

**WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK
OFFICE OF FAMILY ASSISTANCE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

**ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS
IN TANF FAMILIES WORKSHOP**

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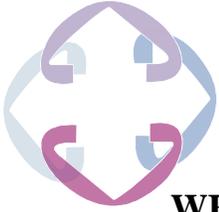
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This report describes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Administration for Family, Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network workshop, *Addressing the Needs of Non-Custodial Parents in TANF Families*. The workshop was held in Tallahassee, Florida, on January 18-19, 2001.



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The Welfare Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Network is a federally funded initiative through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance. The objective of the Welfare Peer TA Network is to facilitate the sharing of information between and among states and to establish linkages between organizations serving the needs of welfare recipients. The U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF), with support from the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network, sponsored the *Addressing the Needs of Non-Custodial Parents in TANF Families Workshop* on January 18-19, 2001, in Tallahassee, Florida. Participants included representatives from State Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Child Support Enforcement, local fatherhood providers, and Federal participants from the Department of Labor and the Department of Health and Human Services. The purpose of the workshop was to promote collaboration between State TANF and OCSE agencies, and to encourage the sharing of information about initiatives to address the needs of non-custodial parents.

1. Background

The involvement of fathers in the lives of their children has declined as a result of increasing divorce rates, out-of-wedlock births and incarceration. It is estimated that one-third of the children in the United States live in a household headed by a single parent. Compared to children raised in two-parent families, children raised by a single parent are more likely to be poor and to experience several negative outcomes. In particular, children raised in poverty are more likely to experience developmental delays, poor health, low educational attainment, higher school dropout rates, increased risk of juvenile delinquency and substance abuse, and higher rates of teenage pregnancy.

These risk factors can be reduced if children have strong family bonds. In particular, research suggests that children benefit from positive relationships not only with their mothers, but also with their fathers, even if they do not share the same residence¹.

Social programs in the past have focused on the provision of services to poor children in families headed by single mothers, neglecting the needs of these children's fathers. Recent studies

¹ Reichert, Dana. 2000. "Connecting Low-Income Fathers and Families: A Guide to Practical Policies." National Conference of State Legislatures. Washington, DC: NCSL.

suggest that poor children tend to have low-income fathers who face substantial barriers to employment, and that their limited access to services may prevent them from financial and emotional involvement with their children. In view of these findings, welfare reform goals to increase compliance with child support payment is unlikely to take place unless Federal and state agencies provide low-income fathers with programs that increase their employability and parental skills. In recent years, programs that address the needs of non-custodial parents have gained in importance, as practitioners and researchers have become aware of the barriers to responsible fatherhood. As fathers are able to meet their child support payments, they are also more likely to become emotionally connected to their children, thus reducing the risks of negative outcomes among our youngest generations. In addition, increasing the payments of non-custodial parents to their families is likely to alleviating child poverty.

Central to effective programs addressing the complex needs of non-custodial parents is the collaboration of agencies. In particular, this workshop seeks to bring together and encourage partnership between TANF and OCSE state agencies. TANF presents States with substantial flexibility in the design of programs. The idea behind TANF is that everybody wins when families are moved from welfare to sustainable employment that provide earnings consistent with self-sufficiency. The dramatic drop in the TANF caseloads, now estimated at about one-half of the families in welfare in 1996, left states with large funds for service programs. It is our view that states could use some of these funds for fatherhood initiatives.

There is need to expand and even modify the way in which we look at programs. The Federal OCSE and TANF are supportive of efforts to address the needs of non-custodial parents. Some states are already looking at ways to increase the flexibility of the regulations to enforce child support payments, such as partial forgiveness of arrearages to increase compliance.

The first session provided information about national trends in child support and the implications for successfully addressing the needs of non-custodial parents and their children.

1.1 National Trends and Implications for TANF Program

Mark Turner, Ph.D., Institute for Policy Studies, Johns Hopkins University

About half a million children are not poor due to the receipt of child support. But...seventy percent of poor children eligible for child support were not receiving it in 1996. Child support will be difficult to obtain for these children because many of their non-resident parents lack the ability to pay.

There are well over 9 million children in the IV-D caseload who were born out of wedlock. Among these, only 59 percent have paternity established or acknowledged. Paternity establishment has improved in recent years substantially. In FY 1999 alone, paternity was established or acknowledged for over 1.5 million children. One of the reasons for the increase in paternity establishment is that the voluntary in-hospital paternity establishment program was expanded under PRWORA. In 1994, only 6.6 percent of children born out-of-wedlock had their paternity acknowledged at birthing hospitals. By 1998, the rate had increased to almost 42 percent.

However, the growth in in-hospital paternity establishment is driven primarily by cohabiting couples. These fathers generally do not have child support orders and are not required to pay child support by the state. Paternity establishment is less likely when the parents do not cohabit.

When averaged across all children and their families, child support represents only two percent of family income. However, for children who receive child support, these payments make up as much as 16 percent of family income. In 1996, the average amount of child support received per child was \$3,795. However, there are large differences by household income. For the same year, the average poor child with a non-resident parent received only \$1,979.

Although on average child support benefits exceed welfare benefits, families on welfare tend to receive only about 12 percent of family income (\$816) from child support payments. In contrast, families not on welfare receive on average about one-third of their family income from child support (\$2,674).

Child support receipts vary by state. In 1997, only 14 percent of eligible children in California received their full child support order. The remaining 86 percent received partial payments or had no order. Other surveyed states had significantly more children receiving support—for example, 30 percent in Wisconsin, 29 percent in Minnesota, and 26 percent in Washington state—but enforcement still has a long way to go.

