

ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD

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

**THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD
2009 ANNUAL REPORT
FROM THE OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
JEFFERY M. LEVING**

December 31, 2009

2009 Council on Responsible Fatherhood Annual Report

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Members of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood

Sen. Kimberly Lightford

Judge Edward Petka (formerly Illinois Senator)

Rep. Paul Froehlich

Rev. Rodney Byrd

Dianna Durham-McLoud

George Haley

Dr. Kirk Harris

David Hirsch

Dr. Leon Intrater

Rev. Walter Jones

Dr. Wrenetha A. Julion

Howard Lathan

Dr. Yolanda Peppers

Tim O'Grady

Lois Rakov

Cathy Reed

Norris Stevenson

Sam Cahnman

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The deterioration of responsible fatherhood during the last half-century has had a devastating effect on American families. At least 25 million children in America are living without their biological fathers. 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, use drugs, experience educational, emotional and behavioral problems, be victims of child abuse, and engage in criminal behavior. We must never forget children need their dads. When fathers are absent, something is lost. Mounting evidence supports benefits of effective male “father figures”/mentors in children’s lives whose biological fathers are unavailable for a variety of 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 toward one clear and measurable goal: 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 2009:

Convened Statewide Symposium – On June 6, 2009, the Council convened a statewide symposium in collaboration with Congressman Danny K. Davis and other partner organizations.

Held at Malcolm X College in Chicago, the event educated and empowered fathers on real life issues that men face. Issues 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 in youth’s lives.

Conducted Strategic Planning Session – Council members met to discuss the role and mission of the Council. As a result of the strategic planning process, the Council identified five (5) priority issues facing fathers today. Issues are listed in order of highest priority:

- 1) Men’s Health and Wellness
- 2) Funds and Resources for Fathers
- 3) Employment
- 4) Public Policies
- 5) Legal Obstacles

Policy Report – The Council worked with state Legislators to enact reforms and legislation amending 1) the paternity act and right to notice of DNA testing prior to establishing paternity, 2) the visitation interference criminal statute to include parenting time and custody interference, and 3) empowering judges to award virtual visitation to non-custodial parents, which could lead to court-ordered virtual visitation for incarcerated parents.

Self- Assessment of State Agencies – In January 2009, the Council determined to rename the Self-Assessment Committee to the Fatherhood Services Committee serving as a clearing house of information for fatherhood services provided in Illinois through state and community organizations.

Completed Fatherhood Resource Guide – The Council updated the “Illinois Fatherhood Resource Guide”. The Illinois Fatherhood Resource Guide is 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 placement in media throughout Illinois regarding the importance of commitment from the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Council’s mission. Throughout the state, increasing the numbers of organizations and individuals that now recognize the Council’s role to increase awareness for the need to have responsible father involvement for the well-being of Illinois children and families. While much was accomplished in 2009, it’s primarily and introduction to the work still needing completion in 2010.

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 male involvement in the development of the 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 symposium and conducting free public sessions on the impact of absent fathers; and
- Updating, preparing and disseminating a resource guide that will include pertinent information on the impact resulting from father absence and include a listing of available service providers available to help fathers.
- 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
 - Surveying services and information state agencies offer to fathers.

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 and share information and available resources with stakeholders
- 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.

2009 ACTIONS

Convened Men's Health Event

The Council succeeded in meeting a goal of its strategic plan by convening an event to address men's health issues on December 26, 2009. The event was spearheaded by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Office of Men's Health with several organizations pooling resources to support the various activities, including a panel with Jeffery Leving, Chair of the Illinois Council On Responsible Fatherhood and Jerome Richardson, Deputy Director, IDPH/Office of Men's Health, health screenings, and a resource fair. More than 100 men attended the health fair.

Convened Statewide Symposium

The Council, in collaboration with Congressman Danny K. Davis, convened a statewide symposium themed "Fathers Who Care Expo for Today's Man" on June 6, 2009. The event was held at Malcolm X College in Chicago and had approximately 450 attendees. A group of panelists consisting of Dr. Jerome Richardson, Deputy Director, IDPH/Office of Men's Health; Phil Jackson, Founder of the Black Star Project; Norris Stevenson, Deputy Administrator for the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services for Field Operations in the Division of Child Support Enforcement and Jeffery Leving, Chair of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, provided opportunities to educate and empower fathers to be more responsible parents.

Informative skill-building workshops and a Resource Fair included sessions on:

- Health and Wellness
- Strengthening Families
- Parental Alienation
- Affordable Housing and Avoiding Foreclosure
- Family Law—Understanding Child Support
- Healthy Relationships and Joint Parenting
- Starting and Financing Small Businesses
- Illinois Ex-Offenders Re-Entry Services

The 2009 event examined state policies and programs to encourage responsible fatherhood. Attendees were primarily indigent and low income fathers.

