



Partners for Kids: Getting Father-Ready

June 2011

Inside



National Leadership: Where Things Began

Karen Schrader, Training and TA Manager, Circle of Parents

In 2006 Circle of Parents applied and received one of five Responsible Fatherhood Community Access grants from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance. Prior to this grant, our work in support of father engagement was scattered rather than focused. We had created a manual, entitled "From Dads to Grandparents to Parents in Recovery: States' Experience in Supporting Diverse Populations". A few dads like Patrick DeCesaro and Harry Baker from Families First in Colorado, provided leadership in facilitating groups for dads there, as well as provided leadership within the Circle of Parents National Network. Several other states also offered dads' groups, but the Network wasn't focused specifically on fatherhood. The grant provided us with an opportunity to help move the 'cultural norm' of our Circle of Parents Network and the 'cultural norm' of local community-based/faith-based home visiting programs further along the continuum of engaging and supporting fathers.



One of our strategic objectives was focused on changing the organization's cultural norms around embracing fathers. The National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), experts in the fatherhood field, joined forces with Circle of Parents to help show us the way. We needed to assess where each grantee was on the scale of father-friendliness. Each local and state grantee completed a father-friendly check-up assessment and created an action plan to increase their abilities to engage fathers.

Knowing that organizational change was important when we wrote the grant, Circle of Parents created a multi-level training and technical assistance system to assist the Network state and local grantees in becoming more father-friendly. In addition to NFI, expert consultants such as a domestic violence professional with experience in working with males and Bernie Dorsey of the Conscious Fathering Program of Parent Trust for Washington Children, were engaged to provide much-needed direction and guidance. By year 3 it became clear that we needed to be more intentional in our efforts. We added additional training events and technical assistance focused on not only organizational assessment, but also staff self-assessment. If organizations are going to change their cultural norms, the staff must make personal changes as well. Circle of Parents' commitment to father outreach and engagement will continue long after the grant ends in September. In this issue, we've focused on North Carolina as one illustration of the far reaching impact of this grant both on the state and local levels.

During this last year we began to see and recognize the cultural norm changes and felt more comfortable saying we are working to become more "father-ready" rather than "father-friendly." We know we've still got a lot to learn, but the growing passion, knowledge and commitment to embracing fathers makes us want to use a more action oriented description of our work. We are proud of the work of our grantees as they continue to invest in being father-ready and encourage all of our Network organizations and collaborating colleagues to learn from their experiences.



Local Programs
Page 2



Local Programs
Page 3



State Partnerships
Page 4



Parent Voices from
Around the Circle
Page 5



Assessing Father
Friendliness
Page 6



Emerging Programmatic
Activities
Page 7



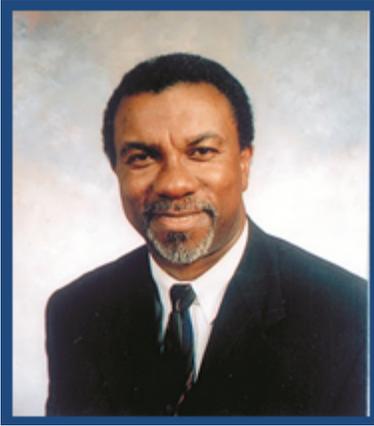
CIRCLE of PARENTS®

Sharing Ideas. Sharing Support.

www.circleofparents.org

Local Programs Embrace Father-Ready Practice Principles

Dr. Denauvo M. Robinson, President & CEO, Albemarle Smart Start Partnership, drobinson@albemarlessp.org



Dr. Robinson and Dr. Morrow form the executive leadership of Albemarle Smart Start Partnership located in northeastern North Carolina. As an organization, Albemarle Smart Start Partnership focuses on early childhood development and school readiness. Albemarle Smart Start Partnership is a local program partner of the Circle of Parents that is promoting efforts to advance the engagement of fathers in the lives of children and families. Dr. Robinson and Dr. Morrow share their own unique insights on father involvement and engagement from a local program perspective.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What has been your overall experience in getting programs and systems to embrace fathers?

DR. DENAUVO M. ROBINSON: One thing that we have seen over time is many agencies define family as mother and children-not fathers or men. It is having a direct negative effect on our society as we raise our children. Our organization helps fathers become more engaged and involved with their children and families. This does not mean that the fathers are the sole heads of the family or lead their family with an iron fist. It does mean that involved fathers can help raise their children in a balanced and participatory way.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: The “father ready” work was formerly characterized as “father friendly” activities. Do think there is a difference between programs and systems that are “father ready” as opposed to “father friendly?”

