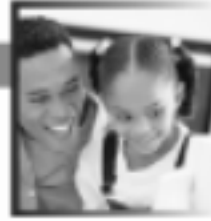


Improving Outcomes for Children and Families



PIP TIPS: Involving Fathers

Each issue of PIP (Program Improvement Plan) TIPS focuses on practice related to safety, permanency and well-being of children. This issue, which departs from a focus on a selected performance item, examines the role and involvement of fathers affecting several performance items.

Safety, Permanency and Well-Being

Involvement of fathers is a key consideration in the ratings of several Minnesota Child and Family Service Review (MnCFSR) performance items:

- Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care
- Item 15: Relative placement
- Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents
- Item 17: Needs and services of child, parents and foster parents
- Item 18: Child and family involvement in case planning
- Item 20: Worker visits with parents

The Minnesota Child and Family Service Review evaluates involvement of fathers in child welfare cases based on the following criteria:

- Agency efforts to assess needs, provide services, and involve fathers
- Agency policies and practices that support father involvement
- Agency efforts to identify and locate fathers

"Fathers are excluded from all levels of child welfare practice; the system is mother focused."
(Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) Practice Notes, 2004).

An assessment of efforts to work with *both fathers and mothers*, based on the federal Child and Family Service Reviews from 2001 to 2004, concluded that when it was appropriate for agencies to work with both parents, they were 'far more likely' to work with mothers than with fathers. Specific findings from the cases reviewed included:

- Maternal relatives were sought as potential placement resources 14 percent more often
 - Mother's needs were assessed in 15 percent more cases
 - Mothers were provided services 15 percent more often
 - Mothers were involved in case planning in 17 percent more cases
 - Mothers had at least monthly contact with the case worker 25 percent more of the time
- (Administration of Children and Families, 2004).

The Minnesota Child and Family Service Review will begin similar specific data collection, assessment and reporting of performance related to fathers in 2005.

**The Minnesota Department of Human Services and County Social Service Agencies:
Working Together to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families**



Putting good practice into practice

The Minnesota Department of Human Services launched a Responsible Fatherhood initiative in 2004 in cooperation with the University of Minnesota. The goal of this initiative is to help young men become responsible, committed and involved fathers. The following principles guide the Responsible Fatherhood initiative: 1) all fathers can be important contributors to the well-being of their children; 2) parents are partners in raising their children, even when they do not live in the same household; 3) the roles fathers play in families are diverse and related to cultural and community norms; 4) men should receive the education and support necessary to prepare them for the responsibility of parenthood; and 5) public agencies can encourage and promote father involvement through programs and services.

Assessing needs, providing services and involving fathers

Assessment and case planning activities present opportunities to confirm father's strengths, which become the foundation for supporting engaged and responsible fathering (Best Practice/Next Practice, 2002). In assessing father's needs it is important to consider his current and potential role in the family, as well as cultural and community influences on fathering. When fathers are included early in the case, they are more likely to participate in the case planning and service delivery process (National Family Preservation Network, 2001). Family Group Decision Making is a venue for case planning that contributes to a high level of father and paternal relative involvement (Holquin, Nixon, Burford, 2003).

Fathers respond to services designed specifically to meet their needs. The array of services offered to men to help them become better fathers should focus on their needs, and help them to meet the needs of their children. Fathers are more successfully engaged when services meet the immediate and tangible needs that they have identified. Services on nights and weekends, working with male staff, home-based services and linking absent fathers to employment programs can be especially conducive to promoting father involvement with the family (National Family Preservation Network, 2001). In addition to programs and services, facilities can be redesigned with pictures, magazines, meeting areas and hours of operation that accommodate the interests and needs of fathers. (*Best Practice/Next Practice*, 2002).

Positive father-child relationships are vital to the well-being of children, and child welfare agencies are in a unique position to support and encourage the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. Visitation plans can contribute to stronger father-child relationships by helping fathers create quality time with their children during visits.

Non-custodial fathers represent a logical permanency resource for workers to evaluate. In addition, the worker potentially expands the pool of relative placement options for the child. Timely and reasonable efforts to engage fathers and conduct relative searches help avoid serious permanency delays. Paternity establishment eliminates legal obstacles to involving fathers in child welfare services.

Agency policies and practices support father involvement

The issue of father involvement is deeply systemic and touches on multiple points of the child welfare system (*Best Practice/Next Practice*, 2002).

Attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes about fathers need to be exposed and addressed as agencies examine their existing policies, procedures, programs and services to determine if they support or represent barriers to father involvement. (National Family Preservation Network, 2001). Child welfare agencies can also play a role in identifying and evaluating policies and practices of other systems, such as the court, child support and community service providers that may contribute or create barriers to father involvement.

Everyone working in the child welfare agency, from administrators and supervisors to frontline workers and clerical staff, plays an important role in making the agency culture more father friendly and inclusive. Use of organizational self-assessment and program evaluation tools to assess “father friendliness” may assist agencies in identifying policy development and staff training needs that will address the numerous and varied factors that affect father involvement (National Family Preservation Network, 2001 and FRIENDS National Resource Center, 2004).

