

Fatherhood and Healthy Families Taskforce

Introduction

The President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships is proud to submit the following recommendations for advancing fatherhood in America. We do so in full recognition of the fact that when fathers are present in the lives of their children, the foundations of our families are stronger and our communities are more robust.

President Obama powerfully stated the mission in a memorable speech delivered from the White House on Father's Day 2009:

In many ways, I came to understand the importance of fatherhood through its absence—both in my life and in the lives of others. I came to understand that the hole a man leaves when he abandons his responsibility to his children is one that no government can fill. We can do everything possible to provide good jobs and good schools and safe streets for our kids, but it will never be enough to fully make up the difference. That is why we need fathers to step up, to realize that their job does not end at conception; that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child but the courage to raise one.

The President has strongly advocated for both responsible behavior and responsible policies—a perspective the Council fully shares.

We believe this Nation must support the capacity of fathers to raise their children; to stay actively engaged with them; and to be steady, positive, and loving models of commitment and support throughout their children's lives. Through innovative, strategic partnerships—partnerships that work with fatherhood organizations, programs, and experts—the Administration can advance its commitment to helping fathers be beacons of hope, stability, and leadership in their own families and communities.

This report identifies a wide variety of opportunities in the public and private sectors for collaboration and action that can be promoted by the Federal Government to support responsible fatherhood. We highlight ideas for reducing violence in general and domestic violence, in particular. We advocate for better education, job training, and overall employment policies. We are in favor of programs that help fathers with parenting skills, financial skills, navigating the child support system, family planning,¹ and maintaining healthy marriages and other strong, positive relationships. We encourage expanded opportunities for volunteering and community service and suggest that community partners that support fatherhood initiatives should include women's organizations and children

¹ "Family planning" is a broad term, and to the extent it includes programs that would involve the Government in funding or otherwise promoting contraception, some Council members would be opposed.

and family-center organizations as well. And we urge that influential sports figures and celebrities, among others, be enlisted to help.

The charge of the Council was to develop recommendations for partnership and program opportunities that will strengthen the Administration's commitment to promote fatherhood and the role of fathers in supporting healthy families. As such, this report does not address or compare the unique needs of mothers in strengthening healthy families, and the recommendations presented here are not intended to disadvantage or diminish the funding and promotion of programs that serve women and mothers.

Core Concepts

A single overarching conviction shaped our deliberations: **Responsible, engaged fathers are critical to the financial, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being of children**, and therefore to the strength and health of American families and communities. Fathers are not just nice to have around; they are profoundly valuable and often irreplaceable in the lives of their children.

Additionally, these recommendations are grounded in the clear understanding that children's well-being is materially advanced by strong, high-quality relationships between their parents. Supporting such relationships—healthy marriages and other stable, supportive relationships—advances the well-being of children and families.²

These recommendations are also informed by the recognition that responsible fatherhood not only requires deep dedication to one's children and family, but also the determination to postpone becoming a father until one is adequately prepared to accept the full responsibilities of fatherhood. This perspective can also include fathers choosing to postpone having *additional* children if they are struggling to meet their responsibilities to their current children and families.³

Key Data on Father-Absence Crisis in America

Many statistics underscore the importance of addressing fatherhood in America in new and powerful ways, especially the importance of men taking responsibility for the children they father.

For example:

- In 2007, 40 percent of all births in America were to single women. For women 20 to 24, the figure is 60 percent.⁴

² "Other stable, supportive relationships" is a broad term, and to the extent it includes non-marital sexual relationships, some Council Members would be opposed.

³ Some Council members would be opposed, to the extent that this would involve the government in funding or otherwise promoting contraception.

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics System* (Washington, DC: 2009).

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- Over 24 million children live in father-absent homes. That is 1 out of every 3 (32.7%) children in America. Nearly 2 in 3 (64%) African American children live in father-absent homes. Nearly 4 in 10 (36%) Hispanic children, and nearly 1 in 4 (25%) white children live in father-absent homes.
- Children in father-absent homes are five times more likely to be poor. In 2002, 7.8 percent of children in married-couple families were living in poverty, compared with 38.4 percent of children in female-householder families.⁵
- Children who live in father-absent homes, on average, are at least two to three times more likely to use drugs; to experience educational, health, emotional, and behavioral problems; to be victims of child abuse; to become teen parents; and to engage in criminal behavior.⁶
- In America, 91 percent of fathers and 93 percent of mothers agree that there is a father-absence crisis here.⁷

Context

The Council recommendations are shaped by several key realities shaping fatherhood in America today. In particular, the current economic downturn directly compromises the essential role that fathers play in achieving economic stability for their children and families. It is especially hard for fathers who are trying to do the right thing to maintain their dignity and motivation in the face of both unemployment and underemployment.

