

Peer TA: Director's Den

July 2014: A Revised Portrait of Fathers: Highlights from the Frontlines



The Director's Den is a special section of the Peer TA website that was created to facilitate communication between the Director of the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) and TANF program stakeholders. Periodically, the OFA Director will provide timely insights and useful information. This article seeks to address current issues related to the program, poverty, and American families. I welcome (and encourage) your feedback and communication through peerta@icfi.com.

Not long ago, the portrait of a father was one of a stable and stoic provider and protector. We all recall the 1983 movie *Mr. Mom*, where the newly laid-off father struggles with the basics of childcare and other household duties. Today, it seems that traditional gender roles are shifting, and there is room for dads to do it all. More and more fathers are taking on the tasks of cooking, cleaning and nurturing children in ways that historically (and stereotypically) were deemed “women’s work.” Fathers serve a variety of important roles in the lives of children. From being a positive role model and mentor to effectively coaching and teaching, the portrait of a father has evolved to include carpooling, lunch making, playdate organizing, story reading and dish washing.

According to recent [data](#), there are an increasing number of fathers who remain home to take care of household activities and do not work outside the home. The number of single dads has increased considerably since 1960 and today nearly [one in ten](#) children reside

with only their father. Fathers play an integral role in the lifetime well-being and development of children starting at birth. OFA and the [National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse \(NRFC\)](#) continue to be resources to Responsible Fatherhood grantees to improve the ability of low-income and disconnected fathers to become involved and engaged in the lives of their children.

The [Los Angeles Fathers Program](#) is one such grantee that works with a diverse group of fathers throughout Los Angeles County. The program works to strengthen the support system available to fathers as young as fourteen years old, and provides relationship counseling, job training and placement, case management services, parenting education and workshops. Recently highlighted by [NPR](#), the program serves hundreds of young men in their journey to be better fathers. As one participant remarked, “As long as I see my son, that’s the best Father’s Day I can ever have.”

Other grantee examples include [Project Developing Active Dads](#) (Project D.A.D.) and the [Kanawha Institute for Social Research & Action, Inc. \(KISRA\)](#). Project D.A.D. has been working with dozens of fathers to help them deal with the barriers they face to being economically and socially independent and become more involved with their children. Throughout West Virginia, KISRA helps low-income, incarcerated and previously incarcerated fathers become empowered

and involved in the lives of their children through job training, mentoring and support services. As one father remarked, “[The] program taught me how to be patient and to treat a child as a child...[it] taught me how to identify my strengths and weaknesses.”

Our nation’s portrait of fathers has evolved considerably since the days of Ward Cleaver, and even Cliff Huxtable. Today we encourage our dads to provide equal parts protection and traditional parenting, and to be both providers and nurturers. To be a father is to be a teacher, and to have a significant influence on a child’s social, emotional and economic health. Through our Responsible Fatherhood grants and NRFC tools, OFA is making an investment in helping low-income and disconnected fathers assume these new roles.

Until next time,

Earl