' concerns that their grandchildren will be unsupervised while they attend their groups.

Grandparent Needs

The Kansas Children's Service League (KCSL) operates programs throughout the state. There is an African-American grandparents group running in Wichita, a group serving rural grandparents located in the western part of the state, and groups for Hispanic and Native American grandparents are currently in development. There are even great-grandparents raising grandchildren attending groups.

Volunteers with experience with these populations lead all groups. The groups tend to be flexible which BJ Gore, parents program coordinator for KCSL, feels contributes to their success. The group belongs to the group and participants decide meeting frequency, dates and times of meetings, as well as the topics to be discussed. The program is structured so that parents always leave with some educational materials or resources. Guest speakers attend monthly and address topics identified by the group.

This population requests a lot of information and support to help address housing, medical, educational and legal issues. These grandparents may be unfamiliar with the way these systems have evolved since they were parents, and they often need navigational assistance.

In addition to learning about available resources and rights, many parenting grandparents seek social and emotional support to help them cope with their new role. As mentioned previously, many of these individuals may feel isolated. Time previously spent with friends or pursuing hobbies is now occupied with caretaking responsibilities. Friendships and other relationships may suffer. Grandparents may also be dealing with the family dysfunction that led to their assuming a caretaking role. They may be angry, sad and frustrated with the circumstances that led to their own children's inability to care for their offspring and might temporarily sever communication with those children. These are complex issues that grandparents must face, so any support from attending groups with others facing similar challenges is valuable. In addition, their own health may be declining, or they may be caring for their elderly parents, or still have their own children at home.

If resources are limited, building partnerships with other providers in the community to reach the grandparent population is important. An unaffiliated grandparent group in Wyoming is heavily service-based and provides respite and child care, as well as some legal assistance for finalizing guardianship and navigating the school system. While limited resources preclude the Prevent Child Abuse Wyoming program from offering these services, they hope to collaborate with community-based agencies to make participating grandparents aware of all available services.

“Do as much research as possible to be a resource for grandparents raising grandchildren. Get to know your local judges and attorneys to obtain an accurate and thorough understanding of your state’s laws with regard to guardianship. Have experts present to groups when necessary. Launching your program with a focus on legal rights helps participants feel better equipped to make difficult decisions.” BJ Gore, Parents Program Coordinator, Kansas Children’s Service League

Grandparenting Resources

Contact Information

BJ Gore, parents program coordinator, Kansas Children’s Service League,
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Carla Klein, Coordinator for the Northern Region of Parents Care & Share of the Children’s Home & Aid Society of Illinois, Cklein@NW.CHASI.ORG or 815.962.1043.

Earl Kloppmann, program director, Parents Care & Share of Illinois can be reached at ekloppma@nc.chasi.org or 847.991.1030

Sharon Koziczkowski, the parent support group manager for The Parenting Network in Milwaukee, WI can be reached at skoziczkowski@theparentingnetwork.org or 414.671.5575

Elaine Searcy, coordinator for the Southern Region of the Children’s Home & Aid Society of Illinois can be reached at Esearcy@SW.CHASI.ORG or 618.874.0216 ext. 113.

Resource Information

- The American Association for Retired People (AARP) has a wealth of resources available to grandparents raising grandchildren including a database of grandparent support groups, information about Medicaid and Food Stamps, and a service for AARP members to find easy access to attorneys across the country. In addition, there are AARP offices in every state. www.aarp.org/
- The Children’s Defense Fund has a kinship care resource kit for grandparents raising grandchildren.
[www.childrendefense.org/childwelfare/kinshipcare/resourcekit/full.pdf#xml=http://childrendefense.org.master.com/tehis/master/search/mysite.txt?q=grandparent+s+%2Bresource+kit&order=r&id=1048e02b4cd986f2&cmd=xml](http://www.childrendefense.org/childwelfare/kinshipcare/resourcekit/full.pdf#xml=http://childrendefense.org/master.com/tehis/master/search/mysite.txt?q=grandparent+s+%2Bresource+kit&order=r&id=1048e02b4cd986f2&cmd=xml)
- Illinois Department on Aging www.state.il.us/aging/1intergen/grg.htm
- Starting Points Resource Book
www.state.il.us/aging/1news_pubs/grg_guidebook.pdf

- University of Illinois Extension – produced a total of 10-12 brochures for grandparents www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/grandparents/0101a.html
www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/grandparents/0206a.html
www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/grandparents/0204b.html

Resources utilized and shared by program staff in Illinois:

- Benefits Checkup.org www.benefitscheckup.org/
Participants answer a few confidential questions and this database explains which federal, state, and local programs they might be eligible for and how to apply. The site is provided by the National Council on Aging. AARP is a national outreach partner for the site.
- Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) <http://www.insurekidsnow.gov/>
Information on state children's health insurance programs and how to contact them.
- Legal Help www.abanet.org/
The American Bar Association can help grandparents find legal help.
- Legal Options www.gu.org/
Generations United explains some legal options for grandparents.
- School Lunches www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Lunch/default.htm
Information about the National School Lunch Program.
- Women Infants and Children (WIC) www.fns.usda.gov/wic/
How to get food and nutrition assistance.

INCARCERATED PARENTS

INCARCERATED PARENTS

The Child Welfare League of America reports that nationwide, there are more than two million children with a father or mother who is or has been incarcerated in state or federal prisons and local jails. The incarceration of a parent can uproot the entire family and be extremely unsettling. Children suffer the stress of being separated from one, and sometimes both, parents. They tend to be confused, anxious, scared, angry and embarrassed. This myriad of feelings can impact their behavior, school performance, physical and emotional health⁷.

According to the Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents⁸, it is becoming increasingly common for incarcerated parents to lose contact with their children, and/or knowledge of their whereabouts, during their time in jail and/or prison. The programs profiled here are helping to ensure that incarcerated parents maintain and improve their relationships with their children and learn to become better caregivers in the process.

Incarcerated Fathers

Inmates at the Blackburn Correctional Complex (BCC) in Kentucky acknowledged that although they had access to other training and development opportunities such as GED preparation, anger management classes, and substance abuse treatment, they really wanted a class on parenting. To accommodate this request, BCC approached Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky (PCAKY) to assist them in providing this type of programming.