Similarly, the pervasive and growing presence of poverty in America directly bears on the fatherhood area as both a cause and a consequence of disconnected or absent fathers. Efforts to support fathers and to engage them fully in their families' lives will make a major contribution to reducing poverty in America. Put another way, any comprehensive effort to combat poverty should include supporting responsible fatherhood.

In addition, it is essential to recognize that men's health challenges also have a direct impact on their ability to be good, present fathers and members of their families. This simple observation underscores the important connection between health care reform and fatherhood.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *Children's Living Arrangements and Characteristics: March 2002*, P20-547, Table C8. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2003).

⁶ *Father Facts*, Fifth Edition. National Fatherhood Initiative. Gaithersburg, MD: 2007

⁷ Norval Glenn, *Pop's Culture: A National Survey of Dads' Attitudes on Fathering*. National Fatherhood Initiative. Gaithersburg, MD: 2006, and Norval Glenn and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead. *Mama Says: A National Survey of Mothers' Attitudes on Fathering*. National Fatherhood Initiative (Gaithersburg, MD: 2009).

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There are also a number of particular life circumstances that complicate the task of being a responsible father. For example, for men who have grown up fatherless or who did not have a positive male role model to teach them, responsible fatherhood doesn't just "happen." Some men need to be taught essential qualities and skills such as nurturing, patience, compassion, self-control, and respect for women. They need to reject domestic violence. In some cases, fathers can only fulfill their potential by receiving special support, education, and mentoring on these and other issues.

Military fathers are another group that merits special, focused help in order to stay well connected to their children and families while they are deployed. They also benefit from support when they rejoin their families upon their return.

In addition, noncustodial and incarcerated fathers benefit a great deal from special assistance—often provided by faith-based organizations—in staying constructively engaged in the lives of their children and families.

Overview of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Convene quarterly White House Partnership Roundtables to encourage a broad variety of sectors, including private foundations and corporations, to form partnerships with existing fatherhood groups and experts to address specific areas in which increased father involvement can strengthen the well-being of children in America.

Recommendation 2: Host an annual Father's Day Celebration at the White House to honor exemplary fathers and to highlight advances in father involvement resulting from the Government's interdepartmental working groups and the strategic partnerships formed at the quarterly roundtables.

Recommendation 3: Continue to personally affirm the important role of fathers, and continue to model the life of a committed husband and father.

Recommendation 4: Challenge government departments and agencies to cross departmental lines and create working groups to assess and address their policies that affect fathers' involvement in the lives of children.

Recommendation 5: Increase participation of Federal agencies in the funding of fatherhood programming, especially in areas of critical importance.

Recommendation 6: Invest in high-quality program evaluation in order to help the fatherhood field define and increase its impact on specific measures and in so doing, increase public understanding of and support for this critical work.

Recommendation 7: Develop fatherhood tools and products that are culturally and linguistically relevant.

Recommendation 8: Engage the academic community in developing curricula to train aspiring health and human service professionals to better meet the needs of fathers.

Recommendation 9: Ensure that programming for couples' employment training, job placement, and financial literacy are allowable activities under federally funded fatherhood, healthy relationship, and healthy marriage grants.

Increasing Father Involvement Through Partnerships

These recommendations share a framing vision that encourages Federal Government agencies to be infused with responsible fatherhood as a means to more effectively achieve their respective missions. We believe that emphasizing responsible fathering as a core message of this Administration offers an opportunity to dramatically improve the impact of many of its policies and to create a legacy that will be felt for generations to come.

Recommendation 1: Convene quarterly White House Partnership Roundtables to encourage a broad variety of sectors, including private foundations and corporations, to form partnerships with existing fatherhood groups and experts to address specific areas in which increased father involvement can strengthen the well-being of children in America.

Background and Explanation:

For several decades, the field of responsible fathering has been developing, helped in part by the infusion of modest government investment beginning in the 1990s. However, much of this work has been done either in isolation or without the consistent and significant partnerships and revenue streams that lead to optimal long-term results. If the current Administration can help infuse “fathering” into other key sectors of American culture by encouraging the formation of strategic partnerships, it will brighten the futures of children, families, and our Nation.

As one example, the National Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) has been actively involving parents in their children’s education for more than 100 years; yet, the vast majority of their membership is women. Having seen the research and observed first-hand that dads have a significant impact on the educational outcomes of their children, PTA leadership recently reached out to existing fathering organizations and created the MORE (Men Organized to Raise Engagement) alliance. Working together, this partnership is engaging fathers—a committed, yet untapped resource—to help attain their ultimate goal of improving educational achievement.