DR: We see it as a significant difference- a progression. We found out that wanting to have fathers involved and wanting there to be openness and awareness and friendliness towards accepting fathers and helping the fathers see that people were going to be friendly to them is a very important objective. But just because they were friendly, didn’t mean they were ready to accept them or to embrace them or have them as part of the total unit. So we felt that “ready” is a much better term than “friendly” and for us it did signify what we were trying to do.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What are your main goal(s) in implementing the father ready Initiative?

DR: Our main goal is really to work with people in the workplace. We’ve entered into a relationship with our local hospitals in trying to help them understand what being “father ready” is. We talked with the Coast Guard base, we’ve talked with people at our Chamber of Commerce which has over 600 businesses, as we’re trying to get them to understand that just as you have rules and regulations for the mothers that work with you, we also need to have some things that allow fathers to be more involved in the lives of their children. We are trying to make it so that it won’t always be that if a child is sick, that it is going to be the mother’s job to stay off work- that it could also be part of the father’s responsibility to stay at home to take care of the child.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: With respect to your implementation of the “father ready” activities, what has been your experience in working with mothers? Is there a difference in working with mothers versus fathers?

DR: Working with the mothers is very different. While in one sense they welcome the involvement of the father, on the other hand they see it as a bit of an encroachment on their world. Things that they would normally be able to do, now the man is saying “I can do that as well” or “I can assist with that.” It’s not that

the fathers are saying to the mothers, “I don’t need you,” they are saying, “I can be a partner in the raising of our child.” That can be a little threatening to females. Indeed some of the males take this as the easy way out because some of them don’t want to be involved with their families or their children so “the pass” that they have gotten in the past, many of them would like to continue it. What we’re trying to do is create an environment and an atmosphere for fathers where non-involvement is not going to be good enough. We’re going to allow other fathers, their peers, to keep their nose to the grindstone so that they will be involved with their children.

We’re also saying that even though you might not be that involved with your “baby’s mama” that you can still be involved with your children.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What would you characterize as being your biggest challenge with respect to the implementation and operationalization of the “father ready” activities and training?

DR: Keeping the dad’s engaged. It’s very easy for them to come to one meeting and then not be available for the next meeting and or to only want to do playful things. It’s ok that we want to go play basketball or we could go to a game, but we also must sit down and talk about some real issues. We know that talking about real issues can be difficult and a little threatening because that’s not what we have done in the past.

Continues on Page 8 Local Practice-Dr. Robinson

Local Programs Embrace Father-Ready Practice Principles

Dr. Jane Morrow, Executive Vice President, Albemarle Smart Start Partnership, jmorrow@albemarlessp.org



CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What has been your overall experience in getting programs and systems to embrace fathers?

DR. JANE MORROW: We have had mixed experiences. On the one hand we have had consistent and positive responses to the idea of services for fathers, promoting involved fathers, and to getting the community more “father ready”. On the other hand, we have not always had the turnout for our programs that we had hoped for.

I think part of it is awareness. Many people are not aware of the barriers they put up for men who are becoming involved fathers. For example, I know someone whose son has custody of her granddaughter. The granddaughter was sick and her son took her to a hospital, but would not be accepted by the nurses. The assumption was, “where’s mom, dad can’t be doing this.” It was not until he showed the nurses custody papers that the she was allowed to be checked into the hospital. The lesson is people need to be aware they are making inaccurate assumptions. We have focused our training in the last year and are making communities aware of such issues through the fatherhood training.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: How would you describe your work with fathers prior to your connection to the “father ready” training and technical assistance?

JM: We have a fairly long history of providing father focused services. We had funded some father involvement programs,

including work with incarcerated fathers. Our Parents as Teachers program includes a quality assessment analysis of how we are serving fathers. Also, our leadership has always been focused on including fathers.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: The “father ready” work was formerly characterized as “father friendly” activities. Is there a difference between programs and systems that are “father ready” as opposed to “father friendly?”

JM: Yes. We are an agency that works with the early care and education community. In that world, there has been a shift in focus from just getting children ready for school to having schools be ready for children. This means everything from the classroom environment to teaching strategies, to parent involvement. We think the same applies for fathers. It is not just a matter of helping fathers to become as involved, but it is also important to get agencies and organizations ready to embrace involved fathers in the same ways they embrace mothers.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What are your main goals in implementing the father ready Initiative?

JM: First, we want to increase awareness by having people stop and think, “Do I do anything to make it more difficult for fathers?” Next, we hope that individuals and programs make the needed changes to facilitate the full engagement of fathers. From that, we hope that more fathers will feel the community as a whole not only expects, but helps them become more involved with their children.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: With respect to your implementation of the “father ready” activities, what has been your experience in working with mothers?