Launched in 1992, the program began with a fairly loose format. Inmates identified a range of topics they wanted to discuss, but prison staff felt there was a need for a more structured curriculum. In 1997 Trey Berlin, prevention specialist from PCAKY, began working with BCC staff to develop the curriculum and field test it each week in class. This process led to the development of a curriculum based largely on Steven Bavolek's Nurturing Parent model. A steering committee comprised of PCAKY, prison staff and inmates formed to offer additional input into sections of the curriculum that still needed improvement. This committee also tested out the Storybook Project (described below) component of the program as well. Although the curriculum has been modified over time, the core foundation is still strongly based on the Bavolek model.

What the Program Looks Like

Fathers and Children Together (FACT) is a 13-week program, operated out of a minimum-security prison. Groups of up to 25 participants meet weekly. Once a new group has started, it is closed to additional members, which facilitates trust and relationship-building. Participants, primarily fathers and a few grandfathers, discuss a

⁷ Child Welfare League of America. Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners. Information downloaded on November 29, 2004 from <http://www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/default.htm>

⁸ Johnston, D. & Carlin, M. (no date) When Incarcerated Parents Lose Contact With Their Children. CCIP Journal, Vol 6, Number 1. Downloaded on November 29, 2004 from <http://www.e-ccip.org/journal.html>

range of topics including discipline, relationships, communication, anger management, self-esteem, domestic violence, and the effects of substance abuse on children. One of the creative aspects integrated into this program is the Storybook Project.

Designed to be a personalized book-on-tape, a father picks out a children's story that he thinks his son or daughter might like. He records himself narrating the story and then sends both a copy of the book and the cassette tape to the child. This activity facilitates literacy for both the father and the child and is a tangible way to strengthen their relationship. Although this project is based on a program that was started in a women's prison, reactions from participating fathers validate its success.

A benefit of participation in the FACT program includes having the opportunity for special father-child visiting sessions. Two of these sessions are held during the 13-week course. During these visits, the fathers have a chance to connect and bond with their children by engaging in activities they have learned about through the program. In addition, dads and their children can read books together and play games. These privileges are not offered to non-participants whose visits are restricted to much more subdued activities and interactions. Fathers who graduate from the program may continue accessing all FACT services until they are released from BCC.

The FACT program also provides services to caregivers of participant children. These services tend to be more loosely structured because not all caregivers remain in the facility during the visit. When caregivers stay, they have the opportunity to participate in group discussions around parenting and learn how to help children understand the special challenges of having an incarcerated father. In addition, referrals to supportive services are made available to caregivers to help address their needs.

Parent Leadership and Participant Input

Parent leadership is encouraged through participation on the parent leadership team – formerly the advisory council. Graduates of the program have the opportunity to continue in the program in a leadership capacity by serving on the council and providing input and direction for the program. Mr. Berlin estimates that about 50% of graduates express interest in continuing on in the program in this capacity.

Participants also make recommendations regarding the content of the program. For instance, the topic of domestic violence was added at their request. They were interested in learning how to identify risk factors so they would be aware in the event their child's mother was involved with anyone who posed a threat to either mother or child. In addition, this topic also helped participants understand when their own behavior might be described as violent or threatening. When this type of self-diagnosis occurs and participants request additional help, the program refers them to an anger management program offered within the prison. They also have access to on-staff psychologists.

Participants have also been engaged in launching the next phase of the Storybook Project. Called the Book Bag Project, it stemmed from the realization that once children reach a certain age, they might look for something a little more interactive than only listening to

stories. The fathers still wanted to maintain a connection to their children but didn't know how that might be accomplished. Program staff worked closely with staff at a local public library that helped create an activity kit for participants and their children. As opposed to the Storybook Project, this time children select the book to be shared with their father. They receive corresponding activities that can be worked on as a team. The library also provides book bags to facilitate transporting the books and other materials. The caregivers are notified and must also approve whether their child can participate in this activity. Program staff hope that caregivers will encourage their children to continue to maintain the bond with their fathers and stimulate a love for reading.

How Well the Program is Working

Although the program is currently being evaluated, anecdotal evidence suggests that this program is very effective. Engagement and retention rates are high. The main contributing factor to drop-out is the fact that many of the participants are released from prison and thus forced to sever their connection to the program.

While initially the main attraction to the program is the benefit of a more flexible and interactive visitation, many participants often later admit that they learned a great deal about understanding their child and how to relate to them. In addition, prison staff describe noticeable behavior change among participants as well as lower recidivism rates.

Lessons Learned/Recommendations

- Before presenting the program to prison administrators, staff should have a good understanding of how the prison system works. Working from the top down starting with the warden or jailor, a program can use research to help build a case. Although it is unlikely that staff will be able to sample the population directly, an organization can still collect data on why there is a need for services and how the prison and inmates will benefit. Staff should create a clear, concise plan for what they want to do and how they plan to reach their goals.
- Building a strong collaboration with the institution is important. Prisons tend to be very closed and hierarchical. It can be useful to locate a champion from within the system to advocate for the program. PCAKY has a great deal of support from the administration at the Blackburn facility.
- Flexibility is important –prison officials need to know that planners can work within the policies and structure of the institution. Staff must assure them that they can, and will, meet all security requirements. It is important to schedule the program at times that are convenient to the administration and ensure that there will be minimal disruption. Staff should attend any volunteer training that might be offered by the prison.
- Programs attempting to enter the prison system need to be patient. New initiatives are a rare thing in prisons and when they do get the green light, can be very slow to get off the ground. Staff should understand that everything must be approved ahead of time.
- Staff should make it a priority to keep momentum and continuity going.
- Mr. Berlin recommends conducting a prison-based program as opposed to a jail-based program. He feels there is a greater likelihood for success. Jails are for

