

ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD

Phone: (312) 296-8656 www.responsiblefatherhood.com

**THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD
2008 ANNUAL REPORT
FROM THE OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
JEFFERY M. LEVING**

December 31, 2008

2008 Council on Responsible Fatherhood Annual Report

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Upon the completion and submission of this 2008 Annual Report, the council members of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood (ICRF) would like to take this opportunity to thank the ICRF Chairman Jeffery M. Leving for his leadership, unending commitment and dedication to children, adolescents and families in the state of Illinois. His continued devotion to the Council and its work over the years continues to have the significantly positive impact upon fathers and families as per the mandates, goals and objectives of the Council. Without Chairman Leving's leadership and drive, the Council would not be able to be reporting the successes noted in this report. We would like to acknowledge Ms. Jennifer Whiteside and Ms. Patricia Harris (recently deceased) for their committed and effective support to the Council.

*Unanimously approved,
[Signature] Vice Chairman Dr. Leon Intrater Council Member
Council Members, Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood*

Members of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood

Sen. Kimberly Lightford	Dr. Wrenetha A. Julion
Sen. Edward Petka	Howard Lathan
Rep. Paul Froehlich	Dr. Yolanda Peppers
Rev. Rodney Byrd	Tim O'Grady
Dianna Durham-McCloud	Lois Rakov
George Haley	Cathy Reed
Dr. Kirk Harris	Alexander Roseborough
David Hirsch	Norris Stevenson
Dr. Leon Intrater	
Rev. Walter Jones	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The deterioration of responsible fatherhood over the last half-century has had a devastating effect on American families and 24 million children live absent their biological dads in America. Countless studies and mounting anecdotal evidence continues to demonstrate how children who grow up in father absent homes are much more likely to be poor, to use drugs, to experience educational, emotional and behavioral problems, to be victims of child abuse, and to engage in criminal behavior. We must never forget children need their dads, and when they're absent, something is lost. There is also mounting evidence of the great benefits of appropriate and effective male "father figures"/mentors in the lives of children whose biological fathers are not available to them for various reasons. We have a responsibility to help children who have been born into harsh circumstances and fractured families. To confront this great social challenge in Illinois, the Council On Responsible Fatherhood (the "Council") has continued working towards one clear and measurable goal: to significantly increase the proportion of children growing up with an involved and responsible father and/or responsible "father figure/mentor" in the state of Illinois.

The following is a summary of what the Council has accomplished in 2008:

Convened Regional Meetings – In 2008, the Council succeeded in meeting the goal of convening five effective regional forums focused on fatherhood issues. The Council hosted events in Chicago, Chicago Heights, DesPlaines and Rockford.

Convened Statewide Symposium – On June 7, 2008, the Council convened a statewide symposium in collaboration with Congressman Danny K. Davis and other partner organizations. The event was held at Malcolm X College in Chicago. The symposium sought to educate and empower fathers on real life issues that men face such as father's rights, child support, relationships, public policy, expunging records, entrepreneurship, conflict resolution, foreclosure, education, health and employment opportunities and the importance of the community in advocating for and supporting male adult involvement in and assistance to children/adolescents who benefit from male adult presence and involvement.

Policy Report – Based on feedback from parents, community leaders and practitioners who participated in our previous regional meetings, the Council has identified four major priority areas that need to be addressed in Illinois to help promote the positive involvement of fathers in the lives of their children.

Self- Assessment of State Agencies – Based on the responses from received self assessments (one completed self-assessment and two responses to the self assessments were received from Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs and Illinois Department of Labor respectively in July 2007), the Council made contact with the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs to provide Council Resource Guides and assess other needs of the agency.

The Council will continue to work with state agencies to update information regarding services that are being provided to fathers.

Completed Fatherhood Resource Guide

The Council updated and produced the “Illinois Fatherhood Resource Guide” and distributed copies of it throughout the state. Printing was done by IDHS. The Illinois Fatherhood Resource Guide is also available as a downloadable .pdf file at the Council’s Website (www.responsiblefatherhood.com), as well as on other state agencies and partner organization Websites.

