

The Dakota Fatherhood Summit III

Executive Summary and Report ***July 2003***

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This report is intended to summarize the conference proceedings and related outcomes of the Dakota Fatherhood Summit III Conference in Fargo, North Dakota from May 21-23, 2003. Support for the planning, design, and implementation of the Dakota Fatherhood Summit III Conference was provided through the NDSU Extension Service and North Dakota State University, the Dakota Fatherhood Initiative, the North Dakota Head Start - State Collaboration Office, and the Denver Region VII Office of the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Description of the Dakota Fatherhood Summit III Conference

The Dakota Fatherhood Initiative (DFI) is a grassroots collaboration comprised of various programs and individuals from North and South Dakota who work with fathers in a variety of settings. This includes hosting and planning an annual Dakota Fatherhood Summit each year with sites alternating between North and South Dakota. The Dakota Fatherhood Summit III was held in Fargo, North Dakota on May 21-23, 2003. Previous summits were held in Bismarck, ND (April 2002) and Pierre, SD (October 2002). The Summit provided the opportunity to address key issues regarding male and father involvement in family life, review research and programs on father involvement, showcase resources, and encourage networking and capacity-building activities in the region related to healthy father involvement and family life. The Dakota Fatherhood Summit III was attended by approximately 180 individuals from at least six different states. A majority of participants came from North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota, but additional participants also attended from Wyoming, Montana, and Washington. Of notable interest was the fact that a sizeable number of participants attended with support from local Head Start or Early Head Start programs, and also that between 30 and 40 percent of participants were from Native American communities across the region.

Outcomes of the Dakota Fatherhood Summit III Conference

The Dakota Fatherhood Summit III conference assisted with the promotion and development of several key objectives designed to further responsible and healthy father involvement in family life. Positive outcomes associated with the conference included:

Highlighting Key Issues Related to Father Involvement

Exposure to key issues of interest and concern related to father involvement was based upon feedback gathered through previous summits in the Dakota region. It was decided to expose conference participants to such issues and related research or resources through conference plenary sessions and in-depth conference tracks on specialized issues.

Plenary sessions at the conference involved the following keynote speakers and were very well-attended and positively received:

- “Why the Dakota Fatherhood Initiative?,” Dr. Sean E. Brotherson, Extension Family Science Specialist, North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND
- “Play is the Work of Children: A Father/Child Interactive Play Night,” Mike Hall, Special Projects Director, Center for Successful Fathering, Inc., Fort Worth, TX
- “Fatherwork: Working Faithfully for the Next Generation,” Dr. David C. Dollahite, Professor, School of Family Life, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT
- “Wimps, Punks, and Sissies: The Roles of Men in the Prevention of Family Violence,” Dr. Jane Gilgun, Professor, School of Social Work, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN
- “A Lakota View of the Sacred and Its Application in Contemporary Life,” Leonard Little Finger, Teacher, Loneman School, Oglala, SD

In addition, conference tracks that focused on key issues provided participants with the opportunity to gain in-depth training and insight into working with fathers in specific contexts. Ten specialized conference tracks were provided during the conference and ranged from two sessions to four sessions. These tracks were:

- Center for Successful Fathering - Programs and Activities for Fathers
- Healthy Marriage Initiative
- Youth Development and Father Involvement
- Involving Fathers in Early Childhood Programs
- Fathers and Children with Special Needs
- Fathers and Divorce
- Men and Violence Issues
- Fathering in Native American Communities
- Fathers and Parent Education
- Working with Incarcerated Fathers

During these conference sessions, participants had the opportunity to learn about particular resources or programs on the particular topic in an in-depth fashion and to pursue opportunities for further training. Already we have seen the benefits of this approach, as we are currently aware of additional training efforts now going forward as a result of the conference related to the Center for Successful Fathering, Involving Fathers in Early Childhood Programs, and Working with Incarcerated Fathers. We anticipate additional momentum to come from the additional areas that were emphasized as part of the conference. The two-day conference thus provided an intensive educational opportunity on issues related to father involvement and family life.

Community Outreach and Involvement

Two valuable aspects of the conference related to community outreach and involvement, specifically participation of parents in the conference (as opposed to community professionals) and media coverage of the activities.

The opening evening activity of the conference focused on an interactive father-child play night, facilitated by Mike Hall of the Center for Successful Fathering, that combined parent education with father-child activities. Advertised through local schools and early childhood programs, this evening activity resulted in participation of nearly 100 fathers, mothers and children in a two-hour, interactive evening. Children ranged in age from young toddlers to teenagers and a diverse group of fathers and father figures participated. All of these participants from the community were in addition to regular attendees at the conference. This community outreach component provided an opportunity for conference attendees to see a practical, real-life demonstration of a father involvement activity that resulted in significant attendance and participation from fathers and children themselves. This event was a highlight of the conference.

An additional “community outreach” component of the conference involved providing parent education sessions throughout the conference entitled “Especially for Parents.” Topics ranged from “Time for Dads and Daughters” to “Raising Money Smart Kids” to “Parenting, Children’s Eating Habits, and Body Image.” These sessions were among the most well attended at the conference and received very high praise. A more specific focus on reaching out to fathers and other parents as part of the conference will follow as a result of this approach.

Media coverage of the conference proceedings was excellent. Local news media attended and reported on various aspects of the conference proceedings. A brief summary of news activity related to the events of the conference included news stories by four local television stations and two local radio stations, as well as print news stories in three different newspapers, including the *Fargo Forum*.

Networking and Collaboration to Promote Father Involvement

The conference provided additional support to the effort to establish a broad-based, grassroots coalition to support father involvement in family life in the Dakota region. The Dakota Fatherhood Initiative now sponsors an ongoing list-serve with hundreds of subscribers. This allows for disseminating information and linking subscribers with opportunities to strengthen father involvement. Additionally, all available presentations from the Dakota Fatherhood Summit III are being made available on the DFI website at <http://dfi.sdstate.org>.

Evaluation

A feedback survey was provided to all conference participants to elicit responses to the conference experience. This information is now being tabulated and will guide further efforts in the future; initial review of the conference feedback results has been very positive. This information will be placed on the Dakota Fatherhood Initiative website and will be available upon request.

Final Summary of the Dakota Fatherhood Summit III Conference

The Dakota Fatherhood Initiative originated a little over one year ago in the Dakota region. During that time considerable progress has been made in addressing issues regarding

responsible, involved fatherhood. Yet considerable work lies ahead to build a grassroots collaboration with a strong organizational structure and potential for significant impact through provision of resources, training, and capacity building activities.

The Dakota Fatherhood Summit III coalesced previous efforts to begin a regional fatherhood initiative and responded to suggested areas of need regarding training and resources in the area of promoting responsible fatherhood. It differed from the two previous summits in that it focused on providing specific training and resources to promote active efforts in strengthening father involvement, rather than on simply exploring issues and assessing stakeholder interest in the topic of responsible fatherhood promotion. The summit featured nationally known speakers and programs that made available high-quality knowledge and resources for working with men and fathers in specific circumstances. This conference further developed a sustainable coalition of interested persons and organizations around the objective of strengthening responsible father involvement.

Establishment of an annual regional conference on father involvement that is followed up with specific training opportunities and collaborative activities across the region is seen as an effective strategy to promote responsible fatherhood. Toward this end, planning activities will begin in relation to the possibility of providing the Dakota Fatherhood Summit IV in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in October 2004.