- individuals who either haven't been convicted or are serving shorter sentences (typically less than one year). Jails also tend to have wide variation regarding the type of offense conducted by the prisoner. Prison-based programs are likely to be more stable than jail-based programs because the inmates are there longer. Jail populations are more transitional and the environments are more chaotic and have a great deal less structure. If a state is interested in conducting a jail-based program, Mr. Berlin suggests picking just one or two topics and repeating them week after week because the participant population will change.
- Staff should definitely provide some support to caregivers even if it is just food. It is difficult to plan a specific program for caregivers as one cannot predict whether or not the same people will return for visitation. It is important to be knowledgeable about resources and provide referrals for caregivers. Often the parent participants can reinforce the importance referrals to caregivers.
 - The program needs to be offered voluntarily. At one point the FACT program was made mandatory for one cycle of classes and it was not a success.. Some inmates who did not want to be there disrupted the group and sabotaged activities. Others were resentful and disrespectful. Another benefit of voluntary programs is that they sometimes attract unexpected participants. Over the years, FACT program staff have had approximately 20 participants who were not parents but were interested in learning about parenting in the event they had children at some point in their future.
 - A suggested outreach strategy, since prisoners mark their time day by day, is to develop and distribute calendars that highlight meeting, visitation dates and times. Including photos of participants and their children is a nice touch if allowed by the prison.
 - Although recruiting participants has not been a problem for several years, there was a time when program planners were looking for strategies to increase participation. They solicited input from program graduates who recommended hosting a pizza party where current participants could bring a friend to learn more about the program. This turned out to be a very successful approach.
 - Programs conducted by outside organizations as opposed to prison staff tend to run better. Outside staff can focus on the program whereas a prison official would likely have to juggle a parenting program in addition to other prison responsibilities. This also helps to ensure that the program is staffed by a qualified person who is capable and interested in administering the curriculum.

Incarcerated Mothers

Until recently, the Milwaukee region has made a continuum of services available to incarcerated mothers. While not currently operational due to loss of the facilitator, a program operated on a weekly basis out of the local jail. Sharon Koziczkowski, the parent support group manager for The Parenting Network, feels strongly that two of the critical factors in this program's success were the special qualities of the facilitator and the agency's collaborative relationship with the jail administration.

The group facilitator had been with the program for several years and was skilled in establishing rapport and trust with the mothers. She understood their troubled upbringing

and nurtured them, instilling a sense of confidence that they *could* change their lives and become successful parents. The facilitator noticed that by empathizing and supporting the mothers, they in turn became more empathetic towards their children.

Although the mothers' physical contact with their children was limited to periodic visitation, the facilitator encouraged ongoing communication and bonding through telephone calls, poetry, and letter writing.

After serving their time, the mothers were required to live in transitional housing for 90 days. Participation in the parenting support groups continued during this time period. Once they were released and allowed to live on their own, the program encouraged mothers to join ongoing, community-based parenting programs to continue developing and refining their parenting skills.

Some challenges the program faced revolved around trying to maintain stability with a transitional population. A typical sentence for participating mothers was six months. Once released from jail, they would spend just three months in a transitional program. This moving around impacted retention rates and program continuity.

Another difficulty was finding facilitators willing to go into a jail setting. Ms. Kozickowski offers facilitator training several times a year. She found that while many individuals who became facilitators were qualified and capable, most were fearful of working in that particular setting.

Although Mr. Berlin recommended using an outside facilitator, if a program is having difficulty recruiting a facilitator, it might be worthwhile to explore working with the jail administration to identify an existing staff member who has the *interest* and time to complete the facilitator training in order to begin running groups. That way, the individual is already familiar with the system and likely less fearful.

Matthew Cox, associate director of Rhode Island Parent Information Network, reports that Rhode Island has a program similar to the FACT program operating out of a prison in his state. They have found that the program helps fathers cope with separation issues. Unlike the program in Milwaukee, Mr. Cox said they have not had any difficulty finding a facilitator. He stated that facilitators had greater safety concerns going into certain communities throughout the state than working within the prison. The facilitator they use was recruited through referrals from prison and agency employees and volunteers.

Incarcerated Parents Resources

Contact Information

Trey Berlin, prevention specialist at Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky is willing to share a topic list with anyone who might be interested. In addition, he is happy to answer questions related to the program. He can be reached at tberlin@pcaky.org or 859.225.8879.

Matthew Cox, associate director of Rhode Island Parent Information Network,
cox@ripin.org or 401.727.4144

Sharon Kozickowski, the Parent Support Group Manager for The Parenting Network in
Milwaukee, WI, skozickowski@theparentingnetwork.org or 414.671.5575

Resource Information

- Steven Bavolek's Nurturing Parent www.nurturingparenting.com/
- Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents www.e-ccip.org/
- Child Welfare League of America
www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/cop_03.htm

PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Children with disabilities often require specialized care that can add to the stress of parenthood. Dealing with a child who needs constant supervision, medical care, and stimulation can be quite challenging. Parents may feel socially isolated and frustrated by limited financial resources from which to pay for expensive care. Children with disabilities are more likely to be stigmatized by their peers and may experience stunted social and emotional growth.

Therefore, it is important to ensure that parents of children with special needs have access to education and support to advocate and provide for their children. Several states that provide supportive services to this group of parents are profiled here.

In 1991, a group of Rhode Island parents who had children with special needs were frustrated because they weren't getting the support they needed to access necessary health care and educational services for their children. Hence, Rhode Island Parent Information Network was founded with a mission to provide information to parents to enable them to advocate for their needs.

The agency has since expanded through the creation of an All Kids Agenda and now provides services to a wide variety of parents. In spite of the state's small size, residents in the state of Rhode Island come from 50 different countries and speak over 30 languages. Staff members fluent in Spanish, Portuguese, Hmong and English provide support to up to ten groups across the state.

In Rhode Island, these groups have operated successfully for two years. Groups tend to be organized by language rather than special needs of the children. Although the primary group has been for parents with children aged birth to three, there has recently been some movement towards the creation of a new group for parents with older children who have found that their needs are not being met. Their desire to continue meeting as a separate group speaks to the success of the group in providing a valuable service to parents.

In these self-directed groups the participants choose which topics to discuss. One common concern of non-English speaking parents of children with special needs is meeting with school representatives to develop individualized education plans for the children. Parents who lack confidence in their communication skills tend to be intimidated and fearful that they will be misunderstood. While the support groups have offered workshops to help prepare for these meetings and have trained a corps of volunteers to accompany parents to these meetings, parents are often inclined to try to navigate the system on their own.

Other topics discussed in the groups include day-to-day issues related to keeping a household and family going including, financial management, discipline, and helping children succeed in school. Child development and behavior are also frequent topics.