Generated Public Awareness – Leveraging regional and statewide events, the Council was able to secure significant placements in media throughout the state regarding the importance of the commitment of the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Council’s mission. Throughout the state, increasing numbers of organizations and individuals now recognize the role the Council is playing in increasing awareness of the need for responsible father involvement for the well-being of Illinois children and families. While much was accomplished in 2008, it is still a prelude to the work that needs to be done in 2009.

The responsible fatherhood movement has become a nationwide call-to-action for all parents and concerned citizens seeking to improve the welfare of the next generation of American children. The Governor and General Assembly’s leadership on this issue and their continued support of the Council and its mission is essential to the success of the movement at both a statewide and national level. The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood is one of the first government programs of its kind and continues to serve as a model for other states across the country seeking to restore responsible fatherhood and positive, effective adult male involvement in the development, education and social/emotional welfare of youth as a societal norm in all communities.

COUNCIL OVERVIEW

Mission Statement

The mission of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood is to significantly increase the number of children in Illinois that grow up with a responsible father in their lives. The Council seeks to accomplish this through:

- Raising public awareness of the impact of father absence on children;
- Assisting state agencies and other service providers in securing the resources they need to promote responsible fatherhood;
- Reforming perceptions within state agencies and other service providers regarding the role of fathers as parents; and
- Advocating for programs, policies, and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers.

Strategic Overview

The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood will raise public awareness of the impact of father absence on children by:

- Holding regional meetings and sharing significant research and statistics;
- Convening an annual statewide symposium and conducting free public sessions on the impact of absent fathers; and
- Preparing and disseminating a resource guide that will include pertinent impact resulting from father absence.

The Council will assist state agencies and other service providers in securing the resources they need to promote responsible fatherhood by:

- Conducting assessments of state agency needs related to promoting responsible fatherhood;
- Providing information regarding the absence of coordination and availability of services among state agencies;
- Updating services state agencies offer to fathers; and
- Developing and disseminating a resource guide available to service-providers throughout the state.

We will reform perceptions among state agencies and other service providers regarding the role of fathers as parents by:

- Conducting regional forum meetings to gain input from citizens concerning different obstacles confronted by fathers in specific geographic areas throughout the state and share information and available resources with stakeholders; and
- Convening an annual statewide symposium to share information obtained at regional forums.

See Appendix A for more information on the Council's structure and mission.

2008 ACTIONS

Convened Regional Meetings

In 2008, the Council succeeded in meeting the goal of convening effective regional forums focused on fatherhood issues in different geographic areas of the state. The Council hosted five events; two in Chicago (January 19th and April 26th); one event in Chicago Heights (February 16th); one event in DesPlaines, IL (March 1st) and one event in Rockford (November 15th). The regional meetings have helped us build a statewide network of supportive groups and individuals; pinpoint challenges that hinder father involvement in their children's lives; develop ideas for programs that would support fathers; and identify the means of bringing about legislative reforms. To accomplish this, the Council reached out to lawmakers, judges, churches, community and faith-based organizations, social service agencies, educational institutions, and individuals in these geographic areas to participate in the forums. Denise Simon, the Bureau Chief of Child and Adolescent Health of the Illinois Department of Human Services, provided assistance with promotions of the November 15th Rockford event and provided staff support to the Council as a resource.

The objectives of the regional meetings were to:

- Identify the top policy issues and concerns that hinder the positive involvement of fathers and responsible adult male involvement in the lives of children in different geographic areas of Illinois;
- Discuss ways to engage fathers through programming and public outreach; and
- Raise public awareness concerning the impact of father absence through public relations outreach.

From the positive comments of attendees, all five meetings were considered a success and generated important feedback. In addition two of the regional meetings were videotaped by Wisconsin Fathers for Children & Families. Authorization for consent from presenters was received and the taped symposiums are available on the Council's website. More information on the regional meetings is available in Appendix B.