A quarterly White House Partnership Roundtable would target sectors where addressing and involving fathers offers significant promise. The President and the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships should invite the key leaders of a given sector to meet at the White House, including representatives from private and corporate foundations. Participants would be briefed on the important role of fathers, have an opportunity to engage with their peers and fathering experts, and then be challenged to take action and report on their progress over time. Foundations, corporations, and others should be challenged to provide financial support for fathering initiatives. Some suggested sectors that could be convened along this model include:

- Education
- Faith Communities
- The Military
- Prisons and Reentry

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- Early Childhood
- Medicine and the Health Professions
- Community, Family, and Domestic Violence Organizations
- Academia
- The Workplace and Workforce Development
- Women's Organizations
- Private and Corporate Foundations
- The Sports and Entertainment World

The President can extend the reach and impact of these Partnership Roundtables throughout a given sector and more broadly by writing letters to other leaders that would challenge them to take action in order to encourage and support father involvement within their respective spheres of influence. Recipients may include, for example, leaders of religious denominations; the Fortune 500; the 100 Best Companies to Work for; top colleges and universities; members of the Council on Foundations; the 100 largest nonprofit organizations; women's and fraternal organizations; community, family, and domestic violence organizations; and elected officials and civic leaders including Governors, Mayors, and State Legislators. Established fathering organizations would provide technical assistance to the partnerships.

Recommendation 2: Host an annual Father's Day Celebration at the White House to honor exemplary fathers and to highlight advances in father involvement resulting from the Government's interdepartmental working groups and the strategic partnerships formed at the quarterly roundtables.

Background and Explanation:

The President has established a personal tradition of using Father's Day to build awareness of the important role of fathers and to call men to fulfill their responsibilities as fathers and father figures. By devoting a full day to the topic of fathering and by convening a White House gathering on the weekend of his first Father's Day in office, the President signaled the importance of this topic to him personally and to his Administration. Continuing and expanding this tradition offers great potential to ensure that engaged fathering remains a high priority for fathers, sector leaders, the U.S. Government and the American public.

The annual Celebration of Fathers could include the following:

- Recognition of exemplary fathers, grandfathers, stepfathers, adoptive fathers, military fathers, and other father figures;
- Recognition of important progress made toward goals that are influenced by the involvement of fathers (e.g., educational testing results and graduation rates, teen pregnancy rates, and children living with two parents);

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- White House recognition of the leaders of intradepartmental and interdepartmental working groups and the strategic partnerships formed at Sector Roundtables;
- Letters, commendations, and proclamations that honor the leaders and teams of other exemplary efforts to improve the well-being of children by involving fathers;
- A Presidential address to fathers about the joys of fatherhood and the importance of fulfilling their personal responsibilities; and
- An invitation by the President to every father (through sectors identified above) to join him in making a formal commitment or pledge to be the father his children need; this step must include a method for counting the commitments made.

Recommendation 3: Continue to personally affirm the important role of fathers, and continue to model the life of a committed husband and father.

Background and Explanation:

The President's personal experience contributes significantly to his ability to speak deeply, credibly, and powerfully on the importance of fathering. Because he shares the wounds of father absence with many fathers who are currently disconnected from their children, the President can challenge them to "step up," even in the face of many barriers, to fulfill their responsibilities as fathers. With these credentials and his personal commitment, increasing the proportion of children growing up with engaged fathers may offer the President the single biggest opportunity for a legacy that will extend for generations.

The impact of the President's actions and words about his personal commitment to being a good husband and father has already demonstrated the value of his personal example. He should continue to capitalize on both informal and formal opportunities (e.g., the State of the Union Address and Prayer Breakfasts) to reinforce and model his commitment. Opportunities include the following:

- Modeling involved fatherhood by taking time to be with his daughters at home, school, and work and by participating in their activities;
- Highlighting the importance of fathers maintaining appropriate work-family balance and modeling it for White House staff, government employees, and the American people; and
- Using Public Service Announcements to challenge men to be involved fathers and grandfathers to their children, and to reach out and be father figures to children in their spheres of influence whose fathers are absent.

Given the important role of mothers in encouraging fathers, the First Lady should also be invited to speak out about how important good fathering is to her personally as well as to the success of her efforts to support military families, to help working women balance career and family, and to encourage national service.

Recommendation 4: Challenge government departments and agencies to cross departmental lines and create working groups to assess and address their policies that affect fathers' involvement in the lives of children.

Background and Explanation:

The vast majority of fathers want to be involved in the lives of their children, but many of them face obstacles to greater involvement.⁸ Some of the most common barriers include a lack of fathering skills, employment, stable housing, or access and visitation. Other critical obstacles facing some fathers who would like to be more involved dads include military service, child support, incarceration, and reentry. In addition, violence, particularly preventing and addressing family violence and abusive relationships, as well as exposure to community violence, presents a unique set of challenges. As such, fatherhood programming must be prepared to address these challenges in partnership with community, family, and domestic violence prevention and intervention programs and services. Helping families address these challenges requires strategies that bridge the responsibilities of multiple government agencies.