Participating parents possess a wealth of knowledge and enjoy recommending to one another where to buy certain products locally, how to find good doctors, how to navigate the various community agencies, etc. Because families with children who have special needs have additional stressors and challenges, and are often more isolated (some research suggests that parents of children with special needs have a 90% divorce rate), groups are a welcome source for support and education.

In Kansas, the initial special needs group served parents of children with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Building on the success of that group, the program grew as BJ Gore, parents program coordinator for the Kansas Children's Service League (KSCL), started getting an increasing number of phone calls. Groups now include parents of children with a range of special needs such as Down Syndrome, autism, ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome, and other physical and emotional disorders.

As the groups have developed, Ms. Gore has noticed an interesting transformation. Many of the groups begin with the intent of sharing information and providing support, then evolve into teaching parents how to become better advocates for their children. For example, many children with special needs tend to be underserved in school systems. Armed with knowledge of their rights, participating parents are speaking up to ensure their children get the resources and supports they need.

Ms. Gore has found that the needs of parents in these groups tend to be very similar. Most of these parents succumb to a period of mourning for the loss of their dreams of having a "normal" child. Many parents are anxious to help their child develop social and emotional skills to ease their interactions with others. Some groups do have accompanying children's groups where skills-building activities take place.

The program has been very successful. Retention remains steady and parents have become very active in their communities by volunteering to serve on community councils and presenting at workshops. These families have grown and flourished.

The groups for parents with children who have special needs that are operating in Illinois are open to any parent who has a child with disabilities. The disabilities of the children range from Down Syndrome and autism to Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) to children who have sensory issues. Carla Klein, coordinator for the Northern Region of Parents Care & Share of the Children's Home & Aid Society of Illinois learned that 80% of children diagnosed with ADD have sensory issues where they get dizzy or nauseated from loud noises and are much more sensitive than children without this disorder to seams and tags in clothing. Symptoms of sensory issues in younger children include constant tugging at their shirts or taking off their socks.

Christine Favazza, coordinator for the Northwest Suburban Region of the Children's Home & Aid Society of Illinois indicated that they recently started a new group for children suffering from sensory disorders. Therapists come and talk to parents about this disorder and the various sensory integration treatments such as brushing and auditory

therapy that are very effective⁹. In Illinois, they require the staff of special needs children's groups to be educated about these various disorders to ensure they provide appropriate care for these children.

In Illinois, program planners have found that participating parents are extremely high functioning. They exchange a lot of information and strategies found to be effective for navigating educational, medical and judicial systems. Parents attend groups, not out of a sense of desperation, but for the camaraderie and shared experiences. The groups really exhibit a "can-do" attitude.

The Families United Network (FUN) program in North Carolina started up about one year ago after a community presentation on ADD was extremely well attended and highlighted the need for services for parents of children suffering from this disorder. They found that the philosophies of parent leadership and involvement were key principles of both Circle of Parents and Head Start from which the FUN program operates.

Information provided through the FUN program tends to focus on parenting, child development and disciplinary strategies. An environment is created in which parents support each other and jointly work through their challenges. Valerie Wallace and Sara Cook, development disabilities case managers for WAGES, the agency that offers the FUN program said that parents are very involved in driving the topics discussed. Because the needs of the parents are so diverse, they created a "topic box" in which parents put ideas they would like to discuss at each group. A parent time-keeper ensures that adequate time is allocated for all topics.

Facilitator Characteristics

In Rhode Island, group facilitators tend to be staff members with social work or education backgrounds and a fluency in one or more of the key languages spoken by the parents. When they need to hire new facilitators, they tap into the community grapevine, including local non-profits and family support organizations. The volunteer parent leaders have personal experience working with children with special needs or in the special education arena, and are fluent in the language of the group. Over the years several parents have emerged from the groups to assume a leadership role.

The Kansas facilitators are required to have personal experience or a background working with special needs children. They must also be patient as new groups take a while to attract and maintain participants. Facilitators are encouraged to groom parent leaders and help them assume new roles within the groups.

In Illinois, they feel that facilitators for these groups need to have good facilitation skills and like working with people in general. It is helpful if facilitators have a good

⁹ In brushing therapy, a non-scratching surgical brush is used to make firm, brisk movements over most of the body, especially the arms, legs, hands, back and soles of the feet. Information downloaded on December 1, 2004 from Health AtoZ at www.healthatoz.com/healthatoz/Atoz/ency/sensory_integration_disorder.jsp

understanding of the cognitive and behavioral issues of children of various ages. The facilitators need to help the group maintain a positive attitude but they also have to be willing to delegate and let the parents' needs guide the group.

Recruiting Participants

When working with different ethnic populations, cultural issues around parenting tend to emerge. For example, within the Rhode Island Latino community, there is a strong sense of familial responsibility. Parents feel that they must be capable of handling everything on their own and are often reluctant to admit that parenting is not an innate skill. Program planners hope that endorsements from friends and fellow parents who have participated in the groups will help Latino parents overcome these feelings.

Other challenges include difficulty carving out the time to attend group due to busy work and school schedules. Lack of child care and transportation issues may also prevent parents from attending. Public transportation in the state, for instance, is limited to buses and can mean long waiting times and other hassles if they even serve an area near the parent. The program has tried to address some of these issues by seeking funds to pay for cab fare. They also suggested to parents carpooling and sharing babysitters, both of which have worked out quite well.

Because Rhode Island is comprised of many closely-knit communities, word-of-mouth is an effective recruitment strategy. Other approaches include disseminating flyers through churches, businesses, and community centers located in target neighborhoods. A local grocery store agreed to stuff flyers in grocery bags to promote the program. Conducting outreach at Laundromats, hair salons and mom-and-pop retail stores has also been quite effective at generating interest and attendance.

Many referrals in Kansas come through the self-help network operated by Wichita State University and functions as a clearinghouse for self-help support groups across the state. The Kansas Children's Service League also partners with local mental health agencies to cross-refer. The local newspapers are very supportive of these groups and are always willing to promote the program.

Parents are recruited for groups in Illinois through occupational therapists' offices, word-of-mouth, local schools and school social workers, social and family service agencies, day care and preschool centers, pediatricians offices, and any other locations that provide services to children.