JM: We work with the hospital’s maternity services, including child birth classes, so

we have interaction with mothers. Sometimes mothers who are registering for those services also sign up their partners for the Conscious Fathering (CF) classes. So it is not always the fathers who are the ones who originally seek the services.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: Is there a difference in working with mothers versus fathers?

JM: The biggest difference in working with mothers and fathers is the cultural expectations about who has the primary responsibility for parenting and seeking help with any parenting issues or concerns. Men may not feel they have permission to seek these services, which is why the father ready awareness work is so important. We must figure out how to promote co-parenting.

If society says that mothers are the primary caregiver of children, it may also be possible that women do not value co-parenting skills. When considering co-parenting, we must come to terms with what we as a society want. Currently, society communicates that it is mom’s fault for the poor outcomes of their children and it is to mom’s credit for the positive outcomes of their children. This is inaccurate because mothers and fathers are co-equal partners in nurturing and supporting the development of children. If we as women do not speak out, then we are not doing our part to change this misperception.

Moreover, I think that in this society, there are still many pregnancies that are not planned for by the mother and father. As a man, if you’re not actively involved in a decision to be a father, that’s a barrier. Men often say, “I have 5 kids and my girlfriends having my baby.” But what you do not typically hear immediately afterwards is “I’m going to be that child’s father.” Those two concepts should be one. If that disconnect is present with the mother or father, then than a barrier to co-parenting may exist.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: Do communities play

Continues on Page 8 Local Practice-Dr. Morrow

Father Ready: State Partnership

Sarah Currier, Chief Program Officer, Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, scurrier@preventchildabusenc.org,
Katrina Gay, Program Coordinator, Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, kgay@preventchildabusenc.org



Sarah Currier and Katrina Gay of Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina (PCANC) are state partners of Circle of Parents. They discuss their statewide leadership strategy for advancing a framework in support of strengthening the role of fathers in the lives of children and families.

SARAH CURRIER: Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina (PCANC) has always been committed to supporting families, whatever their makeup. Over the past few years we have had the opportunity to look more closely at the issue of fatherhood and examine successful approaches to strengthening healthy child development through positive father/child relationships. In 2009 and 2010, we received an ACF Partners for Kids: United Hands Make the Best Families/Responsible Fatherhood Community-Access Grant through the national Circle of Parents office. This funding has allowed us to work with local Circle of Parents programs to include fathers in a more intentional way. In 2010, we received additional funding through the North Carolina Division of Social Services, allowing us to better learn how North Carolina can most effectively approach fatherhood. PCANC convened the Fatherhood Policy Committee, consisting of members of the existing Fatherhood Development Advisory Council, Partners for Kids grantees, state level partners, and university representatives, to actively advise the project and review a final set of recommendations.

At this point, we have completed an environmental scan of local, national, and international fatherhood programs, as well as a review of the literature. As we immersed ourselves, we realized that the field is enormous and has grown out of various different arenas – fathers’ rights, child support enforcement - and has broadened. Because our work is centered on parenting, we really wanted to get at the research on strengthening father/child relationships. Our key learning is summarized in a final report that contains a set of recommendations. This has been submitted to the NC Division of Social Services,

and will guide the work of the Fatherhood Policy Committee in the coming year, which will include some strategic planning. We really see this as the beginning of a more intentional and cohesive system to address fatherhood in North Carolina. We are hoping to see a shift in social norms and begin to help the general public, policy makers, and practitioners understand the vital role that fathers play in their children’s healthy development. It is critical that we embrace dads and help to build and strengthen those relationships.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What has been your overall experience in getting statewide program efforts to embrace fathers?

KATRINA GAY: I believe Sarah said it best: it’s going to be a long process. There are efforts that have been going on for years in North Carolina through the Fatherhood Development Advisory Council. We have been able to connect with that group and have been working collaboratively to implement some broader state level strategies. As the Circle of Parents Coordinator, I have served as the PCANC representative on that group, which is also closely connected with the Fatherhood Policy Committee. What we are trying to do is a very small step. We are trying to work our way toward broad based change.

SC: I think Katrina is right on target. We really wanted to rely on the expertise of the Fatherhood Development Advisory Council, as a pre-existing practitioner led and focused group. The Fatherhood Policy Committee includes members of the Council, as well as other partners. It is a slow process to intentionally build a statewide movement; some of our work this year will be to involve and invite more

state-level systems and policy folks to be a part of the Committee and build some leadership. The Fatherhood Development Advisory Council is an unfunded group; those who are there are really committed to this work.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: How would you describe your work with fathers prior to your connection to the “father ready” training and technical assistance?