Poor children eligible for child support tend to have poor or near-poor non-resident parents with below-average earnings and unstable employment histories. In many of these cases, improved child support enforcement may not help the situation of poor children because these parents are simply unable to meet their payments.

Studies have found that three important predictors of the frequency and amount paid in child support by a non-resident father is his financial ability, his commitment to the custodial family, and the custodial family's financial needs.

Non-resident Father Financial Ability

Non-residential fathers with higher income are more likely to pay than those with low income. Only 26 percent of non-resident fathers whose personal income was in the lowest quartile paid child support. In contrast, nearly 70 percent of non-resident fathers in the highest quartile paid such support. Among the fathers who paid child support, those with higher income paid more than low-income dads, \$4,660 versus \$2,264.

The strongest predictor of paying child support was the number of weeks a non-resident father works. Those who worked between 40 and 51 weeks were 7 percentage points less likely to pay child support than those who worked 52 weeks. Non-resident fathers who did not work at all were 33 percentage points less likely to pay child support.

A 10 percent increase in weekly earnings (\$42.46 per week) was estimated to boost annual child support payments by \$104. Similarly, a 10 percent increase in non-labor income (\$129.69) and

in household income (\$1,561.28) was associated with a respective rise in child support payments of \$8.90 and \$23.42.

Paternal Commitment to Custodial Family

Only 21 percent of non-resident fathers who had their non-resident children out of wedlock paid child support. In contrast, 68 percent of non-resident fathers who had their children in a marital relationship paid child support. Non-marital, non-resident fathers paid 42 percent less child support than marital, non-resident fathers.

While 76 percent of those married to the custodial mother more than 10 years paid child support, only 34 percent paid among fathers who were married to the custodial mother less than 5 years. However, commitment depreciates over time. Those separated for a short time were more likely to pay, and to pay more, child support than those who had been separated longer.

Impact of Child Support Payment on Welfare Participation

A study using data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation found that formal child support receipts increase the probability of leaving welfare, but that informal child support (paid directly to the mother) has no effect on welfare exits. Once a family leaves welfare, child support in excess of \$100 per month significantly reduces the likelihood of re-entering welfare.

Economic Prospects

Some economists have predicted that the booming economy is coming to an end. Higher unemployment and lower earnings, as is likely to be the case in an economic recession, are likely to reduce the proportion of non-resident parents paying child support, as well as the amount paid. These trends may be associated with more non-resident parents seeking modifications, and to more parents facing punitive CSE policies.

2. Serving Non-Custodial Parents

Currently, the formal child-support system has many punitive measures that penalize non-custodial fathers². First, awards are set according to State child support guidelines, which tend to ignore the income level of fathers, resulting in low-income fathers paying a larger share of their income toward child support than higher-income fathers. Second, if the father fails to show up in court, his earnings are imputed as full-time minimum wage, which is usually higher than the actual earnings of many low-income fathers. Third, default and retroactive orders (sometimes going back to the birth of the child even if the custodial parents filed for paternity years later) contribute to the accumulation of arrearages among low-income fathers, which usually limit substantially their ability to meet child support payments. Fourth, any amount accrued cannot be forgiven by the court, even if the amount far exceeds the father's ability to pay. Fifth, courts do not take into account any informal contributions to the child's expenses when setting the

² Sorensen, Elaine. 1999. "Obligating Dads: Helping Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers Do More for Their Children." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

retroactive award. Sixth, welfare reform gave States the authority to revoke the driver's license of non-custodial parents who do not meet their child support payments, further reducing the employment opportunities available to them. As a result, many poor fathers are unable to pay formal child support and establish a relationship with their children.

There are alternative ways to address the issues brought about by non-compliance of non-residential parents. Some of the provisions of welfare reform (1996) and the Balanced Budget Act (1997) allow States to use their welfare block grants to pay for services to unemployed non-custodial parents with children receiving TANF. In addition, welfare reform provides States with access and visitation block grants to strengthen non-custodial fathers' access to their children, and some of the child support enforcement dollars may be used to provide services to low-income non-custodial fathers. Several States have developed programs to provide fathers with a better chance of meeting their financial and emotional responsibilities to their children. The presentation by Joseph Mason highlights some of the programs available in Illinois.

2.1 Effective Approaches to Addressing the Needs of Non-custodial Parents

Joseph Mason, Community Outreach, IDPA/DCSE

Non-custodial parents should be provided with the same services as custodial parents. Although there are Federal and state laws that mandate the provision of paternity services to non-custodial as well as custodial parents, sometimes these are not delivered.

Among the practices that have proven effective in attracting and retaining non-custodial parents in programs to enhance their employability and parenting skills, providing a friendly non-custodial parent-child support system, including customer service, has been crucial. In addition, it is important to bring the family together in conversations about the well-being of the child(ren) involved so that both parents are working in the same direction and with a common understanding.

Training staff in these programs is a good investment because the likelihood of success is enhanced when Child Support employees understand how programs work.

Another practice that has improved the success of programs involves the collaboration/referrals with outside entities such as community- and faith-based agencies, employment agencies, courts and educational institutions. For example, in Illinois, some of the fathers' programs work directly with the courts. When the judges know about programs, they can refer non-custodial parents to them. Also, working with the educational system has proven effective for some programs that aim to expand employment opportunities for their clients by encouraging them to obtain their GED, providing counseling, and offering occupational training.

Finally, public awareness campaigns at the national and state level are necessary to spread the word and obtain needed support. Legislative and policy makers should be engaged in the programs. Things change daily. It is important to keep informed about how states deal with their particular issues. The following are some of the ongoing programs in Illinois. Please use the contact information to find out more about the programs that are of interest to you.