Convened Statewide Symposium

On June 7, 2008, the Council convened a statewide symposium in collaboration with Congressman Danny K. Davis. The event was held at Malcolm X College in Chicago under the theme "Fathers Who Care Expo for Today's Man". This statewide symposium had the largest number of attendees to date, and displays the importance of fathers in the lives of their children. Congressman Danny K. Davis, Department of Children and Family Services Director Erwin McEwen, representatives from Illinois Department of Human Services Secretary Carol Adams' Office, and Joyce Thomas, Hub Director Region V were in attendance along with various Chicago area aldermen, commissioners, professors and leaders in the field of fatherhood. More than 500 people attended. One particular highlight of the symposium was one of the keynote presentations by Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), Dr. Damon T. Arnold, M.D., whose address focused heavily upon the needs of the many youth who are in

need of responsible adult male involvement in their development and the importance of the community in working toward ensuring that youth are afforded this critical service. His presentation became poignant when he used his own development as an example and shared that had it not been for substitute adult male mentoring during his childhood development, his own life would be “much different today” referring to the fact that there is little likelihood that he would have become a physician, much less the Director of the state’s Department of Public Health.

The goal of the symposium was to educate and empower fathers to be more responsible parents and to provide them with resources to make positive changes in their lives through:

- Public dialogue with top state officials and decision-makers regarding policies and programs relevant to fathers; and
- Informative skill-building workshops and a Resource Fair.

The 2008 event also examined state policies and programs to encourage responsible fatherhood. Many in attendance were indigent or lower income fathers. This year’s symposium had an increase in the number of social service agencies represented and had more variety among the type of agencies represented. (For a list of organizations who participated in the Resource Fair see Appendix C). The event was successful in helping create a framework for a collaborative, inter-agency effort to address father absence in Illinois. From this framework, the Illinois Council is in an excellent position to continue its work in the coming year. More information on the symposium is available in Appendix C.

Policy Report

Based on feedback from parents, community leaders, and practitioners who participated in our regional meetings, the Council has identified four major priority areas that need to be addressed in Illinois to help promote the positive involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. The Council plans to work with state agencies and legislators to enact reforms and legislation that will address the following needs:

- **Educate law enforcement and States Attorney’s offices regarding visitation orders:** There are inconsistencies regarding the enforcement of visitation rights among indigent fathers. Educating those involved that all fathers are to be afforded the same support from law enforcement entities is crucial for indigent fathers to maintain contact with their children.
- **Encourage fathers to stay involved in their children’s lives:** Reform of state programs to create incentives that encourage fathers to remain involved; in particular, ensure that child support orders are intended to ensure a minimum subsistence level for non-custodial parents and increase education to social service providers and fathers regarding delinquency of payments and the modification process, and address the absence of coordination and availability of services among state agencies.

- **Assist incarcerated fathers:** Create programs that help incarcerated fathers maintain contact with their children, abate and/or modify child support and assist in re-entry, continue to pursue Virtual Visitation bill for incarcerated fathers.
- **Increase technical assistance and strategic planning support.** Support local areas that are requesting assistance to develop viable fatherhood programs.

Completed Fatherhood Resource Guide

The Council reviewed and updated production of its resource guide and began distributing copies throughout the state. The Illinois Department of Human Services continued to perform the task of printing the guide on behalf of the Council. The resource guide is also available as a downloadable .pdf file at the Council's Website (www.responsiblefatherhood.com), as well as other state agency and partner organization Websites.

Generated Public Awareness

One of the primary functions of the Council, as mandated in the Responsible Fatherhood Act, is to generate public awareness of the impact of father absence on children and to assess the needs of fathers in particular geographic areas. The symposium, a success from a public policy standpoint - generated significant public relations. Public awareness opportunities were scheduled throughout the Chicago Area, in addition to Des Plaines and Rockford, Illinois during 2008.

By leveraging regional and statewide events, the Council was able to secure significant placements in media throughout the state regarding the Council and the importance of its mission. One such highlight included Chair Leving interviewing a former U.S. Deputy Attorney General and senior legal advisor to then Senator and Democratic Presidential Candidate Barack Obama on 106.3 FM. The Council was acknowledged as a resource in an article entitled "Father Figures" in the June 2008 edition of Essence Magazine. In 2008, ICRF was presented the Chicago Skyline Award by the Public Relations Society of America honoring the Council for its work in 2007. Public awareness was augmented by means of videotaping some symposiums and making them available on the Council's website for public use. In addition the Council received an award from the White House—the President's Volunteer Service Award. Members of the Council received a certificate and pin.