KG: Prior to the Partners for Kids grant, Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina believed that we were serving families: families included parents, and parents included dads. We weren’t being intentional about reaching out to fathers specifically but also didn’t feel like we were excluding them. I think that we’ve realized that we do need to be more intentional to engage fathers. We’ve really connected with the Parental Balance Approach that was introduced by Bernie Dorsey. The way that I like to describe that approach is that we engage fathers with the same expectations that we have of mothers – not that dads need to be coaxed with footballs and hotdogs and beer but that they are parents. If we expect mothers to take their children to medical appointments, to pick their kids up after school, and to know their kids’ friends, then we should have the same expectations of fathers. And ultimately, we should create cultural norms where we do have those expectations.

I think other ways that we have tried to model this messaging is through our statewide conference, the Learning and Leadership Summit in March 2011. We invited Roland Warren, CEO of the National Fatherhood Initiative, to be a keynote

Continues on Page 8 State Partnership

Voices from Around the Circle Father Ready: Charles Railford



Charles and his family enjoy their time together.

Charles Railford is a parent leader and a committed father who talks about his experiences as an active father and as a Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina Parent Leadership Award recipient.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: Tell me a little about yourself and how you became involved in the father ready program?

CHARLES RAILFORD: My name is Charles Railford, I'm 27 and I graduated from North Carolina A&T State University. I received my BA in Psychology and I'm now a Probation Officer, Qualified Mental Health Professional, and a part-time DJ. After graduation and before the jobs came, it was a struggle to find money. Aviyah was born and I was selected to be involved in a parenting program and I have been involved ever since. I have two daughters and one step-daughter. Alyvion (Stepdaughter) is 8, Ari is 3, and Aviyah is 5.

I ended up becoming involved in the fatherhood activities through my kids. They started attending a Head Start school here in Goldsboro, North Carolina. The Head Start program put on seminars that helped fathers build skills that they can take home and apply to their families. The Head Start program also had workshops and marriage seminars.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: We understand you've won a couple of awards. How did you and your family feel about that?

CR: In my family, the program and the recognition and the awards mean a great deal. I realize that people actually look and pay attention to what you are doing, whether you think they are looking or not looking- someone's always paying attention to what you are doing. I don't want to say that the awards are an incentive because it is a father's job to be there for the kids anyway. However, there is positive feeling when you get feedback from your kids or you see yourself in the newspaper, it feels warm and it's a good thing. The recognition serves as an extra push to do well; it is not just about receiving a reward. It really is about self-fulfillment knowing that you are doing a good job and people see that you are doing a good job.

I received 2 awards. The first award was the Parent Leadership Award. Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina also recognized me as a parent who is involved, and recognized me for being a role model for youth, being an outstanding leader in the community, and for making the community a better place for kids. My awards were featured in the local newspaper. Later, I was nominated for the National Fatherhood Award, but they choose someone else. It was still an honor to be nominated.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What would you say to fathers who were considering getting involved but were not sure about the program?

CR: Go for it. It's a great program, a good teaching tool, and it's full with learning possibilities- you know the sky is the limit.



Charles Railford receiving the Parent Leadership Award from Rose Marie Allen, CEO, Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina.

Assessing Father-Friendliness

Dr. Chris Brown, Executive Vice President, National Fatherhood Initiative, cbrown@fatherhood.org



The National Fatherhood Initiative's Father-Friendly Check-up has been broadly promoted by the Circle of Parents as an important tool for their local and state partners to deploy in order to determine how well positioned those programs and organizations are in terms of embracing father involvement and participation. Dr. Chris Brown discusses the developments, uses and learnings emerging from the implementation of the Father-Friendly Check-up.

National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) provides the free Father-Friendly Check-Up™ for Social Services and Programs. The Check-Up helps staff assess the organization's operations serving fathers and leads staff to identify strategies for supporting and serving fathers. Staffs also examine the culture of their organization and whether it is likely to support programs and services for fathers. This can help ensure that a program or service will have long-term support in an organization before it is implemented.

NFI developed the check-up in 2000. The original version contained approximately 100 "father-inclusive" statements divided among seven categories that touched on the culture of the organization, not just on its programs and services. The categories included: Leadership and Organizational Philosophy; Policies and Procedures; Program, Service, and Product Content; Physical Environment; Staff Orientation and Training; Social Marketing Strategies; and Community Engagement. Staff simply answered "yes" or "no" based on whether they agreed with each statement. NFI identified the domains based on the expertise of its staff and feedback from the early use of the check-up.