Non-Custodial Parent Services Unit

The Illinois Department of Public Aid operates this program within the Division of Child Support Enforcement to address issues facing non-custodial parents.

- Non-custodial parents who tell a judge that they cannot pay child support due to unemployment are referred to the Non-Custodial Parent Services Unit to prepare them for employment. Parents who participate in the Department's administrative process for paternity establishment can also be referred to the Unit.
- Parents receive employment-related services, such as Earnfare and the court-monitored Job Search program plus referrals to community organizations for supportive services. Parents receive individual assessments to determine assignments for appropriate services.

Earnfare is a 6-month training program for persons with little or no work record. Jobs are based on individual skill level, interests and location. This program is only for non-custodial parents who have children receiving TANF or individuals receiving food stamps who volunteer for the program. Employers are encouraged to provide permanent employment for participants.

The main benefit of this program is that the non-custodial parent assumes financial responsibility for his child and provides for the child's emotional well-being. The self-sufficiency realized through employment and the revitalized parent's role strengthen the entire family. When participants find permanent employment, their income withholding orders are entered and child support payments are deducted from their checks.

For more information about this program, call the Non-Custodial Parent Services Unit, 312-793-7987. The TTY number is 800-526-5812.

Access and Visitation Programs

In September 1997, under the umbrella of the Federal Administration of Children and Families, Section 391 of the PRWORA, the Illinois Department of Public Aid, Division of Child Support Enforcement received an Access and Visitation grant allotment of \$449,673.

- This program enables the state to establish and administer programs to support and facilitate non-custodial parents' access to and visitation of their children. Services include mediation (both voluntary and mandatory), counseling, education, development of parenting plans, visitation enforcement (including monitoring, supervision of neutral drop-off and pickup), and development of guidelines for visitation and alternative custody arrangements.
- The Illinois Department of Public Aid contracted with the "Family In Focus" program in Cook County and the "Parents and Kids Partnership" program ("PAK") in DuPage County to provide these services. Illinois has continued to expand these programs to include more non-custodial parents who never married, since they usually are underserved in terms of access and visitation services.

- The Department of Public Aid contracted with community-based organizations to provide more enhanced services than the courts' mediation services are able to supply. These contracts enable them to hire and/or maintain additional staff, expand existing services, produce educational materials as well as provide additional services to individuals in order to enhance non-custodial parents access to their children.
- The "Family In Focus" program provides an array of services for non-custodial parents. Individuals court-ordered to participate in the program receive mediation for visitation and custody disputes, help for parents in developing parenting plans, interviews of children that are at issue to screen for potential problems, assistance with domestic violence interventions and conciliation and reconciliation counseling. The DuPage County "PAK" program includes supervised after-school activities in community and school-based resource centers. "Caring, Coping and Children" is an educational program mandated for all divorcing parents with minor children in DuPage County. Other programs include outpatient and intensive outpatient substance abuse/dependency programs, domestic violence interventions, and comprehensive family assessment services. These programs provide a holistic approach to the child support process by encouraging greater parental responsibility and parental involvement with their children.

For more information about the Access and Visitation Program, call the Non-Custodial Parent Services Unit, 312-793-7987. The TTY number is 800-526-5812.

Paternity Establishment Prisons Program

In November 1996, the Illinois Department of Public Aid, Division of Child Support Enforcement, and the Illinois Department of Corrections began a six-month pilot in six sites to help incarcerated fathers establish paternity for their children who are involved in Child Support cases. In February 1997, the program grew to 23 correctional centers. Currently, this program offers imprisoned fathers at 24 state prisons the opportunity to acknowledge paternity. Acknowledging paternity helps create a relationship between father and child and may enhance the child's future emotional and financial well being.

- Child Support staff conducts computer matches of child support cases and a monthly listing of state inmates provided by Corrections. When matches are found, Child Support informs inmates that they have been named as alleged father of a child and that a Child Support Paternity Establishment Liaison will visit the prison to conduct interviews regarding paternity. If an inmate agrees he is the father, he may sign a Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity form. After the form is signed by both parents and witnessed, the inmate becomes the child's legal father, and his name is added to the child's birth certificate. An inmate may also request genetic (DNA) testing, and must agree to be bound by the results of the test. If an inmate believes he is not the father, he may contest the claim of paternity and have a hearing at the prison before a Child Support Administrative Law Judge.
- Child Support staff also interviews men at work release centers to establish support orders and begin income withholdings. Child Support and Corrections have been working to

expand the program to include establishing child support orders and income withholding for prison inmates not yet in work releases. Also, the agencies have been studying a paternity program that enlists support of inmates at Illinois' three women's prisons.

For more information about the program, call the Division of Child Support Enforcement, 312-793-8213.

Partners for Fragile Families Project

- Some States recently applied for waivers to ACF to provide services to low-income fathers as part of the Partners for Fragile Families Demonstration. This project was initiated by the National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership, and seeks to develop a partnership between community-based organizations and Federal and State child support agencies. Illinois is one of the States that was selected for this demonstration. Their program will focus on individuals 16 to 20 years of age, and will teach them parenting skills as well as how to negotiate the child support system. An important goal of the program is to encourage the formation of two-parent families. All the programs are administered within the confines of the Child Support programs.

Programs that seek to address the needs of non-custodial fathers are more successful in bargaining modifications, arrearage reductions and payment plans when they are able to establish collaborative relationships with State child support agencies and the courts³. As shown above, Illinois is among a handful of states that have focused on building strong partnerships between community and state institutions. For example, Illinois developed a Division of Community Outreach in the Office of Child Support to provide liaison services between community organizations and agencies, and to educate programs working with fathers about child support procedures. One of the biggest challenges, according to Joseph Mason, is developing trust between local providers and child support agencies.