At the Federal level, the Office of Child Support Enforcement and the Departments of Justice and Labor might work together to connect fathers and children while increasing employment and child support collections. One innovative model of this kind of partnering across agency lines is Fathering Courts. Fathering Courts are programs that offer fathers who have not been making child support payments a chance to make a fresh start.

The program helps to increase child support payments through partnerships involving Child Support, the Courts, employment services, community colleges, health services, and other governmental and community-based support services. In Fathering Courts, the prosecutor agrees to defer prosecution while dads access services that result in gainful employment and a newfound ability to pay child support. Fathering classes inspire and equip the fathers to be effectively engaged in the lives of their children. This is one example of where a cross-sector approach, which requires engagement from different branches of government, is having a tremendous impact on the lives of fathers and their children.

Additional intradepartmental and interdepartmental working groups we suggest are listed below with proposed objectives:

- The Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs → Assist long-distance dads and reentering dads.
- The Departments of Justice, Labor, and Housing and Urban Development and the Office of Child Support Enforcement → Ensure that reentering dads can find jobs in order to fulfill their child support orders and housing to provide stability.

⁸ Norval Glenn, *Pop's Culture: A National Survey of Dads' Attitudes on Fathering*. National Fatherhood Initiative (Gaithersburg, MD: 2006).

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- The Departments of Education and Commerce → Increase father involvement in education, and improve educational outcomes of the future working population.
- The Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Education → Reduce the number of unintended pregnancies,⁹ and increase the number of children growing up with the support and involvement of both parents.
- The Department of Health and Human Services, the White House Council on Women and Girls, the White Office Advisor on Violence Against Women and the Department of Justice → Reduce family violence.

Each of these working groups would be challenged by the President to identify common goals and solutions to increase responsible father involvement in the lives of children. Progress toward these goals would be reported to the President regularly for accountability and recognition.

Recommendation 5: Increase participation of federal agencies in the funding of fatherhood programming, especially in areas of critical importance.

First, the Council believes that it is critical that the fatherhood programming through the Administration for Children and Families continues. A report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Emerging Findings from the Office of Family Assistance Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grant Programs: A Review of Select Grantee Profiles and Promising Results" (September 2009), shows early signs that the fatherhood programming grantees are effectively serving fathers and families.

Also, other sources of funding for fatherhood programming, such as the Second Chance Act, Edward Byrne Memorial Competitive Grant Program, the 1115 waivers program through the Office of Child Support Enforcement, and the Administration for Children and Families Compassion Capital Fund, should also continue.

However, there is a lot of room for the other Federal agencies to use existing grant programs or to create new ones to expand the Federal Government's role in funding fatherhood work.

The Council believes that there is an especially critical need for programming in the following areas:

- Promoting the involvement of dads in their children's education;
- Employment services for men and fathers;
- Programming for military fathers and families; and
- Programming for incarcerated fathers and reentry;
- Programming for fathers involved in the Child Support System;

⁹ To the extent that this proposal would involve the Government in funding or otherwise promoting contraception, some Council members would be opposed.

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- Mentoring programs for boys, men, and fathers; and
- Programming and resources to reduce unintended pregnancies and promote responsible decision making by both men and women about when and whether to become a parent.

Please see Appendix A for a further explanation of the importance of these areas of focus.

In each of these areas, the appropriate Federal agency or partnering agencies could do more to fund and promote programs that target the well-being of children and the role of their fathers.

For example, given the connection between involved fatherhood and reduced recidivism rates,¹⁰ the Department of Justice should do more to fund programs that serve incarcerated and reentering fathers. In light of the unique challenges facing military fathers and families, the Department of Defense can become more involved in funding programs to get resources and training to military fathers. In the Department of Labor, the proposed FY 2010 budget includes a measure that would create a dedicated funding stream to provide transitional job opportunities to noncustodial parents, among other target populations, who owe child support. Groups such as the Interagency Working Group and the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention can convene meetings to discuss and recommend specifically how the agencies can use existing grant programs or create new ones to fund fatherhood.

The Centers for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the agencies can gather to discuss and recommend how both financial and nonfinancial mechanisms can be used or created to increase agency involvement in fatherhood.

The Office of Management and Budget also can be encouraged by the White House to identify opportunities for relevant grant programs to be administered in a way that allows fatherhood programs to compete for funding.

Finally, the White House can use directives to encourage the agencies to address the "father factor" in the work they do.

Recommendation 6: Invest in high-quality program evaluation in order to help the fatherhood field define and increase its impact on specific measures and in so doing, increase public understanding of and support for this critical work.