The current version of the check-up is the culmination of a decade of use and feedback from the thousands of staff who have

used it. Some of the diverse organizations that use the Check-Up are Head Starts and Early Head Starts; Parents as Teachers and Circle of Parents programs; child welfare agencies; schools; public health departments; and family support programs on military installations. The feedback from such organizations has aided the continual process of improving the check-up.

Of particular significance to the refinement of the check-up is what NFI has learned from using it during the five-year National Responsible Fatherhood Capacity-Building Initiative (NRFCCI) funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Since launching the NRFCCI in 2006, NFI has worked intensively with each of nearly 125 organizations from across the country for one year (20-25 organizations per year) to build their capacity to serve fathers. Organizations used the check-up as their primary tool to create strategic plans and build their capacity.

In preparation of the NRFCCI, NFI reduced the number of categories to the current four: Leadership Development, Organizational Development, Program Development, and Community Engagement. These changes made it a more sophisticated instrument that contains 111 statements each on a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) as well as a scoring system. These changes strengthened the check-up and help organizations target their greatest areas of need in serving fathers.

The check-ups' results have been remark-

able. An evaluation of the first three years of the NRFCCI found that 93 percent of the organizations increased their capacity and maintained it 1 year after the 1-year grant ended. Moreover, these organizations had generated more than 4 million dollars in combined funding as a result of their participation in the initiative. NFI has also gathered case studies of the positive impact of the check-up.

There are three primary challenges organizations face in using the check-up. The first is to ensure that staffs at all levels of the organization complete it (e.g. administration, front-line staff, and board members). This approach provides a picture of how staff views the organization's culture in terms of whether it supports serving fathers. Staff often remark that simply completing the check-up raises awareness of how little they knew about serving fathers and how much their organization needs to grow. This creates buy-in to help change the organization's culture.

The second challenge is to use the results of the check-up to develop a strategic plan to change the culture and operations. Organizations must avoid the temptation to simply create a fatherhood program or service that is only one offering instead of including strategies that integrate serving fathers into all of its offerings. NFI staff comes alongside organizations and helps staff translate the results of the check-up into action that ensures they avoid this temptation.

Continues on Page 9 Assessing

Father Readiness: Emerging Programmatic Activities

Dr. Ching-Tung Wang, Project Evaluator, Prevent Child Abuse America, cwang@preventchildabuse.org



As a critical part of the Circle of Parents' Responsible Fatherhood Project effort, Dr. Ching-Tung Wang supported the evaluation/assessment activities. The Father-Friendly Check-Up, developed by the National Fatherhood Institute has been deployed as one central feature of the project and is an effective program practice assessment tool that advances efforts of local and state programs to determine how prepared they are to engage, support and work with fathers. Dr. Wang shares a collection of program experiences emerging from the utilization of the Father-Friendly Check-Up by Circle of Parents' local and state partners.

Leadership & Organizational Philosophy

- Several programs developed a vision or mission statement that includes fathers (e.g., the program's philosophy of serving fathers was incorporated into their mission statement; the vision statement indicates specific steps the program would take to include fathers in their programming).
- The staff and leadership of one program fully embraced the philosophy and concept of father-friendliness, but the tools for delivering this message were yet-to-be developed.
- One program worked to strengthen the mother/father relationship.
- One program was intentional in increasing the visibility of their philosophy of the importance of father involvement through newsletters, staff language, brochures, etc.

Program Management/Program Policies & Procedures

- Many programs sought to actively involve fathers in program's leadership, such as establishing a father's advisory council, including fathers in various advisory boards and councils, and having fathers join the Board of Directors of the agency.
- Several programs improved their efforts of collecting and including fathers' information through newly implemented procedures, revised enrollment/intake forms, and ensured that all program mailings include father's names.
- A couple of programs designated a staff person to be responsible for responding to fathers' requests for assistance or to recruit and plan activities for fathers.

Parent-Involvement Program/Service Content

- A number of programs conducted survey with fathers to determine their needs, concerns, and interests related to the program's activities and services.
- Several programs invited male presenters to speak about issues that are of concern to men.
- One program offered several special events in the community just for fathers and to celebrate fatherhood which increased involvement in their program.

Recruitment/Retention of Fathers

- Several programs involved fathers in their recruitment efforts (e.g., asked fathers to help design the message for their recruitment materials; utilized male parent leaders for recruitment; conducted a focus group with fathers to review marketing materials for father-friendliness).
- Several programs developed marketing tools that used direct language specific to men.
- Two programs started tracking fathers' participation in home visits and other program activities. One program reported a 42% increase in home visits.
- One program educated staff on being flexible with respect to scheduling opportunities to engage fathers

Program Physical Environment

- Many programs added positive portrayals of fathers and children in photos, posters, pictures, and display materials in their program's waiting/reception areas.