In North Carolina, staff at WAGES created a resource manual that contains all the parenting and community resources available in Wayne County. It is updated each year and disseminated to FUN and ME participants who want this resource. The program also provides food, transportation and child care.

Since the FUN program targets parents participating in Head Start and Early Head Start, program staff have ongoing access to parents. They promote the program by disseminating flyers in mailboxes designated for participating children. All Head Start

parents are assigned a social worker who promotes the benefits of the program. Posters describing the group and activities are displayed throughout the center. Additionally, meetings are held consistently two times a month. One meeting is held in the morning and one in the evening to accommodate parents' schedules.

Katrina Gay, program coordinator for Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina described a group in Onslow County that started out as a support group for foster parents. The program planners quickly realized that the foster parents attending the groups typically had foster children with special needs. The executive director of the PEERS Family Development Center, the agency running the group, works with these foster parents to help meet their needs. She has a good relationship with the local Department of Social Services, which facilitates the process of identifying families to participate in the program. She also promotes the program through flyer distribution and by developing relationships with school social workers.

Parent Leadership

BJ Gore said that all family support programs must make parent leadership a priority. Parents know their own needs and thus program planners need to view them as a valuable resource. According to Ms. Gore too often programs focus on weaknesses instead of strengths. Ms. Gore believes in recognizing the talent and skills of the participants and letting them set the direction of the group.

In Kansas, they created two volunteer assistant regional coordinator positions. These individuals handle the program in different parts of the state. They coordinate all training, develop schedules, create training plans and recruit speakers.

A North Carolina FUN father with expertise in graphic design offered to make the program flyers disseminated to parents. In addition, two participating parents demonstrated leadership skills by volunteering to lead the group one night when the facilitators were absent. The group asked them to take on this new role permanently and they now co-lead the groups at each meeting.

Planners of the FUN program found that parents were initially reluctant to be active participants in groups. Many attended with the expectation that this would be like other groups where they were *talked to* as opposed to being asked to offer their own experiences to share with the group. The FUN program has provided an opportunity for parents to see themselves in a new light as a resource for others.

Resources for Parents of Children with Special Needs

Contact Information

Sara Cook development disabilities case manager, for Wayne Action Group for Economic Solvency (WAGES) in North Carolina, scook@wagesnc.org or 919.734.1178 ext. 250

Matthew Cox, associate director of Rhode Island Parent Information Network, cox@ripin.org or 401.727.4144

Christine Favazza, coordinator for the Northwest Suburban Region of Parents Care & Share of the Children's Home & Aid Society of Illinois, Cfavazza@NC.CHASI.ORG or 847.640.9590

Katrina Gay, program coordinator for Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, kgay@preventchildabusenc.org or 919.829.8009.

BJ Gore, parents program coordinator, Kansas Children's Service League, bjgore@kcsl.org or 316.942.4261 *ext. 232*

Carla Klein, coordinator for the Northern Region of Parents Care & Share of the Children's Home & Aid Society of Illinois, Cklein@NW.CHASI.ORG or 815.962.1043.

Valerie Wallace, development disabilities case manager, for Wayne Action Group for Economic Solvency (WAGES) in North Carolina, valerier@wagesnc.org or 919.734.1178 *ext. 240*

Resource Information

- In Illinois – the Regional Access & Mobilization Project is a resource for individuals with disabilities in the state. They also provide links to a variety of other resources across the country which can be accessed at:
www.rampcil.org/Links/index.htm

PARENTS IN RECOVERY

PARENTS IN RECOVERY

Children of substance abusing parents are at a greater risk of being maltreated and are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol as adults. When parents struggle with addiction, their ability to provide for their children's basic needs can be impaired¹⁰. In addition, substance abusers often suffer from other problems such as mental illness, poverty, and social isolation, all of which place children at increased risk for maltreatment. Children who grow up in these conditions may not learn healthy coping mechanisms and tend to repeat the destructive substance-using patterns set by their parents¹¹.

Among others, Circle of Parents programs in the Milwaukee region and the state of Washington provide services to parents recovering from substance use. In Milwaukee, participants are homeless mothers recovering primarily from cocaine addiction. In Washington, Circle of Parents provides services to both mothers and fathers depending on the eligibility requirements of the treatment facility. Both states offer services within residential treatment centers where patients remain anywhere from six months to one year. The program also provides corresponding children's groups.

Circle of Parents provides a great model for parent education and support since it creates a foundation of trust among participants. Peer support is critical among recovering parents who are more respectful of, and able to relate to and learn from, others who have walked in their shoes.

The strengths-based nature of these programs create an environment in which parents are recognized for their strengths but also receive strategies to help them develop and enhance their parenting skills. Receiving recognition for the strengths they do have is often a shock to recovering parents, many of whom have been caught in cycle of negative, hopeless and unhealthy environments.

Sharon Koziczowski, parent support group manager for the Parenting Network in Milwaukee and Linda McDaniels, associate director of Parent Trust for Washington Children underscored the importance understanding the complex issues of recovering parents. The risk of relapse is quite high and facilitators must be equipped with the right combination of expertise, empathy and professionalism to excel with this population.

Ms. Koziczowski and Ms. McDaniels have both found that a common trait among recovering mothers is a lack of nurturing skills. These women were often not nurtured themselves and have few, if any, positive role models. Most of them either do not have family in the area to serve as a source of support, or their families are not physically or

¹⁰ National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (1999). No Safe Haven: Children of Substance-Abusing Parents. New York, NY.

¹¹ Widom, C.S., Ireland, T. & Glynn, P.J. (1995). Alcohol abuse in abused and neglected children followed-up: Are they at increased risk? *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. 56 (2):207-217.

emotionally healthy. These mothers need to learn how to undo the negative parenting that shaped them and adopt a new way of parenting. Many recovering parents had violent childhoods in which they were hit and yelled at as a punishment for misbehaving. Thus, they do not know any other discipline methods. The facilitator works with the mothers to help them understand their children's capabilities and developmental levels. They help them understand how to respect their children and to set boundaries and expectations, and work with them to learn positive disciplinary strategies.

Ms. Koziczkowski highly recommended incorporating Hazelden videos into the group as they provide interactive opportunities to discuss and work through difficult but critical conversations. While she admits their products are expensive, she believes they are a valuable tool for groups.