Policy Report

Conducted Strategic Planning Session – Council members met in Chicago on Saturday, February 21, 2009. During the planning process, several important issues facing fathers today surfaced. Issues including: Employment & Training; Business Entrepreneurship; Need for obtaining Living Wages, Legal Assistance & Child Support; Judicial Reform; Health & Wellness – Male Services; Affordable Housing concerning Homelessness; Visitation Access To Children; Parenting Education; Law Enforcement Education; Parental Involvement; Incarceration; Fundraising Resources; Policies Regarding Legislation/Judicial Reform/Education, Lack of Fathering Models; Definition of Father Roles; Mentoring; Health of Children and Legal Obstacles.

The Council narrowed this extensive list of problems into five priority issues and ranked them as follows:

- (1) Men's Health And Wellness
- (2) Funds and Resources for Fathers
- (3) Employment
- (4) Public Policies
- (5) Legal Obstacles.

Updated Fatherhood Resource Guide

The Council reviewed and updated production of its resource guide. The Illinois Department of Human Services was unable to perform the task of printing the guide on behalf of the Council due to state budget constraints. The resource guide is now 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 a particular geographic area. The symposium, a success from a public policy standpoint, generated significant public relations. Additional public awareness opportunities occurred with the Men's Health Event conducted at Malcolm X College on December 26, 2009. Several organizations collaborated and pooled resources to support the health event. Dr. Jerome Richardson Deputy Director, IDPH/Office of Men's Health, spearheaded the event and Council member Reverend Walter Jones coordinated transportation arrangements for approximately 200 men.

Enhancing public awareness is accomplished via the Council's website at www.responsiblefatherhood.com. Maintaining an up-to-date website provides resources, events and goals of the Council for the public at large.

The Council was represented on November 17, 2009, on the Region V, Administration for Children and Families Fatherhood Collaboration Network Call. This is an outreach call for fatherhood providers and advocates in the six states of Region V. Two Council members reported on President Obama's National Conversation on Fatherhood in Chicago entitled "The White House Round Table and Town Hall Meeting on Responsible Fatherhood".

The Council and the Ohio Practitioner's Network for Fathers and Families agreed to provide reciprocal links to each other's websites. The links have helped increase public awareness of the Council's mission and the progress made in Illinois "toward justice in Family Law", <http://www.opnff.net>

Visit the section entitled "Midwest Fatherhood Activities" and then search in "Illinois".

In addition to this reciprocal website link, the Council provided information on bills supported by the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood and signed into law by Governor Quinn. The information provided on this site is utilized by fatherhood providers, throughout the six states of Region V Administration for Children and Families along with national, state, and local fatherhood and family providers.

Advocated for programs, policies and legislation

The ICRF Legislative Committee, with support of the full Council, continued to advocate for policies, and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers. The Council supported four pieces of legislation that were passed by the Illinois Legislature and signed into law by Governor Quinn. The Virtual Visitation Bill promotes awareness of new technology for use in the area of electronic visitation between fathers (non-custodial parents) and their children. The Council also supported a bill requiring the right to notice of DNA testing before establishing paternity, under certain circumstances, to eliminate cases of paternity fraud, and supported legislation to amend the Illinois Criminal Code to include parenting time and custody interference in the visitation interference criminal statute. The Council made clear that it is working with the Governor and Legislature toward "equal justice in Family Law."

The Council provided public awareness following its advocacy of the new legislation. The information released on August 21, 2009 included the following summary of the enactment of the legislation:

Gov. Patrick Quinn has signed into law three (4) Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood (ICRF) supported bills that passed both houses of the General Assembly.

The ICRF was created by the Illinois General Assembly to help fathers overcome barriers to being responsibly involved in their children's lives, through efforts at the legislative and administrative levels, and to provide public education. Subsequently, extended by Executive Order.

Highlights of the legislation:

SB 1628, sponsored by Sen. Iris Martinez and in the House by Rep. Deborah Mell, accomplishes two things: It amends the Paternity Act and other Acts, to insure that both parties be informed of their right to DNA testing before an adjudication of paternity can be made either through a voluntary acknowledgment of paternity or court or administrative proceedings. It also amends the visitation interference section of the Criminal Code and sets forth that it is now a criminal offense to deny the other parent their right to parenting time or custody time. Previously, only visitation interference was a crime.

SB 1590, sponsored by Sen. Pamela Althoff and in the House by Rep. Sandra Pihos, and unanimously passed, allows children and non-custodial parents to use electronic visitation technologies such as email, telephone, internet and video conferencing. Illinois is the fifth state to pass Virtual Visitation Legislation which can open the door to virtual visitation for incarcerated parents in Illinois.