The Council was represented on November 18, 2008, on the Region V, Administration for Children and Families Fatherhood Collaboration Network Call, an outreach call for fatherhood providers and advocates in the six states of Region V. A Council member reported on Council activities and following Council approval increased Illinois Council outreach through participation in a fatherhood archive for the outreach calls and for the states in Region V by providing Council Information. See Illinois on website: <http://www.opnff.net/id36.htm>.

Advocated for programs, policies and legislation

The ICRF Legislative Committee continued its support for the Virtual Visitation Bill in order to promote awareness of new technology in the area of visitation between fathers and their children. The Council also supported a bill requiring DNA testing to establish paternity under certain circumstances to eliminate cases of paternity fraud.

The Council further enhanced its mission by conducting symposiums that provided lectures on current and relevant topics including: Virtual Visitation, Parental Alienation, Psychology and the Law and It's Affects on Fatherhood. Military Fathers and Teen Fathers and Dead Broke Dads. Various state department representatives, judges, attorneys, professors and Council members presented at the symposiums.

2009 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- *Policy Report*
The Council plans to work with state agencies and legislators to enact reforms and legislation that will: implement a virtual visitation plan for incarcerated fathers, assist indigent parents whose visitations rights are not being enforced by law enforcement and aid veterans, determine the role of providing support to state agencies requesting assistance for fatherhood programming, determine a plan to seek funding for collaborative program initiatives and to assist with technical assistance and training at state agencies, and enhance public awareness of rules and regulations that impact fathers' rights.
- *Convene a Statewide Symposium on Responsible Fatherhood*
Building on the success of last year's event, the Council will convene another statewide symposium focused on educating fathers, families, practitioners, and community leaders about fatherhood issues and provide them the practical resources needed to promote responsible fatherhood in their homes and in their communities.
- *Continue to Convene Additional Regional Meetings.*
- *Seek funding and identify person(s) to pursue grant opportunities in order for the Council to enhance its efforts in promoting positive fatherhood involvement in the lives of children throughout Illinois.*
- *Conduct a half-day strategic planning retreat for Council members.*
- *Plan a social event to further encourage more member familiarity and inclusiveness.*
- *Explore the development of a quarterly or semi-annual newsletter.*
- *Increase networking and possible collaborating activities with the IFI, FEI, NFI, and other state fatherhood initiatives.*
- *Identify and promote best-practicing and gratis legal services for disadvantaged fathers.*

Presented by:

Jeffery M. Leving, Chair
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STRATEGIC OVERVIEW APPENDIX A

Council Mission Statement

The mission of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood is to significantly increase the number of children in Illinois that grow up with a responsible father in their lives. We seek to accomplish this through:

- Raising public awareness of the impact of father absence on children;
- Assisting state agencies and other service providers in securing the resources they need to promote responsible fatherhood;
- Reforming perceptions within state agencies and other service providers regarding the role of fathers as parents; and
- Advocating for programs, policies and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers.

Council Strategic Overview

We will raise public awareness of the impact of father absence on children by:

- Holding regional meetings and sharing statistics; and
- Convening a symposium and conducting sessions on the impact of absent Fathers.

We will assist state agencies and other service providers in securing the resources they need to promote responsible fatherhood by;

- Conducting assessments of state agency needs related to promoting responsible fatherhood;
- Providing information regarding the absence of coordination and availability of services among state agencies;
- Updating services state agencies offer to fathers; and
- Developing and disseminating a resource guide listing available to service-providers throughout the state.

We will reform perceptions among state agencies and other service providers regarding the role of fathers as parents by:

- Conducting regional forum meetings to gain input from citizens throughout the state and share with stakeholders;
- Convening a statewide symposium to share lessons learned;
- Advocating for programs, policies and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers by conducting assessment or researching of current programs, policies, legislations that hinder father engagement; and
- Holding a statewide symposium to gather information and evaluate current programs and policies.