Ms. Koziczkowski also felt it is important to create opportunities for celebration. She recognizes recovery anniversaries, Valentine's Day, Kwanzaa and even individual behavioral and attitudinal changes. She believes parents thrive in a strengths-based environment. As a facilitator, she often ends groups by asking participants to offer a one-word description of what they learned or experienced during that meeting. She knows parents have a lot of obstacles to overcome, so she works with them to develop goals and then identify small, manageable steps that lead them in the right direction. She also encourages parents to forgive themselves. This does not mean absolving themselves of responsibility or accountability, but rather acknowledging their past mistakes and determining how to avoid making them in the future.

The Families In Recovery (FIR) program in Washington help its participants understand that they are valued and to learn that they all have skills and experiences that can benefit others. The facilitators coach all participants to play an active role in the group. This interactive participation contributes to the healing, growth and recovery process because it takes a great deal of courage to acknowledge publicly how substance use has impacted behavior and one's ability to parent. Regardless of a parent's substance use or parenting history, within the group, everyone is treated with respect. Within this nurturing environment, participants talk about their weeks: what went right, what went wrong and what they did or could do to create positive outcomes for themselves and their family.

Program planners found that the groups needed to work on basic parenting skills. Many of the parents did not feel bonded with their children nor had they any idea how to engage their children, especially at playtime. Lacking their own experiences with play, many recovering parents did not feel comfortable and confident, and would become bored or frustrated when their children wanted to play. Facilitators and parent leaders addressed this issue by coaching parents how to get to know and play with their children. Parents are encouraged to start by spending just five minutes engaging in play. Within the groups, parents learn how to sing lullabies, play board games, host birthday parties, play imagination games, and read to kids. The groups utilized tip sheets to help parents identify their children's characteristics and traits – what they like and dislike, what they are afraid of, what gets them excited. Parents also learn anger management and positive

discipline strategies such as the ten-foot rule (have at least ten feet between parent and child when a parent is angry), re-direction, ignoring, etc.

Facilitators and parent leaders also help parents develop action plans for potentially stressful situations. For instance, parents in recovery often find evening time to be difficult and that the stress created by a child's bedtime could become a trigger for using drugs. So, in a FIR group, the parent leader encourages parents to figure out a positive bedtime routine that will work for their family. Other participants who share this same struggle can offer the strategies that they have tried so the parent knows they are not isolated in their frustration and can get through a stressful evening without relapsing.

The FIR program has become an integral component in a client's overall treatment program. Many participants are mandated to attend the program in order to maintain or re-gain custody of a child.

Once parents have completed residential treatment, they are encouraged to continue their journey as parents through participation in a community-based FIR program. Although currently located in only one community in the state, the program hopes to expand this next step in the recovery process. This program is held in the evening in conjunction with a children's program. These support groups provide tools for children of recovering addicts to begin their own healing process reducing a child's isolation and fear that they may be the only one experiencing the crazy ups and downs associated with substance use. At the same time, they can work to enhance their problem-solving and communications skills.

A challenge in expanding this community program has been identifying funding sources. For the time being, only the residential FIR program has been eligible for public dollars. While Parent Trust is grateful for the private funding that currently supports the community-based program, it is public dollars that ensures the stability of the Families in Recovery Network. Ms. McDaniels cites the cost-benefit of programs such as FIR. Programs, which contribute to the birth of drug-free babies and pay for themselves tenfold when the medical, legal and social costs that could be incurred are considered. It is much more cost effective to keep families intact and ensure healthy outcomes.

Facilitator Characteristics

Working with recovering adults can be both immensely rewarding and incredibly, emotionally draining. Relapse is all too common: over 60%. No one can determine who will make it and who won't. Ms. McDaniels and Ms. Kozickowski agree that finding the right facilitator is critical. This person must be non-judgmental, and provide unconditional support. They must remove any bias and understand that these parents are often suffering from years of shame and guilt associated with losing their children. In addition, they are also trying to regain control of their role in the family.

It is not uncommon for parents to become emotional recalling how they neglected their children when they were using drugs. Facilitators must be prepared to help parents work through their feelings, learn how to come to terms with their past and resolve issues with

their children. The facilitators must be incredibly patient and support the mothers as they resolve their issues and begin the healing process from their own wounded childhoods. It is only then that they can begin to parent differently. The facilitator must also create a trusting, respectful environment where participants can openly and honestly voice their frustrations, anger and other emotions without fear of judgment.

One participant in the Milwaukee program was searching for help trying to learn how to be a mother again. Her oldest child had assumed this role by necessity and had filled it for so long that even after the mother was clean and sober, her younger child still looked to the older sibling for nurturing, guidance and love. The group provided suggestions for how the mother might tackle this situation.

Families In Recovery facilitators complete a six-hour training provided by Parent Trust for Washington Children in addition to receiving ongoing technical assistance. For facilitators working with families in recovery, the first year is typically the most difficult. Burnout can be high and facilitators may struggle to maintain a strengths-based approach. To help minimize facilitator turnover, Parent Trust hired a coordinator whose specific role is to provide support to all FIR facilitators. She trains, supports, and provides ongoing technical assistance. She also facilitates weekly FIR programs: working “in the trenches” provides an up-close-and-personal perspective.

Identifying, training and keeping the right person to serve in a facilitation role is critical. Parent Trust looks for seasoned facilitators with a background and experience in family support environments. Strong group facilitation skills are necessary as the groups can become emotionally charged. Participants faced with the relapse of one of their peers are very aware of how close everyone is to falling back into old habits. Facilitators must have undying faith in each parent’s ability to recover and they must treat everyone as if they will make it. Facilitators also need to be acutely aware of the cycle of recovery and how relapse can be a part of that. Very few addicts are able to recover without relapse and facilitators must not assume the blame for the relapses of participants.

Program Impact

Feedback from focus groups that were conducted during the summer of 2004 with participating FIR parents indicates that¹²:

- They feel very safe and supported in the groups;
- They have learned a lot of parenting and coping strategies;
- They feel less isolated;
- They are learning to respect, trust and value themselves;
- They are learning how to enjoy their children;
- They learned about child development and behavior;
- The group helps to keep them clean and sober;
- The group provides support not just around recovery but around parenting; and
- They were not able to get parenting help through other treatment programs.

¹² Focus group conducted by Prevent Child Abuse America in Seattle on September 15, 2004.