“Recognizing the positive role that fathers can play in the lives of their children should be a fundamental tenet of every child welfare agency,” (Salovitz, 2002).

Efforts to identify and locate fathers

When fathers are absent, information about their identity and their location should be determined in the early stages of working with the family.

Questions about the father and his extended family are expected as the social worker gathers basic demographic data about the family. Resources such as child support, MAXIS, SWINDEX, Father’s Adoption Registry, online directory, birth certificates and Department of Corrections information may help verify or provide additional details.

Minnesota requirements

Case planning requirements for children receiving child protective services found Minnesota Rules 9560.0228, do not specifically mention fathers, but are clear regarding requirements to involve [all] appropriate members of the family in the initial development of the plan, and in ongoing evaluation of progress toward meeting goals of the case plan.

According to Minnesota Statutes 260C.212, subdivision 4, when a child is in out-of-home placement, the agency **shall** make diligent efforts to identify, locate and where appropriate, offer services to both parents of the child. If a non-custodial or non-adjudicated parent is willing and capable of providing for the day-to-day care of the child, the agency may seek authority from the custodial parent, or the court, to have that parent assume care of the child. If a parent is not adjudicated, the agency shall require the parent to cooperate with paternity establishment as part of the case plan.

Improving Performance

County agencies can improve performance on involving fathers to achieve safety, permanency and well-being of children by addressing key systemic issues, focusing supervision on critical areas of practice and implementing quality assurance practices, including the use of data. Strategies for improving performance on involving fathers include the following:

- Define clear expectations, policies and practices that support father involvement. Examples:
 - Conduct assessments that address the current and potential roles of fathers and factor in cultural and community norms.
 - Schedule and locate case planning meetings to accommodate fathers' needs.
 - Conduct thorough paternal relative searches during the early stages of the case.
 - Facilitate Family Group Decision Making meetings that include fathers and paternal relatives.
 - Develop visitation plans that consider the unique parenting needs of fathers.
 - Ensure frequent and quality worker contacts with fathers.
 - Develop protocols for establishing paternity for non-adjudicated fathers.
 - Assess father-friendliness of the county agency and community partners.
- Assess the agency's service array to determine the capacity to meet the needs of fathers.
- Forge community partnerships with employment and training providers to facilitate father involvement with their family.
- Become familiar with fatherhood projects available to serve multiple needs of fathers.
- Train and prepare staff to involve fathers.
- Support and guide decisions about father involvement during supervisory consultations.

- Address the issue of father involvement at Children's Justice Initiative (CJI) teams.
- Consider surveying fathers to assess their level of involvement with case planning and satisfaction with services.
- Institute naming protocols to clearly identify the involvement of fathers. For example, "paternal relative search," or "father case planning meeting."

Resources and technical assistance

- Administration of Children and Families, (2004). *General Findings from the Federal Child and Family Service Reviews*. Available at: <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/cwrp/index.htm>.
- *Best Practice Next Practice*. National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice. Summer 2002.
- *Case Review and Consultation Guide* (Based on Minnesota Child and Family Service Reviews) available on DHS Supervisor's Web site: http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/county_access/documents/pub/dhs_id_000308.hcsp
- Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW). *The Fatherhood Factor in Permanency Planning*. Issue No.15. March 2004. Available at: <http://ssw.che.umn.edu/cascw>
- FRIENDS National Resource Center. *Fatherhood Programs Self-Assessment Tool*. Available at: <http://www.friendsnrc.org/>
- Head Start: *Father-Friendliness Organizational Self-Assessment for Early Childhood Education Programs*. Available at: http://www.nhsa.org/parents/parents_father_assessment.htm

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- *Minnesota Child and Family Service Review, County Self-Assessment* document, available on: DHS Supervisor's Web site http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/county_access/documents/pub/dhs_id_000308.hcsp
- National Family Preservation Network. *An Assessment of Child Welfare Practices Regarding Fathers*. March 2001. *Position Paper on Fatherhood in the Child Welfare System*. January 2001. Available at: <http://www.nfnp.org/tools/articles/fathers.php>
- Related *PIP Tips* for Items 13 Parts I and II, 17, 18, and 20. Available on the DHS Supervisor's Website: http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/county_access/documents/pub/dhs_id_000308.hcsp
- Salovitz, Barry. Child Welfare Institute. *Reintroducing Dad into the Family Equation*. February 2002.

Quality Assurance Regional Contacts

Anne Broskoff, Lower SE Region
anne.m.broskoff@state.mn.us (507) 389-6898

Chris Harder-Mehl, SW Region
christine.harder-mehl@state.mn.us (651) 215-9506

Steve Johnson, NE Region
steve.h.johnson@state.mn.us (763) 497-0156

Lori Munsterman, SW Region
lori.munsterman@state.mn.us (320) 634-0048

Larry Wojciak, Upper SE Region
larry.wojciak@state.mn.us (507) 359-4666