According to Dana Reichert, from the National Conference of State Legislatures, policymakers can largely facilitate the collaboration between local programs and child support agencies by developing outcome-based performance measures that must be met as condition for the receipt of funds. Reichert (2000) has suggested that legislatures develop independent boards or commissions to oversee policy development and implementation, thus maintaining their oversight capacity while promoting the collaboration between local agencies. However, legislatures face barriers of their own, and this is the topic of the session by Preston and Dowds.

³ Reichert, Dana. 2000. "Connecting Low-Income Fathers and Families: A Guide to Practical Policies." National Conference of State Legislatures. Washington, DC: NCSL.

2.2 Legislative Perspective: Challenges to Development and Implementation of Programs

Carol Preston, Committee on Judicial Oversight, FL House of Representatives
Debra Dowds, FL Senate Committee on Children and Families

- Five years after the passage of welfare reform, some members of the Florida House of Representatives are increasingly interested in looking into developing programs that support fatherhood. Initially, there was opposition to tailoring programs to fathers. But what started as an idea with small funding has been increasing since.
- It is important to keep in mind that members of the House need to be educated about the issues associated with non-custodial parents. They are professionals with diverse backgrounds and limited time to read. In addition, their workloads include dealing with domestic violence, supervised visitation, and many other areas, so that it is difficult to get things done.
- Politics also get in the way of the best of intentions. Members need to do the work most likely to be noticed because they need to have a presence in the press.
- Currently, there is a dearth of members with specialized knowledge about child support issues. These barriers suggest that to promote support for fatherhood programs new members be educated as to the issues involved.
- As we endeavor to bring the legislature and the public's attention to the issues of non-custodial parents, it is important to keep in mind that sometimes the legislature institutes regulations, but provides little funding for diffusion of information. In particular, public-service announcements are needed so that families become aware of new services.

2.3 Setting Up Programs for Non-Custodial Parents

Reductions in TANF caseloads have resulted in large state funds, and regulations do not require that states obtain permission from the Federal government to develop new services or programs. That is, states have the ability to expand and develop services that include low-income fathers, even if they are not married or living with the mother of their children.

States have adopted a variety of strategies to address the needs of non-custodial parents. Some states (e.g., California) have funded county-level programs to recruit fathers through courts, and to provide them with services ranging from expedited paternity establishment to subsidized work experience and vocational training. Others (e.g., Iowa) have established several small pilot projects throughout the state. In Florida, the state hosting this workshop, local WAGES (Work and Gain Economic Self-Sufficiency) coalitions fund programs that provide employment-related services to fathers. In addition, the State WAGES coalition funds the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood, which distributes funds to local programs to promote father's

involvement with their children. Matthew Munyon spoke about the mission of Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood.

2.4 Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood

Matthew Munyon, M.S., Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood

In 1996 Florida Legislature established the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood—at that time, thirty percent of Florida's children lived in homes without their dads. According to a recent study by Columbia University's National Center for Fathering, Florida ranks top in the nation for promoting responsible fatherhood. There is still much work to be done. Let me give you some figures:

- In Florida, thirty five percent of the babies are born out of wedlock. The fifth highest in the country. Moreover, seventy-seven percent of teen births in Florida are out of wedlock. The twelfth highest in the country.
- Four out of ten first marriages end in divorce, and 60 percent of divorcing couples have children. It is estimated that over one million children each year experience the divorce of their parents.
- Seventy-seven percent of fathers have never had lunch with their child at school and 41 percent don't know their child's teacher's name. Forty percent of fathers have never read a book to their children.

These statistics are usually accompanied by serious consequences for the future of children. Children with absent fathers are more likely than peers in two-parent homes to be poor, to have academic, emotional and social problems, to be victims of child abuse, to engage in criminal behavior, and to become teen parents. In contrast, children excel academically and socially when fathers are involved in their school activities. Relationship between fathers and children during early childhood development has been associated with well-adjusted teens and adults.

We count with the support of businesses and families, who want dads to be involved with their family. Businesses find that good dads make better workers. When men succeed at work and home, the dividends show up in kids, dads and moms. Individual surveys find that a large proportion of adults say that mothers and fathers should be equally responsible for infant care, for taking care of a child who is sick or injured, for tucking a child in bed, and for helping with homework.

The mission of the Commission is to promote responsible fatherhood. Its goals are to raise awareness, identify barriers, and promote solutions. The vision of the Commission is that Florida's children will enjoy parents who are actively involved in and mutually responsible for loving , nurturing, supporting and protecting them.

The commission is formed by 25 members: Seven appointed by the governor; five judicial/legislative members; three appointed by the Commission; and the rest are members of local organizations. The staff consists of the executive director, a program specialist, an

administrative assistant, and a research associate. Funding comes from the Department of Children and Families (DCF, \$250K, operational), the Department of Health (DOH, \$750K, programs), and the Workforce Florida (\$3 million, programs).

The programs implemented by the Commission are long-term and provide intensive service delivery. These programs receive substantial technical and community support and their outcomes are evaluated to determine the success of their approach. The Commission's programs are sponsored by community organizations, faith-based organizations, Healthy Families Florida sites, and Healthy Start Coalitions.

Barriers and Programs for Responsible Fatherhood

Many fathers delay involvement with their children because they see parenting as a code word for mother. In addition, many programs that influence child and family well-being are geared toward and marketed to moms. Finally, socialization norms have conveyed the notion that men should solve their own problems. There is need to provide parenting skills and to teach fathers how to have healthy interactions with their children.