The White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships should encourage the investment of Federal funds in evaluating a range of fatherhood interventions so that the field can grow in its overall quality and impact. Evaluation should be structured in a manner that fosters collaboration among fatherhood

¹⁰ This information is based on preliminary data from an evaluation of the National Fatherhood Initiative's InsideOut Dad™ program being conducted by the Indiana Department of Corrections. See also Nancy La Vigne, Elizabeth Davies, Tobi Palmer, and Robin Halberstadt. *Release Planning for Successful Reentry: A Guide for Corrections, Service Providers, and Community Groups* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute; The Annie E. Casey Foundation), 2008; also Jeremy Travis, Amy L. Solomon, and Michelle Waul, *From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2001).

practitioners and program evaluators, helping move the field toward even greater evidence-based programming.

Background and Explanation:

The fatherhood field is at a stage in its development in which it is critical for evidence to be provided about the effectiveness of its work. There is little doubt about the need to connect fathers with their children, but questions remain about the most effective approaches to fostering those connections.

Some preliminary data are encouraging. According to a report from the Department of Health and Human Services, "Emerging Findings from the Office of Family Assistance Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grant Programs: A Review of Select Grantee Profiles and Promising Results" (September 2009), several Office of Family Assistance Responsible Fatherhood Grantees are showing positive results 3 years into their projects. For example, an evaluation of The South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Project found, among other things, that 63 percent of participants unemployed at program intake obtained employment; 27 percent of those who were employed at intake increased their earnings; and 79 percent of participants who had child support arrearages decreased their arrearages. An evaluation of the Jefferson County Fatherhood Initiative found that participants reported and maintained statistically significant gains in effective communication skills, interpersonal skills, and relationship satisfaction.

Two independent, third-party evaluations of the National Fatherhood Initiative's InsideOut Dad™ program for incarcerated fathers found that fathers significantly increased their knowledge of and improved attitudes about fathering. For example, fathers were more likely to report knowing how their children were doing in school and knowing with whom their children spend time than men who were not in the program. And many fathers increased the frequency of contact with their children. Moreover, preliminary data from the Indiana Department of Corrections indicates that the use of InsideOut Dad™ and 24/7 Dad™ as part of a comprehensive reentry program has led to recidivism rates of 20 percent or lower.

Additionally, fathers involved in the National Center for Fathering's WATCH D.O.G.S.® (Dads of Great Students) program showed significant gains in their involvement in their children's lives, according to an independent, third-party evaluation. Surveys taken at the beginning and end of the school year showed that WATCH D.O.G.S. dads increased their involvement in both educational activities as well as unrelated activities at home. A Department of Education study in 1997 suggests that increased paternal involvement in education will result in improved educational outcomes, but future studies will need to confirm this.

Given these promising early indications that a diverse set of approaches to reaching and serving fathers is working, additional evaluations should be aggressively funded in order to provide deeper, broader data on the most effective approaches that will positively connect fathers to their children and families.

The Federal Government can help to produce valuable evaluations of the fatherhood field by investing in high-quality program evaluations that examine the effectiveness of fatherhood programs and services across agencies and throughout the field. Program evaluations of current and future responsible fatherhood grants should be structured by the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and other Department evaluators in a manner that fosters collaboration among practitioners and program evaluators.

These evaluations should not only identify effective programs but also best practices that can shape the future of the field. To facilitate this process, HHS, in conjunction with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, can convene a series of discussions with leading fatherhood practitioners and researchers to identify research needs and barriers, address concerns of each party, and build trust and consensus among these distinct communities.

Additionally, program evaluations should be administered throughout the Federal Government for those agencies whose systems and programs serve or interact with a high quantity of men who may need fatherhood services. These programs may be directly or indirectly focused on fatherhood and include Department of Labor workforce development programs, Department of Justice reentry and fathering court programs, and child support enforcement initiatives. The goal of these evaluations should not only be to assess the effectiveness of individual programs but should also be to identify the full range of service needs of fathers and to coordinate service delivery for fathers and their families.

Recommendation 7: Develop fatherhood tools and products that are culturally and linguistically relevant.

Cultural and linguistic challenges occur for many new Americans and people of color. According to an issue brief prepared by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, African American, Latino, and Native American children are more likely to live in single-parent families. The 2007 data show that 65 percent of non-Hispanic Black children, 49 percent of Native American children, and 37 percent of Hispanic children reside in single-parent homes. The same issue brief cites research indicating the tougher challenges that fathers of color face in being involved, responsible, and committed fathers.

Similarly, as President Obama pointed out, “new Americans and refugees still face language barriers and have significant challenges.”¹¹

As Fatherhood programming and resources are developed, the needs of all client populations need to be taken into consideration. Fathering resources, such as those promoted through www.fatherhood.gov should include culturally and linguistically

¹¹ See Remarks by the President at AAPI Initiative Executive Order Signing and Diwali Event (available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-aapi-initiative-executive-order-signing-and-diwali-event>).

relevant information, including resources that are translated into Spanish and other languages.

