

**THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD  
2015 ANNUAL REPORT**

*December 31, 2015*

[www.responsiblefatherhood.com](http://www.responsiblefatherhood.com)  
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Members of the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood

Jeffery M. Leving, Chairman

Members:

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Rep. Paul Froehlich (Ret.)

Rev. Rodney Byrd

Rep. LaShawn Ford

Norris Stevenson

Dianna Durham-McLoud

Dr. Kirk Harris

David Hirsch

Dr. Leon Intrater

Rev. Walter Jones

Howard Lathan

Dr. Yolanda Peppers

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood is a state commission established by the Illinois State Legislature to promote the positive involvement of both parents in the lives of their children. Countless study findings 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. This information indicates that these most challenging social problems are symptoms of father absence.

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. In Illinois, it is estimated that 1.1 million children grow up without their fathers present at home. Yet the Fragile Families study found that 80% of the fathers of children born to never-married parents were involved at the birth of their child. The need is great to help fathers stay involved with their children as the child grows.

There is 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. Efforts of the Council and of the individual Council members are geared to fulfill the mission of the Council: to promote the positive involvement of both parents in the lives of their children.

## 2015 ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD ACTIVITIES

In 2015, the Council worked to spread awareness of the crucial importance of children's need for their dads and the serious effects of father absence. The Council and Council members concerned themselves with real life issues that men face such as fathers' rights, child support, relationships, access and visitation, public policy, expunging records, entrepreneurship, conflict resolution, foreclosure, education, health, and employment opportunities. The Council recognizes and builds public awareness on 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 youths' lives.

### *Statewide Symposium*

On December 19, 2015, the Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood (ICRF) convened its Annual ICRF Statewide Symposium at the Oak Park Library in Oak Park, IL from 12:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. The symposium was attended by single fathers, community leaders and ministers. The symposium presented professionals who spoke on a wide range of critical fatherhood-related topics focused on keeping children safe. ICRF council members wanted to ensure that fathers were provided the essential support and parenting tools to assume the important role they play in their children's lives.

Council Chairman Jeffery Leving welcomed the attendees and presented an overview of the Council's work. He also moderated the panel discussions which focused on Protecting Our Children from Internet Risks, False DCFS findings against dads and the outreach for fatherhood involvement. In addition, solutions were provided to help dads become active participants in their kids' lives as a means of creating safer communities. The panel speakers included: Chicago Matrimonial Attorney Maureen A. Gorman who lectured on successfully appealing DCFS findings against dads falsely accused of abuse. Maureen has a highly successful track record and won four of these complex and difficult appeals in a row; Illinois Detective Wayne Halick from Millennium Investigations, Inc who discussed how to keep children safe from harm in the Internet age. Wayne has saved children from harm, abuse, and human trafficking. Detective Halick is a board member of the [Fatherhood Educational Institute](#), a not-for-profit organization that promotes a positive fatherhood environment across all communities; Lois Rakov, an ICRF council member, presented a topic entitled "Outreach for Fatherhood Involvement" that provided helpful tips on promoting responsible fatherhood; Intellectual Property Attorney Mark Petrolis encouraged the fathers at the symposium not to give up hope and to fight for their rights as parents despite the injustices.

The symposium was an opportunity to share the mission of ICRF with community leaders and members who had the opportunity to ask questions about the status of fathers in the community, the range and diversity of federal, regional, state and local fatherhood programs, and the need for legal assistance for fathers to gain access and visitation with their children. Speakers provided important statistical information on single parenting, particularly that of single fathers with custody, examples of the difficulties faced by children in situations of parental alienation and assistance with current resources as well as future events to promote the positive involvement

of both parents in the lives of their children. The symposium generated public awareness regarding the impact of father absence on children and the serious effect on children of all ages throughout the state and nation.

### *Council Areas of Concern*

The Council's strategic planning during 2014 identified key focus areas upon which the Council, as a group and individually, continued to work in 2015.

During 2015, the Council utilized the identified areas of concern from the Council's strategic planning sessions to inform its plans and organize its efforts. Council members worked to make certain that the identified key areas of focus were aligned with the role and mission of the Council. The Council identified ICRF partners, developed action steps, and identified person(s) responsible for key areas of focus.