- The strategic elements of the Commission's programs are the support of family, organization and community, and the collaboration of all those involved. The programs involve fathers and mothers in both, their planning and implementation.
- Access points to our program are usually community and childcare centers, schools, hospitals, homes, courts and prisons, and some recruitment also takes place in the street.
- The Commission's curricula is available on the web (www.fcorf.org), and it is based on Mark Pearlman's "Nurturing Fathers." This approach can be implemented by para-professionals and it comes with a helpful manual.

One of the programs funded by the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood is run by Visions of Manhood. Joe Thomas presented information about the program, which invited the workshop participants for a site visit.

2.5 Project Child Support, Leon County

Joe Thomas, Visions of Manhood, Inc.

Most of the clients in Visions of Manhood are court-ordered to the program. At first, they are hostile and unwilling to participate. Over time, as they understand their situation and how the program helps them, they behave better.

Visions also has a youth program funded through the city of Tallahassee. Counselors go to schools once or twice a week to talk to youth about making the right choices. In addition, they recruit program participants for additional services through guidance counselors. Parents are notified and asked to sign for release of their children. This program includes meeting men who

are involved with the Child Support program to talk about their experiences, and visits to the court to witness the resolution of cases.

For adults, Visions seeks to address non-custodial parents' barriers so that they can pay child support and have a relationship with their children on a regular basis. The program offers conflict resolution support, anger management, budgeting, and prepares men to deal with the court system and to interview for jobs. Their grants help fund specific aspects of their program, such as keeping the men employed. Staff helps the clients to learn more about their rights to see their children and to have their orders modified due to changes in circumstances.

Currently, they have been thinking of ways in which they could develop programs for women.

Some of the issues mentioned by staff as barriers to the employment of program participants include suspended driver's licenses, which makes it difficult to get a job; criminal records, and the fact that not all employers are willing to offer ex-offenders a second chance.

Visions has been successful at placing ex-offenders in jobs because of their excellent reputation in the community. Some employers ask that ex-offenders not be rapists, child molesters or murderers. Others specifically ask that they don't refer anyone with drug-related offenses. The staff work hard at selling the program and themselves as serious and professional members of the community, and make themselves responsible for sending candidates who are willing to work hard and who meet the employer's criteria. If needed, staff drive the program participants to job interviews and even to work.

Program participants and employers are asked to contact Visions in the event of problems on the job, and the staff is always alert to new opportunities that may represent a job advancement for their clients.

3. Changing Context of Welfare Reform

Jeanette Hercik, Ph.D., Welfare Peer TA Network

Four years into TANF Program implementation, the characteristics of families remaining in the caseload has changed substantially, raising the challenges of moving into self-sufficiency families with complex, and sometimes unidentified, barriers to employment. Multiple barriers among TANF recipients and widespread poverty among program leavers are likely to set the tone under which PRWORA reauthorization will take place in 2002.

Although Work First approaches seemed widely successful in the first two years of welfare reform implementation, after 1998 caseload declines have slowed down. It has become clear that issues of domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health require more than employment placement in order to put these families into a path toward self-sufficiency.

In addition, first results from studies of TANF leavers suggest that their earnings sometimes leave little room for hopes of a better life. There is now increased awareness of the need to develop and provide post-employment support services that will help them not only keep their

jobs, but also earn higher wages over time. While more than half of leavers are employed at some point within a year of leaving the program, little is known about those who are not, or about clients who simply walk away from the TANF program as a result of sanctions.

To effectively address the needs of the current and former caseload, appropriate screening and referral procedures must be established in collaboration with a variety of agencies. Screening, assessment and referral of clients with certain barriers require a holistic approach because often substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health and other barriers interact. The increasing need for inter-agency coordination, and for the provision of an integrated system of service delivery demands the collaboration and development of common goals among the agencies involved. In the absence of coordination, agencies may be unnecessarily duplicating efforts and neglecting gaps in service. Successful inter-agency collaboration requires:

- shared visions and goals,
- consensus about roles, responsibilities and procedures, and
- formal agreements that will clarify the roles and expectations of all parties involved.

In addition, front-line workers need to welcome their new partners and their newly defined responsibilities of assessing clients and placing them in paths leading to training and jobs. Job transformation must be accompanied by staff development as well as cross-agency training in order to be successful.

At the State level, innovative responses to the changes in caseload characteristics have increased the need for states to share their experiences in a variety of topics. During the workshop, Don Winstead spoke about the changes taking place in Florida.

3.1 Changing Context of Welfare Reform in Florida

Don Winstead, Florida Department of Children and Families

In Florida, the number of families receiving cash assistance has declined from 200,292 in September 1996, to 62,584 in January 2001. According to the HHS/ACF, Florida leads the country as one of the states with the largest drop in caseload (75% drop between August 1996 and June 2000). This decline has resulted in over \$30 million not spent on cash assistance.

Welfare Reform also brought about a significant change in the way funds are spent. Most of the expenditures under the AFDC program went to cash assistance. Under Welfare Reform, a much smaller proportion goes to cash assistance payments, and funds are now increasingly directed to childcare, activities to promote employment among clients, emergency services and other family services. In particular, funds directed to childcare have increased ten-fold, from a bit over \$54 million in 1987-1988, to over \$531 million in 2000-2001.

Enrollment of Medicaid-eligible children has also increased since 1996. The number of children receiving cash assistance declined from 376,414 to 113,246 between March 1996 and November 2000. For the same period, the number of children enrolled in Medicaid increased from 805,880 to 947,957.