Continues on Page 10 Programmatic

Local Practice-Dr. Robinson Continued

The only thing we have found to work is the peer approach in getting the guys to say “come on” or getting the guys who digress a little bit to bring them back in the fold.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What would you characterize as being your biggest success with respect to the implementation and operationalization of the “father ready” activities and training?

DR: Probably working with some college age fathers and seeing that they have a support group on campus while they are away from their children or away from the children’s mother. Trying to keep them focused- if they are in a relationship with their child’s mother, the support group helps them to work on nurturing that relationship and trying to help fight some of the temptations that exist on campus. Also, the support group helps them to see that even if it doesn’t work out with the baby’s mother, they can stay in the baby’s life or the child’s life for the long haul.

Local Practice-Dr. Morrow Continued

a role in changing the assumptions about fathers?

JM: We have seen change within communities related to the role of fathers. More men interact with babies and those men are involved in nurturing and other developmentally appropriate activities. Societal images and attitudes related to men as fathers have broadened. There is interplay between parental and family decisions and social norms so seeing dads more engaged and involved shouldn’t be a surprise.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What would you characterize as being your biggest challenge with respect to the implementation and operationalization of the “Father Ready” activities and training?

JM: Attendance is the biggest challenge. We do not think this is a challenge specific to us or because the work is about fathers. Participation is an issue with which many

groups and programs struggle.

If all the agencies and programs who worked with fathers and children would do more community-based referrals using such community institutions as a local church, the barber shop or the doctor’s office, we would get referrals from everywhere and there would not be just “one door” that fathers can walk through in order to participate in programs.

For us, the most effective strategy is approaching groups that are already together. Otherwise, it’s very hard to reach people. We know that PTA membership and various other civic memberships have lost attendance. We believe it is because parents are working more and they do not have as much time.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What would you characterize as being your biggest success with respect to the implementation and operationalization of the “father ready” activities and training?

JM: The successes are on an individual basis. Our biggest individual success was probably when connecting with a group that was already in existence. There was a group already set up for parents with children that had special needs and some of the fathers from that group formed our first Circle of Parents group.

Another was on the university campus; they were hungry for fatherhood programming. They never had the opportunity to sit around in a group and talk about their role as men and fathers in a small group setting.

We have experienced some success working with hospitals. More broadly, when hospital leadership says, “This is good. We should have these meetings about fathers.” That we consider an important achievement.

State Partnership Continued

speaker. Our audience was made up of practitioners who serve families, and I think his message was just what we needed to hear. Many walked away thinking they could do better job engaging and serving dads, so it gave us something to build on. We were also very excited to honor Charles Railford, a father with this year’s Parent Leadership Award, which was presented at the Summit. We provide our Prevention Network, over 250 organizations and individuals across the state who are involved in child abuse prevention efforts, with all of the modeling and tools that they can put to use at the local level.

SC: Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, as well as Prevent Child Abuse America, have done a lot of work with the Frame Works Institute to learn how to message about child maltreatment prevention policy. We’ve been using these reframed messages - which really are very complimentary when we talk about engaging dads. We’re trying to shift the focus to the critical role that dads play in children’s healthy development. It’s the positive interactions between children and fathers that are strengthening the architecture of the growing brain and are having positive outcomes across development and throughout the life span. Again, I would say that there is a balance between policy and norms; policy can help shift norms and shifting norms can help shift policy.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: The “father ready” work was formerly characterized as “father friendly” activities. Do you think there is a difference between programs and systems that are “father ready” as opposed to “father friendly?”

KG: I do see a distinction between father ready and father friendly. Albemarle Smart Start, one of the local NC Partners for Kids grantees, has really been involved in implementing that terminology in their community, which they adopted from fatherhood work happening in South Dakota. They are committed to move beyond father friendliness; it’s not just about be-

ing nice to the dads when they come in the door, it's about being ready to engage them, to work with them, and to know how to do that. That really appealed to Albemarle Smart Start and that's exactly the direction that they wanted to go with their services. They've done a great job at putting that message out into their local community. It's not something seen more broadly around the state yet, but it's certainly a part of the messaging that we consider making more available.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What are your main goal(s) in implementing your father ready Initiative statewide?

SC: I would hope that our strategic planning process would actually help us identify those benchmarks.