Recommendation 8: Engage the academic community in developing curricula to train aspiring health and human service professionals to better meet the needs of fathers.

We recommend that the White House, with involvement from HHS and the Department of Education, convene a series of meetings to engage the academic community to develop curricula to train aspiring health and human service professionals to better meet the needs of fathers. Invitees should include the American Medical Association, the National Association of Social Workers, the American Public Human Services Association, and educators from the top colleges and universities. The objective of these meetings should be to educate and encourage participants to cultivate the development of health and human service professionals who are fully cognizant of the importance of and the strategies required for meeting the needs of fathers.

Background and Explanation:

Historically, the services provided by health and human service professionals have been geared toward providing supports for mothers and their children. Although such work must continue, a growing body of research is showing the importance of providing complementary or comparable services to fathers in order to more fully engage them in the lives of their children and families. Therefore, "culture change" is necessary within the health and human services professions so that there is a broader recognition of the critical role that fathers play in child, family, and community well-being. This kind of change must start in the earliest stages of an aspiring professional's education in the field.

In 2003, researchers from the Yeshiva University School of Social Work conducted an assessment of the degree to which academic social work literature addressed the social service needs of fathers and prepared social work students to respond to the needs of fathers through social service programs. The results of the review indicated that there is a significant research and information gap concerning the support service needs of fathers.

Lack of awareness among medical and social service practitioners about the needs of fathers may lead to service program designs that do not consider the impact of fathers in their psychosocial assessment of children or that are viewed by fathers as disparaging or apathetic. This perception might cause some fathers to be reluctant to seek support services.

To the potential detriment of fathers and families, social service programs have not been designed to address the emotional strain of divorced fathers separated from their children, emotional or resource support needs of single-parent fathers, engaging noncustodial and adolescent fathers in the lives of their children, or a range of other support needs particular to fathers.

Expanding health and social work education and training to include fathers is an important step in ensuring that service delivery programs are designed with the needs of fathers as well as mothers and children in mind. Schools of social work must develop and infuse father-focused curricula throughout all levels and areas of their programming as new generations of social service practitioners are trained.

Additionally, current physicians, social workers, and social service practitioners can be directed to learn about the role of fatherhood and needs of fathers through professional conferences and agency staff training sessions. An example of this is the Father Friendly Check-up™ workshop, developed by National Fatherhood Initiative. The workshop helps agencies and organizations improve their performance in leadership and organizational philosophy; policies and procedures; program, service, and product content; physical environment; staff orientation and training; social marketing strategies; and community service.

Recommendation 9: Ensure that programming for couples' employment training, job placement, and financial literacy are allowable activities under federally funded fatherhood, healthy relationship, and healthy marriage grants.

We recommend that the White House ensure that allowable activities of Federal responsible fatherhood and healthy relationships and healthy marriage funds include "couples employment programs." These programs provide both partners in committed relationships with employment training, job placement, financial literacy, and other financial supports in conjunction with core responsible fatherhood and healthy relationships and marriage training.¹²

Background and Explanation:

Economic factors such as limited financial resources and unemployment can serve as barriers to both responsible fatherhood and healthy relationships/marriage for low-income fathers and couples.¹³ An innovative method of addressing the intersection between economic instability and responsible fatherhood and healthy

¹² Couples employment programs are designed to serve couples that are jointly raising a child and are dedicated to being in a committed relationship with each other, irrespective of whether they are married. Some Council Members would be opposed to such programs to the extent that people qualify to participate in such a program precisely because they are involved in "committed" sexual relationships other than marriage. Those Council Members further submit that, if, by contrast, the program defines its beneficiaries by their relationship to the children they share, rather than by their nonmarital relationship to each other, then there would be no objection. Similarly, if the program confers benefits based on the existence of nonmarital sexual relationship, but also has as its purpose to steer those participants toward marriage, then the concern raised by those Council Members would be alleviated. Other Council Members support the inclusion of non-married couples dedicated to (i) jointly raising their child and (ii) being in a committed relationship with each other, because that eligibility criteria allows the program to reach fragile families who have a great potential of being strengthened precisely because the couple is committed to each other and to raising their child together. These Council Members believe the inclusion of non-married couples in these programs is a commendable strategy for breaking the cycle of father-absence in America.

¹³ William J. Doherty, Ph.D., Edward F. Kouneski, M.A., and Martha Farrell Erickson, Ph.D., of the University of Minnesota, *Responsible Fathering: An Overview and Conceptual Framework*, September 1996 (available at <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/concept.htm>); Conceptual Framework and Center for Research on Child Well being, *The Retreat from Marriage Among Low Income Families*. Fragile Families Research Brief No. 17, 2003; and Paula Roberts, *I Can't Give You Anything But Love: Would Poor Couples With Children Be Better Off Economically If They Married?* (Center for Law and Policy: 2004).

relationships/marriage is a “couples employment approach” that provides employment assistance and other means of financial support to each partner in a committed relationship.