In Florida, a family can live above the monthly Federal poverty level even if they earn minimum wages, as long as the parent works full time, makes use of the EITC refund, collects food stamps, and continues to receive child support services. Transitional services prevent participants from stepping into a cliff when they reach their time limit. In Florida the time limit is set at 2 years, and for people with chronic receipt is 3 years. It can be extended to 4 years for people with lifetime receipt. Most of the families (87 percent) that will reach their time limit still have more than 6 months left in TANF.

A study of a sample of leavers in Florida found that about 75 percent of leavers are employed, and for a full 60 percent, it is the reason they left the program. However, there seems to be somewhat conflicting findings. Studies that use unemployment insurance data report a high proportion of part-time and episodic employment, which may be due to some continuity issues associated with data collection. Work activities appear more stable in the survey data, which is likely to provide a clearer picture.

Early in the implementation of welfare reform, there were concerns that the proportion of child-only cases would increase significantly as a result of parents finding no other route to supporting their children. However, they find that this situation has not materialized. Prior to WAGES, about 2.1 percent of children leaving cash assistance returned to the caseload in child-only cases and only an additional 0.7 percent moved in with a non-parental adult. These proportions have even declined slightly after WAGES, to 1.7 percent and 0.5 percent respectively. To encourage relative caregiver, Florida is also providing cash assistance grants higher than those paid in foster care settings.

Florida has also developed new programs to strengthen and protect its most vulnerable groups, and offers services specifically targeting:

- families with children who are at risk due to abuse, neglect or threatened harm
- homeless families
- families served by Healthy Families Florida
- families at risk of welfare dependency due to substance abuse or mental illness
- families with victims of domestic violence
- low income families to avoid future welfare dependency
- families that reside in designated economically distressed communities

The income limit for new programs to provide TANF funded services is \$2,358, or 200 percent of the Federal poverty level.

Assistance is subject to some limitations, however:

- time limits,
- meeting work requirements,
- meeting child support requirements, and
- extensive data reporting requirements.

Years ago, Florida started to provide services to non-custodial parents under a waiver. Those programs transitioned to “Parents’ Fair Share.” Now, with more flexibility on how the funds are

used, there is renewed interest in this population. The local Regional Workforce Boards already provide employment-related services to these parents.

4. National Trends of Incarcerated Non-custodial Parents

Leticia Fernandez, Ph.D., Welfare Peer TA Network

National trends suggest that incarcerated parents and their children are a particularly vulnerable group. In many cases, incarcerated parents do not know how to establish or continue a relationship with their children. Upon release, with yet fewer employment opportunities and lack of financial resources, many parents simply do not contact their children. As a result, the children of incarcerated parents are at increased odds of negative outcomes, such as chronic poverty, dropping out of school and becoming teen parents. The following figures from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (based in a 1997 survey of inmates conducted in state and Federal correctional facilities) suggest the need for programs to strengthen parent-child bonds while the parents are in prison.

In 1999, over 720,000 State and Federal prisoners were parents of one or more minor children⁴. In fact, about 75 percent of these prisoners reported having two or more minor children. Most of these parents were male and in their early 30s. Half were black, and about one fifth were Hispanic. About half had never been married to the mother of their children, and a quarter were divorced or separated. Less than half reported living with their children prior to incarceration.

The nature of the offenses committed by these parents varied. Nearly half of the parents were sentenced for violent offenses (homicides, sexual assault and robbery), about 25 percent for drug trafficking or possession activities, and another quarter for offenses against property, such as burglary. Because of the reasons for sentencing, incarcerated parents were expected to serve, on average, 80 months, although up to 40 percent would be released in less than four years. This means that their children spend a significant portion of their young lives with a parent behind bars.

From the perspective of children, there were about 1.5 million children with a parent behind bars in 1999, which represents about 2 percent of all the children in the U.S. Nearly one-quarter of these children were under age 5, and their average age was 8 years old.

Most of the children with an incarcerated parent are black or Hispanic. Moreover, compared to white children, black children were nine times more likely, and Hispanic children were three times more likely to have a parent in prison.

Although up to 40 percent of fathers and 60 percent of mothers reported some kind of weekly contact—by mail or phone—with their children, as many as 20 percent of fathers and 12 percent of mothers had contact with their children less than once a month.

⁴ Based on Mumola, C. J. 2000. "Incarcerated Parents and Their Children." Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report., U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

In addition, parents may come to prison with many barriers to engaging in healthy relationships with their children, including anger, domestic violence, substance abuse and poor parenting skills. Some states are finding ways to develop programs for incarcerated men and their families. These programs usually include parenting skills training, anger management and literacy skills. In Florida, Kairos Horizons program has received excellent reviews by the Department of Collection. Hugh MacMillan spoke about his work through this program.

4.1 Recent Experiences with the Kairos Horizon Residential Initiative

Hugh MacMillan, Kairos Horizon Communities Corp.

The Kairos Horizon pilot project at Tomoka C.I. in Volusia County, Florida, is the first of many “faith-based” residential programs that can help transform American prisons. The pilot program is a collaborative effort of Kairos Prison Ministry, Florida’s Commission on Responsible Fatherhood/Ounce of Prevention Fund, The Foundation for Partnership in Correctional Excellence, the Florida Department of Corrections, and volunteers from churches in the greater central Florida area.

In prisons, community links are very few and almost all volunteers come from the faith community. There is virtually no political constituency. Therefore staffing and programs are stretched past the limit.