KG: I think that the fact that we have convened the Fatherhood Policy Committee is a huge success. A short term goal for us was to identify and pull together stakeholders across the state that are invested in this to begin to look at leadership and policy change, so I think that in it of itself is a milestone. In the future, that group is going to define what those benchmarks are. For me, it would be important to see some defined leadership around father engagement.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: With respect to your statewide implementation of the "father ready" activities, what has been your experience with mothers? Is there a difference in working with mothers versus fathers?

KG: I think we feel very strongly that we want to move away from the view of mothers as gatekeepers, which feels like we're putting them in an adversarial role. Instead, we want to think of them instead as partners in this effort. We're all working together to support children and nurture children.

We feel very strongly about partnering with moms in this work. Fathers and mothers are both a part of the family sys-

tem, and we believe in approaching this holistically. From a systems and policy perspective, we need to be careful not to silo and create distinct initiatives. We need to engage the family as a whole. It is a partnership.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What would you characterize as being your biggest challenge with respect to the implementation and operationalization of the "father ready" activities and training statewide?

SC: I would have to say that it's how broad the field is, as well as the lack of a solid research base. It's not something that we can tackle on our own. We at Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina are trying to be clear about our role and focus. Our commitment is building strong relationships between parents and children and building support within communities to strengthen and support families and that would include dads.

KG: Actually, I completely agree. Trying to wrap our brains and our arms around this issue has been really hard. Figuring out how to define what we are focusing on and then how to break it down into manageable pieces has been really challenging. And I think what's interesting about this issue is how personal this is.

Everyone has an experience with their father whether the father was in the home, not in the home, or even if they've never met. And in some ways that's challenging because it can be hard to think past that, but it's also a great gift to this effort. People bring so much passion to it, and it's based on those personal experiences.

CIRCLE OF PARENTS: What would you characterize as being your biggest success with respect to the implementation and operationalization of the "father ready" activities and training statewide?

SC: I think Katrina touched on this, but it's really convening this group and being at the final stages of getting the recommendations and the final report together. That

feels huge. And it's exciting to think about that work that could happen over the next few years.

KG: I completely agree. Just seeing the financial crisis going on across the country and yet we were able to convene this group, we have some direction, and (although not a lot) we do have some funding and are able to continue the work next year.



One of Albemarle Smart Start's father ready promotional efforts.

Assessing Continued

The third challenge is to assign staff—ideally a team—to manage the change effort and complete it. Staff should come from all levels of the organization. It can take at least a year to complete the changes that some organizations require, but it is well worth the effort and leads to a sustainable organizational result.

For more information on the Father-Friendly Check-Up™, visit www.fatherhood.org or send an e-mail to info@fatherhood.org. NFI offers a one-day on-site workshop that helps organizations apply the check-up.

Programmatic Continued

- Several programs added reading materials (i.e., magazines, books) that are of interest to and directed toward men in their lobby or reception areas.
- A number of programs added a baby changing station in the men's or unisex bathroom.
- A couple of programs surveyed fathers about their opinions on the father-friendliness of the program's reception area and then implemented or requested improvements based on their suggestions.

Professional Development

- Many programs provided training to staff on fatherhood programming, father-friendliness, and father involvement through new staff orientation, staff meetings, supervision discussion, training workshops, or in-service trainings.
- Several programs provided training on gender differences in learning and communication styles.
- A couple of programs' supervisors shadowed staff during home visits, which included a father providing feedback and discussing ways to more effectively involve fathers.

Resource Network/Community Outreach

- Many programs reached out to agencies serving families within their communities. Program staff provided training and materials to help increase the awareness within the community of the importance of fathers.
- A few programs formed partnerships with community agencies, through which education on father friendliness was provided, fatherhood information was shared, and parenting curriculum offerings in two hospitals were expanded to include Conscious Fathering™.
- One program reported that there is a heightened awareness among the partner agencies of the importance of outreach to fathers and inclusion of fathers in all programming.
- One program began outreach efforts to early childhood providers in their county.