*"This is the one group that I found that.... beats AA and NA and all that other stuff because this is where I can come and talk about what I'm going through with my kids and get the support I need and suggestions."
(mother of two children in FIR program.)*

*"I really wanted to say that my children, especially my son...wouldn't talk to anyone about anything. He was raised with you can't say a word, it's a secret... He feels safe enough and he is, he [has] developed relationships and [is] able to share things out there and help other children too... And he's really, really changed and grown."
(parent leader, mom of four.)*

What You Should Know

The catalyst for creating the program in Washington stemmed from an opportunity provided by the National Institute on Drug Abuse in 1990 to launch a ten-state initiative to create chemical dependency treatment services for pregnant and parenting women and their families. That project was called "The MOM's Project". Parent Trust for Washington Children was on the MOM's Project Steering Committee and provided the Families in Recovery mutual support program as a part of that project.

That project lasted five years as everyone involved tried to figure out how to best serve addicted pregnant and parenting women and their families. When the project was over in 1995, Ken Stark, Director for the Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse, approached Parent Trust about replicating the program. Mr. Stark and others involved in the project recognized the need to integrate family support services into substance abuse treatment. Recovering parents need coping, nurturing and disciplinary skills in order to succeed both in their recovery and their parenting. There are currently ten Families in Recovery (FIR) programs across the state of Washington. This program is supported through federal Parenting and Pregnant Women dollars and matching state dollars.

For programs interested in providing support groups to recovering parents, Ms. McDaniels provides the following suggestions:

- It is important to find out which entity in the state is the equivalent of Department of Social and Health Services -- Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse and to arrange a meeting. Programs should ask about any initiatives that may already be underway. If there is nothing, staff can provide them with information about the FIR program in Washington and how it can be replicated.
- Absolutely critical is having a strong facilitator who is comfortable and knowledgeable about the cycles of substance abuse, knows about the high probability of relapse and still believes in parents' potential. What makes the program work is facilitators ensuring that all participants feel safe and that everyone has time to share. It's the environment in which mutual support is created that keeps recovering parents coming back week after week.
- It is important to create an enticing environment and roles such as timekeepers, topic-keepers, resource coordinators, and greeters and to let participating parents

fill these roles. Veteran parents can help keep the group running smoothly. People feel valued when they have something to contribute.

- While FIR has not been implemented in residential treatment programs that are shorter than four months, Ms. McDaniels strongly believes that shorter programs could be effective. She states that program evaluation indicates that providing a minimum of 12 sessions seems to be the point at which knowledge and behavior can change and a parent's sense of self-efficacy increases. If a state has a 28-day program, Ms. McDaniels recommends trying to provide groups two to three times per week to achieve the 12-session goal.
- In the absence of being able to provide this program in a residential setting, a community-based program could be modeled after the one in Washington. Ms. McDaniels suggests limiting the group to recovering parents who share similar experiences, and recruiting a strong facilitator to lead the group.

Resources for Recovering Parents

Contact Information

Sharon Koziczkowski, the parent support group manager for The Parenting Network in Milwaukee, WI, skoziczkowski@theparentingnetwork.org or 414.671.5575

Linda McDaniels, associate director for the Parent Trust for Washington Children, lmcdaniels@parenttrust.org or 206.233.0156 ext. 224

Resource Information

- Hazelden Products www.hazelden.org/
- National Center on Addiction and Substance Use at Columbia University www.casacolumbia.org/absolutenm/templates/article.asp?articleid=287&zoid=32
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration www.samhsa.gov/index.aspx

RURAL PARENTS

RURAL PARENTS

According to the Population Reference Bureau, in 2000, nearly 7% of the American population was comprised of children under the age of 18 living in rural areas¹³. Life in rural areas can be idyllic: peaceful, beautiful scenery, vistas as far as the eye can see, fresh air, etc. But rural living is not without challenges. Many parents face unemployment, poverty, social isolation, inadequate transportation systems, and limited community resources; all of which can make providing for their children extremely difficult.

Wyoming and Maine are two states that fall into the category of being predominantly rural. Circle of Parents groups are and have been operating in both states for a number of years.

To illustrate what life is like in these states, it is important to know that residents are overwhelmingly white and are scattered far and wide. According to the US Census, Maine has approximately 1.3 million residents living on 30,000 square miles of land.¹⁴ In Wyoming, neighbors are even scarcer. Only 500,000 residents live on its 97,000 square miles.¹⁵

Wyomingites are often described as being fiercely independent, self-sufficient and quite private. Mainers tend to have a strong work ethic. Unfortunately, the job force in Maine has been weakening as some of the primary industries such as fishing and manufacturing leave the area. Under such circumstances rural parents frequently struggle to make ends meet. This often entails working multiple low-paying jobs to keep food on the family table. These daily stressors can lead to a dependence on alcohol or other substances. Some parents attend support groups looking for strategies to help them cope with a spouse or partner who has substance use issues and whose behavior is having an impact on a child.

With one-quarter of the population in Maine and Wyoming falling under the age of 18, there is an incredible opportunity to provide supportive services to parents. There are some unique challenges, however, to overcome the barriers of running parent support groups in rural communities.

¹³ Population Reference Bureau. Information downloaded on November 23, 2004 from: <http://www.prb.org/datafind/prjprbdata/wcprbdata5.asp?DW=DF&SL=&SA=2/>

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau 2000. Downloaded on November 23, 2004 from <http://www.prb.org/rfdcenter/ruralkidslagginginhlth.htm>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Overcoming Barriers

Transportation

Many rural areas lack a reliable and safe public transportation system. In Maine, some parents drive 45 minutes to attend groups. Parents without vehicles have limited access to community resources.

Programs in both states encourage parents to carpool when possible. In Maine, program planners have discussed trying to provide a “parenting van” to pick up parents and provide supportive services, but lack of resources is a real challenge to building and maintaining attendance at groups.

An on-line “network chat” is being implemented in Maine to support parents participating in the Parents as Scholars program. Maine and Wyoming are the only states in the country using dollars available through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) reauthorization to provide eligible parents the financial, transportation and child care support they need to graduate from college. Parent leaders for Mainely Parents who have completed the Parents as Scholars program provide individual support and mentoring to women currently enrolled in the program. In addition to the personalized attention provided by the parent leaders, relevant issues and solutions are posted on their electronic bulletin board to assist all participating parents. While this type of resource is not a substitute for personal contact, it is a creative way to provide supportive services to parents who may not be able to access them otherwise.