Kairos Horizon seeks to bring together corrections and the faith community to effect an inner transformation of inmates and prepare them to live with others in mutual support, trust and respect. The program lasts twelve months, and focuses on family relationships and responsibilities. Almost every inmate has family ties, and almost every inmate returns to the free world, most within three years. To prepare them for successful re-entry to society, Kairos Horizon offers programs designed for growth in emotional, social, spiritual, cognitive and cultural areas.

The Kairos Horizon Communities Corp. is a non-profit organization working with local faith communities and corrections officials. Program components include inside and outside coordinators, God-parents, and a curricula focused on enhancing the parenting skills of inmates, including parenting education, correspondence, and Family Days. The program starts with a 3-day event presented by local volunteers. This transformational event is broadly ecumenical and is offered to all who are accepted in the program. Participants do not have to be Christians, and no effort at conversion is involved. The program houses 48 to 64 inmates in a separate dormitory. Kairos Horizon works with Departments of Corrections to modify existing dorm facilities to create a living and learning space where some of the programs take place. Weekly “pod” and community meetings and a self-developed code of conduct designed within existing security regulations encourage cooperative and communal interactions.

The inside and outside coordinators, hired to oversee program delivery and develop local resources, also prepare progress reports, work with the institutional staff, and recruit and train volunteers from the local faith community to lead and facilitate programs.

Programs stress accountability and mutual respect, and lead to emotional, cognitive, and spiritual development.

- Journey—a scripture-based small group study, emphasizing listening and discussion skills
- Quest—anger management, relationship and parenting skills
- Godparents—non-structured mentoring, weekly visitation by volunteers from local churches
- Family relations—weekly letter writing to children and family members and a Family Day celebration
- Workshops—on victim offender and restitution, spiritual disciplines, decision making, parenting, etc.

Studies conducted by the Florida Department of Corrections show that inmates participating in Kairos weekends are 33 percent less likely to re-offend, compared to those not participating. Those participating in Kairos follow-up activities have a 57 percent reduction in recidivism, compared to standard statistics of similar offenders. Future plans include maintaining and growing in Florida on an inter-faith basis; they also have set up the program in Ohio (Marion C.I.). And there are plans to set up similar programs in Oklahoma, Texas, CCA & Alaska.

5. Resources and Opportunities to Develop Programs for Non-custodial Parents

Mack Storrs, ACF Central Office—Office of Family Assistance

Latifa Johnson, Workforce Development Specialist, DOL, Region IV

Bob Richie, Office of Child Support Enforcement, Region IV

Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families: All MOE can be spent on programs that benefit families. For example, state agencies providing assistance to non-custodial parents could provide part of the grant to the custodial parent and part to the non-custodial parent, this way, work requirements for both parents would be triggered automatically.

Usually, work preparation and supportive services—childcare, transportation services, life skills, etc.—are only provided to the custodial parent. But to reduce births out of wedlock, services must be delivered to women and men.

No one has yet figured out what are effective programs/services to encourage family formation.

Most states transfer TANF funds into the SSBG. These funds could also be used for fatherhood programs. The constraint is that they have to be spent on eligible families. Also, when funds are commingled, all the Federal rules apply.

Reauthorization is likely to focus more on TANF funds and how to spend them on family formation.

Department of Labor, Welfare-to-Work: Non-custodial parents are eligible for WtW funds if he/she is unemployed, underemployed, or having difficulty paying for child support. In addition, one or more of the following must apply:

- the minor child or the custodial parent of the minor child is a long-term TANF recipient,
- the minor child is receiving or is eligible for TANF benefits/services during the preceding year, or
- the minor child is receiving or eligible for assistance under the food stamps program, SSI, Medicaid and CHIP, and
- the non-custodial parent enters into a Personal Responsibility Plan that includes establishing a child support order, cooperating in payment of child support, and participating in employment activities that will lead to self-sufficiency.

The WtW activities for which the non-custodial parent is eligible include job readiness, vocational or job (and on-the-job) training, job placement services, post-employment and supportive services.

For additional information, see the DOL/WtW website (www.wtw.doleta.gov and www.doleta.gov)

Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support: Child Support has only funding for establishing orders because its original function was to collect payments from non-custodial parents. In some ways, Child Support is only designed to serve custodial parents. States cannot be reimbursed for fatherhood initiatives. However, there are Access and Visitation grants that can be used to fund other programs, and that are paid by Child Support.

Some of the issues that Child Support faces include a large percentage of families not receiving payments, large caseloads per case worker, and automation problems.

6. Lessons Learned and Conclusion

John Horejsi, ACF Central Office

Jeanette Hercik, Ph.D., Welfare Peer TA Network

- Although Work First approaches were widely successful in the first two years of welfare reform implementation, after 1998 caseload declines have slowed down. Currently, the main issues facing states refer to clients with multiple barriers and widespread poverty among program leavers.
- To effectively address the needs of the current and former caseload, appropriate screening and referral procedures must be established in collaboration with a variety of agencies. Screening, assessment and treatment require a holistic approach to families as well as inter-agency coordination. In the absence of coordination, agencies may be unnecessarily duplicating efforts and neglecting gaps in service.
- Reauthorization is likely to focus on family formation and other strategies to promote self-sufficiency among vulnerable families. Low-income non-custodial parents are an important group not protected by the current safety net. Low-income non-custodial fathers face substantial barriers to employment and limited access to services. Fathers who are unable to

meet their financial responsibilities are less likely to be emotionally involved with their children, thus increasing the risks of negative outcomes among our youngest generations.