From 1997 to 2000, the Department of Labor funded the Full Family Partnership (FFP) at Jobs for Youth/Chicago. In this unique program model, low-income partners in committed relationships simultaneously participated in a 2- to 3-week job readiness and job placement program. The participation and outcomes results of these couples were compared with those of participants in two other employment assistance programs that did not use the “couples employment approach.” Key findings reveal the following:¹⁴

- Both mothers and fathers participating in FFP were more likely than parents in the comparison groups to finish the program and be placed in a job.
- FFP mothers showed higher initial earning gains upon program completion than mothers in comparison groups.
- FFP mothers were 60 percent less likely to receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families upon program completion than they were before participating in the program.
- Earning outcomes for FFP fathers were comparable to those of fathers in one comparison group and surpassed those of fathers in the other comparison group.
- When both partners completed the program, couples experienced significantly higher earnings gains than couples in which only the mother completed the program (over \$4,000 per quarter gain vs. a \$1,300 per quarter gain).
- Program completion and earnings gains were associated with relationship stability.

These findings from the FFP program evaluation illustrate the potential of coupling employment assistance and other financial supports with the core services provided by responsible fatherhood and healthy relationships/marriage programs to enhance the Government's ability to help low-income couples and fathers overcome economic barriers to healthy relationships and responsible fatherhood involvement.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A: Further explanation for programming areas of focus highlighted in Recommendation 5.

¹⁴ Rachel Gordon and Carolyn Heinrich, “The Potential of a Couples Approach to Employment Assistance: Results of a Nonexperimental Evaluation,” *Review of Economics of the Household*, March 2009, and Kristin Abner, Rachel Gordon, and Carolyn Heinrich, *Utilizing a Couples Approach to Promote Employment Stability* (Institute of Government and Policy Affairs: 2009).

Develop and encourage programming that promotes the involvement of dads in their children's education:

A landmark study by the Department of Education in 1997 indicated that children in two-parent families with highly involved fathers were 42 percent more likely to get mostly A's, 55 percent more likely to enjoy school, and 28 percent less likely to repeat a grade than were children in two-parent families with fathers who had low involvement. This study found that these positive effects extend to the children of highly involved, nonresident fathers. Children of these fathers were 54 percent more likely to get mostly A's, 70 percent more likely to enjoy school, and 50 percent less likely to repeat a grade than were children whose nonresident fathers had no or low involvement.

Clearly, one important strategy for increasing our children's academic performance is to get their fathers more involved in their education. The National PTA has recognized this need by creating the MORE (Men Organized to Raise Engagement) alliance. Through this alliance, several father-serving organizations have come together to work with schools to increase the quantity and quality of services those schools offer to engage fathers.

One of the MORE partners, WATCH D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students), provided more than 75,000 dads with a volunteer experience in their child's school during the 2008 to 2009 school year. WATCH D.O.G.S. dads are enlisted to serve 1 day as an unobtrusive security presence and as adult male role models. Pre-testing and post-testing of dads who had served at least 1 day as a WatchDOG showed that they were significantly more involved on multiple measures of involvement at school and in the home. Principals indicate that WatchDOGS are contributing to a safer and more secure learning environment and to an increase in student achievement.

Discretionary grant programs from the Department of Education, such as the Fund for the Improvement of Education and the Parent Information and Resource Centers program, can be tweaked so that "fathers in schools" programs can more effectively compete for funds. The Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships can play a role in encouraging the Department of Education to make the necessary adjustments to allow fatherhood programs to compete more effectively.

The need for employment services:

Research supports the notion that unemployment can serve as a barrier to responsible fatherhood. A 2005 article in the *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* reported evidence suggesting that "men under financial strain or who have unstable employment have more problems being responsible fathers and establishing a household than do other fathers." Unemployment is also a major factor in non-custodial fathers' abilities to meet child support obligations. Additionally, there are a number of personal factors that can contribute to the "marriageability" of unmarried parents. Unemployment has been identified as a leading factor affecting one's ability to marry. In 2002, the *Journal of Applied Economics* published an article that found that being unemployed significantly reduced the chance of men being married. Employment is a key factor in maintaining the resources needed to sustain

families and meet the socio-emotional needs of fathers. Therefore, it is constructive for programs focusing on responsible fatherhood to incorporate programming that addresses the employment needs of fathers.

The Departments of Labor and Justice can create links between existing employment service programs and responsible fatherhood programs. They can create such links by using existing money to fund formal partnerships, creating new grant programs to fund formal partnerships, or rewording Requests for Proposals to help facilitate these connections.

