

**THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD
2017 ANNUAL REPORT**

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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 from 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 toward 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.

2017 ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD ACTIVITIES

In 2017, 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 concerned itself 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. In December, Governor Bruce Rauner sent a personal letter congratulating the Council on its successes and urging its members to continue their mission. In addition, the Council contacted the Department of Human Services (DHS) to discuss collaboration in helping to support responsible fatherhood.

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 9, 2017, the Council hosted its annual statewide symposium at the Oak Park Library in Oak Park, IL, from 1-4:30 p.m. The symposium was attended by single fathers, mothers, community leaders and Council members. The symposium featured professionals who spoke on a wide range of critical fatherhood-related topics focused on protecting and nurturing children. Council members wanted to ensure that fathers were provided 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. The panel speakers included Council member Lois Rakov, who presented an Archive of Resources for Fathers. Chicago Matrimonial Attorney Maureen A. Gorman from the Law Offices of Jeffery M. Leving, Ltd., explained the New Illinois Laws on Custody, Parenting Time and Child Support and How They Affect Fathers; Chicago Matrimonial Attorney Arthur Kallow presented on the Reunification of Fathers with their Children and Reverend Walter Jones presented on Men Empowering Men. In addition, Joe and Joe Media LLC videotaped the entire symposium.

The symposium was an opportunity to share the mission of the Council 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 information on updated laws regarding parenting and provided examples of the difficulties faced by children in situations of parental alienation. 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.

Press for this year's annual symposium reached a total of 277 media outlets, with a potential audience of 86,657,703 worldwide. Yahoo specifically, which generated approximately

66,181,000 visitors each day, generated the highest audience. In addition, other publications such as Market Insider (1,726,000 visitors/day), Chase (2,704,000 visitors/day), and Chicago Business Journal (324,000 visitors/day) were among the top media outlets that reached expansive audiences.

Council Areas of Concern

The Council's strategic planning during 2016 identified key focus areas upon which the Council, as a group and individually, continued to work in 2017.

During 2017, 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 Council partners, and developed action steps.

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

Legislation

The Council continued in 2017 to give attention to needed reforms and legislation to ensure that state programs' procedures and government policies are reviewed. For example, interest was high on the need to reduce the negative outcomes experienced by children affected by numerous custody issues.

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. The Council has received recognition from the President of the United States and the Governor of Illinois.

Council Website

The development and refinement of the Council's website continued throughout 2017. The Council's website at 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>

2018 Plans

The Council plans 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.

Building on the momentum from the December 2017 Annual Symposium, the Council will assess the benefits and ideas gained in order to plan another statewide symposium. The focus will be identified by community members and Council members in response to the prior identified focus areas and the questions raised on December 9 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.

The Council intends to seek funding and identify person(s) from the Council, partners and the community who are able to collaborate to pursue grant opportunities. This is crucial in order for the Council to enhance its efforts in promoting positive fatherhood involvement in the lives of children throughout Illinois.

Appendix A – Government Fatherhood Resources

Department of Children & Family Services

(312) 808-9040 www.state.il.us/dcfs

Department of Human Services

(312) 793-4131 www.dhs.state.il.us

State of Illinois Government Resources

Child Support – (312) 793-7987 www.childsupportillinois.com

United States Dept. of Health & Human Services

(877) 696-6775 www.hhs.gov

United States Dept. Of Education

(800) 872-5327 www.ed.gov

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearing House

(877) 432-3411 – 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 plan 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.



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