- The rapidly declining TANF caseloads have left states with large funds for service programs. Federal laws mandate the provision of paternity services to non-custodial parents, and give states the ability to expand and develop services for them, even if they are not married or living with the mother of their children. In addition, Maintenance-of-effort, Welfare-to-Work, and Access and Visitation funds can be spent on programs that benefit non-custodial parents and their families.
- Programs that seek to address the needs of non-custodial parents focus on improving their employability so that parents can pay child support and have a relationship with their children on a regular basis. These parents also receive parenting skills training, paternity establishment counseling, anger management, and access and visitation mediation. Programs benefit from close collaboration with State child support agencies, courts, community- and faith-based agencies, employment agencies and educational institutions. Among the issues that make it difficult to place non-custodial parents in jobs are suspended driver's licenses and criminal records.
- In 1999, about 1.5 million children had a parent behind bars, which represents about 2 percent of all the children in the U.S. These children are on average 8 years old, and tend to be black or Hispanic. Upon release, these fathers are likely to find few employment opportunities and to avoid financial and emotional involvement with their children. Several states have begun developing programs to enhance the prospects of these parents and their children. These programs emphasize the need to reduce recidivism by connecting incarcerated parents with their families and offering parenting skills, anger management and other classes.

7. Resources

- Center for Successful Fathering (working with fathers in community and schools)
<http://www.fathering.org>
- Columbia University (Map & Track publication listing state-by-state initiatives)
<http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/edu/dept/nccp>
- Families and Work Institute (Relevant publications to get dads involved)
<http://www.familiesandwork.org>
- National Fatherhood Initiative (Establishing a City-wide Fatherhood Initiative)
Wade Horn, President
101 Lake Forest Boulevard
Suite 360
Gaithersburg, MD 20877
(301) 948-0599
<http://www.fatherhood.org>

- National Center for Fathering (research, curriculum and father assessment tool)
<http://fathers.com>
- National Center on Fathers and Families
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- National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership
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- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Federal fatherhood campaign)
<http://fatherhood.hhs.gov>

Reports:

- “Involving Non-Resident Fathers in Children’s Learning: A Father Matter Report.” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. September 2000. Available on the HHS Fatherhood Initiative Web site at: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov>.
- “Restoring Fathers to Families and Communities: Six Steps for Policymakers.” K. Sylvester and Kathy Reich. Social Policy Action Network. Free copies of this report may be ordered from: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, (410) 547-6600 or www.aecf.org.

**APPENDIX A:
AGENDA**



AGENDA



*Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network
Addressing the Needs of Non-custodial Parents in TANF Families*

Tallahassee, FL ♦ January 18-19, 2001

Thursday, January 18, 2001

- 8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. **Registration and Continental Breakfast**
- 9:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m. **Welcome and Opening Remarks**
Greg Campbell, ACF Region IV Office
Bob Richie, OCS Region IV Office
John Horejsi, ACF Central Office
- 9:15 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. **Non-custodial Parents and Child Support Payments: National Trends and Implications for TANF Program**
Mark Turner, Ph.D.
Institute for Policy Studies, Johns Hopkins University
- 10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. Break
- 10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. **Effective Approaches to Addressing the Needs of Non-custodial Parents**
Joseph Mason, Community Outreach, IDPA/DCSE
- 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. **Working Lunch: Challenges to Development and Implementation of Non-custodial Parents' Programs**
- 1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. **An Overview of Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood**
Matthew Munyon, M.S.
Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood
- 1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. **Project Child Support, Leon County**
Joe Thomas, Visions of Manhood, Inc.
Mr. Thomas will provide an overview of the Project Child Support Program, its background and mission, services available, client recruitment strategies and organizational challenges.

- 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. ***Staff perspectives***
Project Child Support, Leon County
 Staff members will talk about the specific services provided to the Project Child Support clients, the day-to-day issues most frequently confronted, and their strategies to address these issues.
- 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. ***Clients' perspectives***
Project Child Support, Leon County
 Current and former program clients will share their experiences with the program, and talk about the impact of the program in their lives.
- 4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. ***Site visit***
Project Child Support, Leon County
 The Project Child Support facilities will be toured. Transportation will be provided.

Friday, January 19, 2001

- 8:15 a.m. – 8:45 a.m. **Reflections on the Site Visit and Continental Breakfast**
 Moderator: Mack Storrs, ACF Central Office—Office of Family Assistance
 Resource Panel:
 Walter Jones, Visions of Manhood, Inc.
 Matthew Munyon, Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood
 Participants invited to share their views regarding the site visit and what their own States are doing to address NCPs issues
- 8:45 a.m. – 9:15 a.m. **Changing Context of Welfare Reform in Florida**
 Don Winstead, Welfare Reform Administrator
 Florida Department of Children and Families
- 9:15 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. **National Trends of Incarcerated Non-custodial Parents**
 Leticia Fernandez, Ph.D., Welfare Peer TA Network
- Recent Experiences with the Kairos Horizon Residential Initiative**
 Hugh MacMillan, Trans Tech Ag Corp
 Director, Kairos Horizon Communities Corp.
- 10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. Break

10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Resources and Opportunities to Develop Programs for Non-custodial Parents

Mack Storrs, ACF Central Office—Office of Family Assistance

Latifa Johnson, Workforce Dev. Specialist, DOL, Region IV

Bob Richie, Office of Child Support Enforcement, Region IV

11:30 p.m. – 11:45 p.m.

Closing Remarks: Next Steps

John Horejsi, ACF Central Office

Jeanette Hercik, Ph.D., Welfare Peer TA Network

**APPENDIX B:
LIST OF SPEAKERS AND PARTICIPANTS**



Welfare Peer TA Network
Addressing the Needs of Non-Custodial Parents in TANF Families
Tallahassee, FL ♦ January 18-19, 2001

LIST OF SPEAKERS AND PARTICIPANTS

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