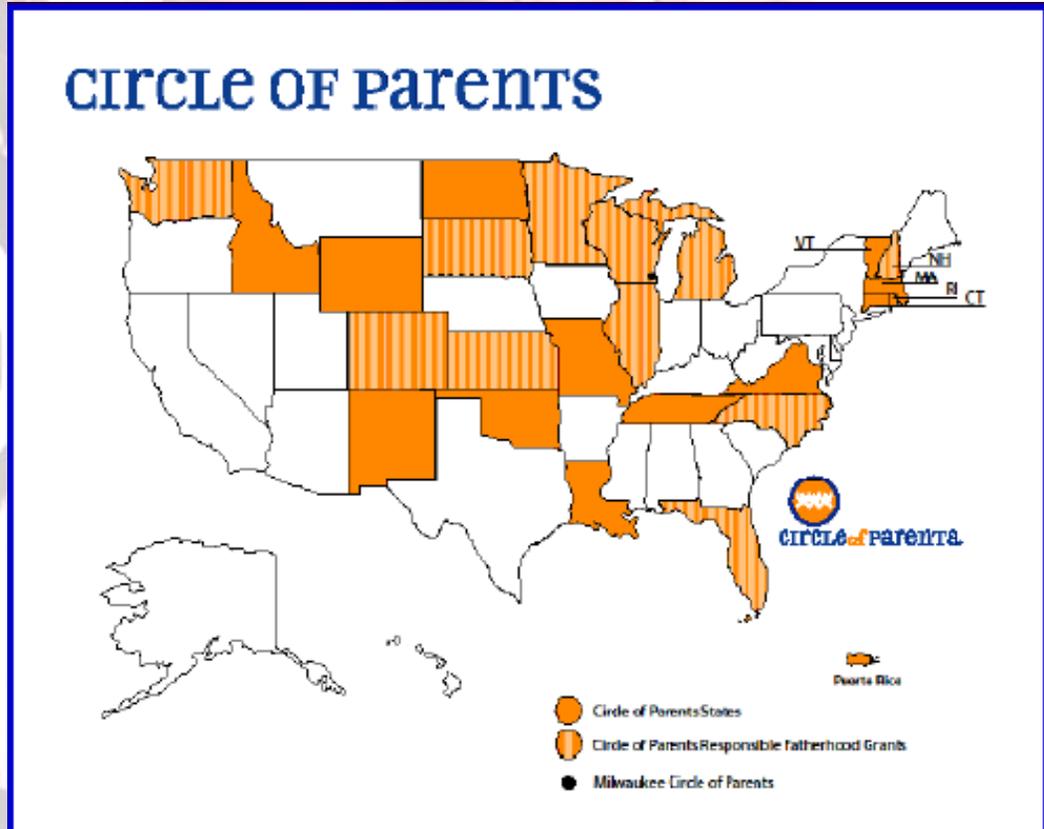
For more information on the Father-Friendly Check-Up™ as being utilized by Circle of Parents, please refer to Karen Schrader, Project Director for Partners for Kids: United Hands Make the Best Families Responsible Fatherhood Community Access Program, and Training and TA Manger, at circleofparents@lexicominc.net, or to Cynthia Savage, CEO, Circle of Parents, at csavage@circleofparents.org.



Circle of Parents

Circle of Parents® is a national network of statewide non-profit organizations and parent leaders that are dedicated to using the mutual self-help support group model as a means of preventing child abuse and neglect and strengthening families. Circle of Parents offers anyone in a parenting role the opportunity to participate in weekly group meetings with other parents to exchange ideas, share information, develop and practice new parenting skills, learn about community resources, and give and receive support. Groups are parent-led with the support of a trained group facilitator, are conducted in a confidential and nonjudgmental manner, are free of charge and provide developmentally appropriate children's programs or child care concurrent with the parent group meetings. Developing leadership on the individual, family, community and societal levels, as desired by parent participants, is a central theme of the Circle of parents model.

In 2006 Circle of Parents received a grant from the Office of Family Assistance to implement a comprehensive training, technical assistance and community access project to aid local home visiting programs in the provision of support and education to new and expectant fathers. Parents as Teachers, Nurse-Family Partnership, Healthy Families America, Early Head Start and/or Healthy Start programs in 13 states



received \$50,000 each to begin services to expecting and new fathers. The project is being implemented in partnership with the National Fatherhood Initiative, the Conscious Fathering Program™ of Parent Trust for Washington Children, PACT Law Center, Prevent Child Abuse America and Leslie Staroneck, a domestic violence expert.

Through March 2011, 2,280 expecting or fathers of infants, 1,546 fathers of children between 1 and 5 years, 1,057 mothers and 153 other caregivers were served through 710 Conscious Fathering classes and 1,103 Circle of Parents' groups for fathers.

Partners for Kids: United Hands Make the Best Families Responsible Fatherhood Community Access Program, funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance - Grant No. 90FR0098, CFDA#93.086. These services are available to all eligible persons regardless of race, gender, age, disability or religion. This grant was awarded to Circle of Parents, 2100 So. Marshall Blvd., Unit 305, Chicago, IL 60623. Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Department of Health & Human Services, Administration of Children & Families and/or Office of Family Assistance.

2100 South Marshall Boulevard
Suite 305
Chicago, IL 60623
www.circleofparents.org