Sub-Committees (comprised of council members)

- Symposium Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
 - Collaborate with state agencies to plan symposium; and
 - Help plan regional meetings.
- Resource Guide Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
 - Collaborate with state agencies to revise “Non-Custodial Parent Service Directory” into resource guide; and
 - Compile existing pertinent information on the state of fatherhood in Illinois for Resource Guide.
- Assessment Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
 - Revise/Design assessment program/tool for state agencies; and
 - Make recommendations for internal policies and programs.
- Intergovernmental Affairs Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
 - Interact with state agencies to keep abreast on new policies and programs; and
 - Make recommendations for changes in agency policies and programs.
- Legislative Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
 - Research legislative initiatives that could serve fathers; and
 - Make recommendations for the General Assembly.

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REGIONAL MEETINGS REPORT APPENDIX B

Background

In 2008, the Council on Responsible Fatherhood for the State of Illinois convened five regional meetings – Northeastern IL University, Chicago on January 19th, Prairie State College, Chicago Heights on February 16th, Oakton Community College, DesPlaines, IL on March 1st, Chicago State University, Chicago, IL on April 26 and Zeke Giorgi Center, Rockford, IL on November 15. The regional meetings sought to build a network of supportive groups and individuals, pinpoint challenges that hinder father involvement in their children's lives, develop ideas for programs that would support fathers and look for means of bringing about legislative reforms. To accomplish this, the Council reached out to lawmakers, churches, social service organizations and individuals in these geographic areas to participate in the forum.

The stated objectives of the meeting were to:

- Identify what are the top policy issues or concerns that prevent the positive involvement of fathers;
- Discuss ways to engage fathers through programming and public outreach; and
- Form regional task forces.

The regional meetings also offered an opportunity to raise public awareness of the impact of father absence through public relations outreach in these areas.

Results Summary:

Information was gathered through dialogue in the forum discussions.

The following is an assessment from the meetings.

- **Educate law enforcement and States Attorney's offices regarding visitation orders:** There are inconsistencies regarding the enforcement of visitation rights among indigent fathers; educating those involved that all fathers are to be afforded the same support from law enforcement entities is crucial for indigent fathers to maintain contact with their children;
- **Encourage fathers to stay involved in their children's lives:** Reform of state programs to create incentives that encourage fathers to remain involved; in particular review that child support orders are intended to ensure a minimum

subsistence level for non-custodial parents and increase education to social service providers and fathers regarding delinquency of payments and the modification process; and to address the absence of coordination and availability of services among state agencies;

- **Assist incarcerated fathers:** Create programs that help incarcerated fathers maintain contact with their children, abate and/or modify child support and assist in re-entry to society; continue to pursue Virtual Visitation bill for incarcerated fathers; and
- **Increase technical assistance and strategic planning support:** support local areas that are requesting assistance to develop viable fatherhood programs.

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APPENDIX C FATHERHOOD SYMPOSIUM REPORT

Overview

Mission:

To educate and empower fathers to be more responsible parents and to provide them with resources to make positive changes in their lives.

The 2008 Fatherhood Symposium accomplished this through:

- Public dialogue with top state officials and decision-makers regarding policies and programs relevant to fathers;
- Informative skill-building workshops; and
- Resource Fair.

The focus of the 2008 event was reforming state policies and programs to encourage fathers to be more involved in the lives of their children.

Theme:

“Fathers Who Care Expo for Today’s Man”

Location:

Malcolm X College in Chicago, Illinois

Who Was There:

- More than 500 people attended. Many in attendance were indigent or lower income fathers.
- This year’s symposium had an increase in the number of social service agencies represented and had more variety among the type of agencies represented. The more than 25 participants included: Fathers Who Care, Fatherhood Educational Institute, U.S. Small business Administration, Introspect Services, Inc., West branch NAACP, Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, A hand Up Recovery homes, Firman Community Services, Advocate Healthcare Parish Nurse Ministry, Maryville Academy, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Loretto Hospital, Haymarket Center, Cook County Department of Public Health, Center For Employment Training, Teen Parent Family Services Project, Legal Assistance Foundation of Metro Chicago, Working For Togetherness, The Danny K. Davis Job Training Program, J.C. & Company Design, The Pro-Team, Provident Hospital, Wings of Hope Resource Center, DRF Enterprises, Illinois Department of Health

and Family Services, The Store House of World Vision, Rachel's Transitional Center and Worldwide Family Center.