Maine is also exploring the use of video-conferencing. Many facilities such as hospitals, community centers and colleges across the state have video-conferencing facilities. Getting to a local video-conference center might prove more convenient than getting to a support group. Parents would have the opportunity to participate in educational and interactive video-conferencing sessions to learn new information and strategies to address a range of issues.

While most of the groups in Maine meet weekly, participants in the Wyoming groups felt that bi-weekly meetings would be more manageable. It is important for facilitators to be responsive to the needs of the group.

Privacy

Rural communities tend to be close knit. While this provides a source of social support, it can infringe on privacy. Some parents may be reluctant to attend groups in their own community because of concerns about neighbors gossiping about them.

Carrie Harmsen of Prevent Child Abuse Wyoming stresses that hiring a facilitator who can connect with parents and who is respectful, responsive and sensitive is critical. This person needs to create an environment in which privacy and confidentiality are honored.

It is important to emphasize the purpose of the program. In Wyoming, Ms. Harmsen found that parents have an incredible distrust of social services. Many view any program providing parenting services as a cover for Child Protective Services. Ms. Harmsen

suggests being very clear about the benefits and purpose of the program and, when appropriate, its voluntary nature.

Recruitment and Retention

Both Carrie Harmsen and Pam Marshall of Mainely Parents agree that strong connections with community agencies are the key to recruiting and retaining families. In Maine, they work with the local child abuse councils to promote the program. These agencies have a solid reputation and are a credible endorser.

Parent support groups can be slow getting started. Ms. Marshall and Ms. Harmsen both found that kicking off groups with a specific, short-term curriculum is an effective way to connect parents with the group and elicit their trust. In Wyoming, they use the Love and Logic curriculum which runs for up to eight weeks. They combine these educational sessions with dessert sessions to provide opportunities for group members to socialize and become a support to one another.

In Maine, they often use a six-week parenting education course to launch new groups. Sessions cover a variety of parenting topics, identified through a local needs assessment, such as child development, discipline, teen substance abuse, and managing the defiant child. Once trust has been established and parents recognize the value of the groups, there is a greater likelihood of success. Ms. Marshall has found Dr. Michael Popkin's Active Parenting program to be a wonderful resource for providing parenting education.

The parenting education groups also provide opportunities for professional development for the support group facilitators. Ms. Marshall has found that some facilitators get frustrated and bored running support groups when attendance drops as parents cycle in and out of groups. Planning for and providing these educational services can be useful for re-charging facilitators.

Ms. Marshall suggests that agencies interested in providing services to rural parents should work with a local organization such as a church, school system or local child abuse council located in the area of interest. Assess the community's level of interest and need for services. At a minimum, Ms. Marshall recommends holding a basic training on parenting issues and building from there.

Child Care

Offering either children's programs or other child care helps to recruit and retain parents. Although a lack of resources has limited Mainely Parent's ability to operate children's programs, they have been able to run support groups during times when children are attending other events such as court-mandated therapy. This strategy has proven effective in ensuring children are not left unsupervised.

“If you only have resources to address either child care or transportation, try and provide child care. There are many creative strategies to find child care services by partnering with other community-based organizations. Transportation is a complex issue to solve.” Pam Marshall, Director, Mainely Parents.

Rural Parenting Resources

Contact Information

Carrie Harmsen, Prevent Child Abuse Wyoming, charmsen@pcawyoming.com or 307.637.8622

Pam Marshall, Director of Mainely Parents, pamkm@day-one.org or 207.842.2984.

Resource Information

- Active Parenting www.activeparenting.com
- Cooperative Extension Departments located at universities tend to be an excellent source for information and materials.
- Love and Logic www.loveandlogic.com/
- US Census Quick facts www.quickfacts.census.gov

Transportation and Food Resources

All parent support group providers would agree that providing food and transportation to participating parents can help facilitate recruitment and retention into programs. States use a variety of strategies to provide these services. Some examples are listed here.

Transportation

Programs can:

- Obtain sponsorships from bus or taxi companies;
- Negotiate discounted or donated fares or vouchers from city or state transportation agencies;
- Host agency provides transportation;
- Use Circle of Parents mini-grants to subsidize private or public transportation to enable parents to participate;
- Work with local churches, YMCAs, community centers and tribes to share busses or vans;
- Encourage participants to car-pool;
- Explore with local schools the possibility of using school busses;
- Partner with casinos to share transportation resources;
- Use wrap-around funds available through prevention programs to support transportation;
- Schedule meetings to coincide with WIC or health department clinics for which transportation is provided; and
- Explore Kiwanis Club or Forester's volunteer corps that may be willing to transport participants to and from groups.

Food

Programs can:

- Ask grocery stores to offer donated or discounted food to support groups;
- Look into whether the host agency provides food;
- Use Circle of Parents mini-grants to provide food for meetings;
- Look into local pizza parlor or other community-focused restaurants that often provide free or discounted food;
- Explore churches that tend to sponsor food for meetings;
- Ask Kiwanis Clubs or faith-based organizations to provide food for meetings;
- Explore providing food through the local or state office of USDA;
- Look for hospitals where the cafeteria will donate food for the groups, as in Illinois; and
- Occasionally ask participating parents if they are interested in bringing in food or having a pot luck meal.

When approaching organizations or companies to donate or subsidize food or other services, it is important to think about and discuss how this will benefit them. Programs should be sure to promote the benefactor's name and give them recognition, and ask what might make it easier for them to help support the program.

In Closing

We hope this document has provided some valuable strategies and resources that will assist your efforts to provide services to a range of parents. All programs that provide supportive services to parents will encounter challenges, but there are many creative solutions that can be identified through thoughtful thinking and collaborative efforts. We wish you the best of luck in your pursuits to make this a better world for children and families.

A Note of Thanks

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to those who shared their experiences for the benefit of the Circle of Parents Network and the field of family support. The passion, enthusiasm, dedication and creative energy exhibited by all those involved was overwhelming and I feel fortunate to have been a part of this process. I learned a ton!

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