The key areas of concern identified many major issues facing fathers which are in line with the Council's continued work on its mandated mission:

- Health and Wellness
- Funds and Resources
- Employment
- Public Policies
- Legal Obstacles
- Parenting/Parent Education

### *Identification of Partners*

Illinois Council members reached out to numerous community groups to build partnerships to fulfill the mission of the council and to build awareness and support for fathers and families. Particular efforts were made to identify and work with partners in the identified key areas of concern.

## *Council Committee Work*

### Fatherhood Resources

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 annual symposium, a success from a public policy standpoint, generated significant public relations.

### Council Website

The development and refinement of the Council's website continued in 2015. The Council's web site at [www.responsiblefatherhood.com](http://www.responsiblefatherhood.com) is a key vehicle for generating public awareness of the need for father involvement and the resources available to aid fathers and families. The goal of the website is to be a community resource for responsible fatherhood programs.

### Resource Guide

Copies of a summary resource guide were made available by the Illinois Department of Human Services and also distributed by Council members. Selected information from this resource guide can be found in this report and is available on the council's website's direct link:  
<http://responsiblefatherhood.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/ICRF-Datasheet.pdf>

## **2016 Plans**

The Council hopes to continue implementing activities and sponsoring outreach that address the identified areas of Council concern such as health, wellness, employment, public policies, legal obstacles and parenting/parent education. However, participation of all its Council members is important and has been lacking.

The Council hopes to conduct a planning meeting in 2016 to develop action steps and enumerate priorities.

The Council hopes to work with state agencies, associations, community organizations and legislators to identify legislative and policy reforms and to build awareness to these issues. Council members are needed to work to advance measures to make changes and identify more specific strategies to address these concerns. The Council needs funds 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.

Building on the momentum of the December 2015 Annual Symposium, the Council will likely assess the benefits and ideas gained from the December Symposium in order to plan another statewide symposium and other public. The focus will hopefully be identified by community members and Council members in response to the prior identified focus areas and the questions raised on December 19 by audience participants. The broad goals remain: to focus 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.

Funding and identifying person(s) from the Council, partners and community who are able to collaborate to pursue grant opportunities is critical. This is of importance in order for the Council to enhance its efforts in promoting positive fatherhood involvement in the lives of children throughout Illinois. The Council would find value in funding to support the work of the Council.

## **Appendix A – Government Fatherhood Resources**

### **Department of Children & Family Services**

(312) 808-9040 [www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs)

### **Department of Human Services**

(312) 793-4131 [www.dhs.state.il.us](http://www.dhs.state.il.us)

### **State of Illinois Government Resources**

Child Support – (312) 793-7987 [www.childsupportillinois.com](http://www.childsupportillinois.com)

### **United States Dept. of Health & Human Services**

(877) 696-6775 [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov)

### **United States Dept. Of Education**

(800) 872-5327 [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

### **National Responsible Fatherhood Clearing House**

(877) 432-3411 – [www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov)



## **APPENDIX B -- 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 hope 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.

### **Goals**

- To promote father-friendly policies statewide in state and community agencies, faith-based organizations and institutions;
- To provide assistance and resources to local fatherhood groups;
- To build partnerships with state agencies fatherhood program staff and with community and faith-based organizations; and
- To enhance public awareness of the important role of biological fathers and other father figures in the children's development and learning.

### **Council Strategic Overview**

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

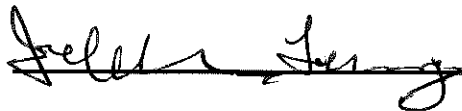
- Convening a symposium and conducting sessions on the impact of absent
- Fathers; and
- Preparing a resource guide that will include pertinent resources.

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

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

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

- Gathering input from citizens throughout the state and share with stakeholders; and
- Convening a symposium to share lessons learned.
- We hope to advocate for programs, policies and legislation that will encourage the positive involvement of fathers by:
  - a) Conducting assessment or researching of current programs, policies, legislations that hinder father engagement; and
  - b) Holding a symposium to gather information and evaluate current programs and policies.



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