The need for military fathers programming:

Research shows that military families face some of the toughest challenges to marital/relational stability and involved fatherhood. For example, rates of divorce and domestic violence among military families are high, and there is evidence from a 2009 report by the Defense Manpower Data Center that divorce rates in the military are increasing. Also, according to an issue brief prepared by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, deployment of military fathers is associated with increased behavioral problems by their children, especially boys. The brief also cites research that has found that children experience academic and adjustment problems, as well as depression and anxiety, as a result of the deployment of fathers.

Therefore, there is a need to serve military fathers before, during, and after deployment. Pre-deployment services should focus on helping families attend to the emotional, logistical, and legal issues that can cause stress during the fathers' absences. Services during deployment should be focused on providing fathers with practical strategies and tactics to help them stay connected to their children and families. Post-deployment services should be focused on family reunification; fathers should be educated about how to handle the changes that their families will have gone through during their absences so that they can make a smooth transition back into family life. All of these services should focus on fathering, relationship, and communications skills so that fathers can strengthen their relationships with their children and the mothers of their children.

The Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the Department of Veterans Affairs can work together to ensure that existing programs designed to improve quality of life for veterans, including veterans recently returned from deployment, include supports for fathers.

The First Lady's office, given its vocal support for military families, can encourage family policy leaders at the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide specific supports for military fathers in their existing services to military families.

Finally, the Department of Defense, through the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, the Department of Defense Family Advocacy Program, and other offices within the Department can take steps to ensure that its family programs are inclusive of specific support for fathers. The five branches also can be directed by the Department of Defense and

the White House to include specific fatherhood supports through the family service centers on bases.

The need for incarcerated fathers programming:

According to an issue brief prepared by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Fathering while in prison is not impossible, but it faces considerable obstacles. About six in ten incarcerated fathers have some kind of monthly contact with their children, but a majority does not receive visits from their children throughout the time they are locked up. Yet, such contact is a key predictor of the father's ability to reenter the community once his time is served and not return to prison again." Additional research shows that the strongest predictor of whether a child will end up in prison is if they have a relative who has gone to prison. It is most common for this relative to be their father.

These two key factors—reducing recidivism and ending the intergenerational cycle of crime—speak to the need to provide services for fathers while they are in prison and while they are transitioning out of prison back into their communities.

While in prison, fathers should receive education to enhance their fathering, relationship, and communications skills and be given practical strategies to connect with their children while incarcerated. These supports can be combined with opportunities for enhanced child visitation, educational and job readiness programs, and substance abuse treatment.

Similar education can continue while a former inmate is transitioning back into his community so that he can successfully reintegrate into the lives of his children and families.

The Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, in its meetings, can specifically address how to better serve incarcerated fathers through existing Department of Justice (and other Federal agency) programs.

The Department of Justice (through the Bureau of Justice Assistance) can ensure that grant programs, such as the Edward Byrne Memorial Discretionary Grant Program, are "father friendly," allowing fatherhood programs to effectively compete for funding.

The Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the Department of Labor can ensure that its Prisoner Reentry Initiative includes adding specific supports for fathers into programs serving reentering prisoners. The Faith-Based Center at the Department of Justice can do the same thing.

The need for programming for fathers involved in the Child Support System:

Low-income fathers represent a significant portion of fathers involved with the Office of Child Support Enforcement. As a result of their lack of employment or underemployment, history of incarceration, and other challenges, these fathers are often unable to meet their established child support orders or to reduce accumulated arrearages. Efforts to enforce these orders often result in distancing these fathers from their children. Fathering Courts and other programming for

fathers involved in the child support system have shown promising results in reconnecting these fathers to their children, increasing child support payments, and helping these fathers become responsible citizens and taxpayers. In one Kansas City Missouri Fathering Court, 281 graduates and current participants have become significantly more involved in the lives of their children, contributed more than \$2.6 million in child support and avoided more than \$2.8 million in incarceration costs.

The need for mentoring:

The National Mentoring Project estimates that there are 17 million children in the United States in need of a mentor. This estimate correlates closely with the number of children living without a father in the home. Who better to mentor our Nation's fatherless children than our Nation's good fathers? Good fathers are uniquely positioned and skilled to do "double duty" by becoming mentors to children in need. There are an estimated 64 million fathers in the United States. Given the extent of the father-absence crisis, it is likely that many of these fathers can simply look into their own communities or families to find a child in need of a father's guidance. Additionally, there are many fathers who, having grown up in father-absent homes, are in need of help in their own fathering journeys. Again, our Nation's experienced fathers can do "double duty" by stepping into the gap to become mentors to these dads.

The Corporation for National and Community Service can start an initiative or program that specifically calls out fathers to become mentors to children in father-absent homes. Such a call has never been made.

The President, through his fatherhood messaging and his Call for National Service, can include a specific call to fathers to become mentors. The President can encourage private mentoring organizations and existing government programs focused on mentoring to begin including specific initiatives to engage fathers as mentors.