HB 4008, sponsored by Rep. Jehan Gordon and in the Senate by Sen. Iris Martinez, includes the paternity provisions of SB 1628. It amends the Paternity Act to insure that both parties be clearly informed of their right to DNA testing before a voluntary acknowledgment of paternity is signed or the paternity order is entered in an administrative proceeding or by the court.

HB 2266, sponsored by Rep. Ken Dunkin and in the Senate by Sen. Iris Martinez, amends the visitation interference section of the Criminal Code with the use of terms used in family cases today (i.e. parenting time and custody time). (Signed into law: August 25, 2009)

In 2010, Council members will provide outreach and education on the new legislation and gather questions from the public about the new laws. One event where this will take place is at Opening Minds Conference of the Chicago Metro Association for the Education of Young Children on January 28, 2010.

2010 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Policy Report

The Council plans to develop and support events/activities that address issues identified during its strategic planning meeting. Issues are listed in order of highest priority:

- 1) Men's Health and Wellness
- 2) Funds and Resources for Fathers
- 3) Employment
- 4) Public Policies
- 5) Legal Obstacles

The Council plans to work with state agencies and legislators to enact legislative and policy reforms to build awareness to these issues, institute measures to make changes and identify more specific strategies to address these concerns. The Council plans on seeking funding for collaborative program initiatives that will 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

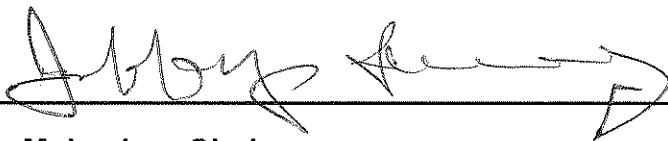
Building on the success of last year's event, the Council will convene another statewide symposium focused on educating fathers, families, practitioners, and community leaders about fatherhood issues and help build awareness of the resources needed to promote responsible fatherhood in their homes and in their communities.

Convene Regional Meetings

The Council will continue seeking funding and identifying people 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.

The Council will increase networking and alliance events with fatherhood initiatives.

Presented by:



Jeffery M. Leving, Chair

Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood

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STRATEGIC OVERVIEW APPENDIX A

Council Mission Statement

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- Raising public awareness regarding 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
- Advocating for programs, policies and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers

Council Strategic Overview

The Council will raise public awareness regarding the impact of father absence on children by:

- Holding regional meetings and sharing statistics
- Convening a symposium and conducting sessions on the impact of absent fathers
- Preparing a resource guide that will include pertinent resources

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

- Updating services and information state agencies offer to fathers
- Developing and disseminating a resource guide available to service-providers throughout the state
- Drafting and supporting legislation supporting father engagement

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 symposium to share lessons learned
- Advocating for programs, policies and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers by:
 - (a) Conducting assessment and researching of current programs, policies, legislations that hinder father engagement; and
 - (b) Holding a symposium to gather information and evaluate current programs and policies

Sub-Committees (comprised of council members)

Symposium Sub-Committee Responsibilities:

- (c) Collaborating with state agencies to plan symposium
- (d) Help plan regional meetings

- Resource Guide Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
 - Collaborate with state agencies to revise “Non-Custodial Parent Service Directory” into resource guide
 - 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
 - Make recommendations for internal policies and programs

The Self-Assessment Committee was renamed Fatherhood Services Committee at the January 15, 2009 meeting. Its function is to be a clearing house of information for fatherhood services.

- Intergovernmental Affairs Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
 - Interact with state agencies to keep abreast on new policies and programs
 - Make recommendations for changes in agency policies and programs
- Legislative Sub-Committee Responsibilities:
 - Research legislative initiatives that could serve fathers
 - Make recommendations for the General Assembly
- Chairman Responsibilities:
 - Organize and implement regional meetings
 - Organize full Council meetings, set agendas
 - Manage and maintain website
 - Manage sub-committees

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APPENDIX B 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 2009 Fatherhood Symposium accomplished this through:

- Public dialogue with selected panelists regarding policies and programs relevant to fathers;
- Informative skill-building workshops
- Resource Fair

The focus of the 2009 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:

- Approximately 450 people attended. Attendees were primarily indigent and lower income fathers.

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APPENDIX C MEN'S HEALTH EVENT

Overview

Mission:

To provide men in targeted communities with access to health screenings and information on obtaining ongoing medical treatment

The 2009 Men's Health Event accomplished this through:

- Partnership with the Illinois Department of Public Health
- Health Screenings
- Panel discussions on responsible fatherhood, expungement, and men's health issues
- Resource Fair

The focus of the 2009 event was to inform men seeking healthcare of programs available to them, and provide health screenings.

Theme:

"Men on the Move to Better Health: Chicago Men's Health Fair"

Location:

Malcolm X College in Chicago, Illinois

Who Was There:

- More than 100 men attended. Many in attendance were indigent and lower income fathers