

Center for Family Policy and Practice

2006 Annual Report



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Fiscal Year 2006 Annual Report

Mission

The mission of the Center for Family Policy and Practice (CFFPP) is to help create a society in which low-income parents—mothers as well as fathers—are in a position to support their children emotionally, financially, and physically. CFFPP seeks to address the unique barriers affecting low-income fathers, including negative public perceptions. Through the provision of technical assistance, policy research, and public education, CFFPP will work to support low-income fathers and their families and develop public awareness of their needs. Fundamental to this mission are the following principles:

- In order to preserve the well-being of children, public policy must preserve the well-being of children's parents and caretakers. However, when the needs of a child and the needs of parents conflict, those of the child must prevail.
- Public policy must actively and effectively promote the economic viability of families.
- Public policy must support individuals' efforts to create families of their own choosing.
- Low-income parents need accurate and comprehensive legal information and support to successfully negotiate the social service system.
- Public policy must be created and executed in a manner that ensures that individual family members feel secure and are safe from physical harm.

In summary, CFFPP seeks to foster public policies at every level that promote and contribute to the well being of children, parents, and families.

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Staff

Jacquelyn Boggess, JD, Associate Director
Rebecca May, Senior Policy Analyst
Louisa Medaris, Manager of Operations
David Pate, PhD, Executive Director
Marguerite Roulet, PhD, Director of Programs
Scott Sussman, JD, Staff Attorney (through March 2006)

HIGHLIGHTS:

(2005-2006)

- Held our *first* National conference on Fatherhood and Domestic Violence in communities of color in San Antonio, Texas.
- Invited to participate in a *Wingspread Conference* on the intersection of Marriage, Fatherhood Responsibility, and Domestic Violence.
- Held a national technical assistance meeting with selected members of Fatherhood and Domestic Violence groups in Chicago.
- Invited to participate in a Casey Foundation sponsored activity examining the role of women in fatherhood programming.
- Jacquelyn Boggess was elected as Board Chair for the YWCA (Madison, Wisconsin)
- Invited to participate in a national discussion with the 21st Century Foundation on Black Men and Boys in New York.
- Provided technical assistance to the Philadelphia Fatherhood Collaborative Project.
- Boggess was an invited presenter to the 10th International Conference on Family Violence in San Diego, CA.
- Conducted qualitative research interviews with selected child welfare staff in the Wisconsin counties of Milwaukee, Dane, Racine, and Rock on the topic of fathers and the child welfare system.
- Invited to participate and present at the Ford Foundations annual meeting on asset-building and financial literacy at Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama.
- Pate was selected as the keynote speaker for the Kansas City Fatherhood Summit.
- Boggess was selected to be a founding member of the Women's Law and Policy Project at the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Chicago, IL.
- CFFPP was featured in an on-line article by *Black Enterprise* magazine for its work with low-income Black males.
- Completed a training (technical assistance) featuring a short documentary with the Hudson River Film & Video company on the intersection of domestic violence and fatherhood.
- Premiered the hosting of a monthly radio program on "The Morning Buzz", WORT, 89.9FM, community radio station in Madison, Wisconsin.

Introduction

Since 1995 the Center for Family Policy and Practice (CFFPP), has been working to change the way policy makers nationwide think about vulnerable families. Conventional wisdom has it that the interests of noncustodial fathers are inherently at odds with the interests of women and children. Too often, this mindset has resulted in public policy and program management that fails the entire family.

Fragile, low-income families find themselves at the mercy of welfare, child support, child custody and health care systems that are often punitive rather than supportive. These systems, for example, frequently incarcerate men with limited education and dim job prospects rather than help them improve their employment options enough to support their kids financially. They require mothers of infants to “earn” their welfare checks through make-work activities rather than help them care for their own babies at home. They prioritize the government’s desire to recover program expenses over the well-being of the very children these programs are supposed to benefit. CFFPP recognizes that these kinds of policies are misguided and counterproductive, and works to prevent and change them through research, public education and technical assistance. We seek to change laws and rules that penalize parents for being poor. We promote policies that support parents’ efforts to stay involved in the lives of their kids. And we protect the rights of parents treated unfairly by agencies ill-equipped to fully address low-income families’ strengths and challenges. Families today come in a variety of configurations, but all members—women, men and children alike—share the same basic needs: economic security, a network of caring friends and relatives, and access to responsive institutions and services. CFFPP advocates for policies and practices that address those needs.

Policy Advocacy

National

On the national level, the Center continued to be involved in policy advocacy related to the reauthorization of TANF and the development of marriage and fatherhood initiatives and policies. In February 2006, Congress passed the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, which included the reauthorized TANF, as well as specific funding related to fatherhood programming (\$50 million per year for five years). The Center provided analyses of specific aspects of the Act in our national policy advocacy and published information in our national policy briefing, which reaches over 1550 individuals through subscription each month and thousands more per month through requests on the Center’s web site.

Pursuant to passage of the Deficit Reduction Act, the Center initiated our national “Pass It On, Pass It Through” campaign to encourage states to take advantage of the new option to pass through larger amounts of child support payments to children and their custodial families. In addition, the Center was consulted by the offices of Senators Evan Bayh and Barack Obama as they submitted their Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2006 (in June 2006). The bill includes provisions to support noncustodial parents in their efforts to support their children (e.g., through inclusion of job training, job opportunities, expanded EITC), provisions to support married families and couples (e.g., reducing marriage tax penalties, including domestic violence provisions), and ensures that children and families receive all child support payments made on their behalf.

State

During the past year, the Center addressed a variety of family support issues in the state:

The Center continued to be involved in the Wisconsin Division of Children and Families’ Performance Enhancement Plan (PEP). The state has undertaken this process in response to the 2004 federal evaluation of state child welfare practices. One area in which Wisconsin – and all other states – was found to be deficient was the incorporation of noncustodial fathers and their natal families in the permanency planning for children involved in the child welfare system. The Center helped generate information to assist the PEP process in this area and ultimately enable child welfare workers to more easily broaden the support system for children in the child welfare system by incorporating their fathers and their extended families (e.g., grandparents, aunts and uncles) in permanency planning efforts.

The Center continued to be involved with Community Shares of Wisconsin, a program that supports progressive community agencies in Wisconsin and brings them together regularly to address a variety of community issues.

The Center worked closely with several local and state fatherhood programs and coalitions, including the Urban League of Greater Madison's fatherhood program and the Milwaukee Fatherhood Collaborative, to develop initiatives to assist low-income noncustodial parents within the state. During the past year we have focused particularly on policy and practices pertaining to arrears debt reduction and asset development and on addressing family and gender violence.

Center staff serve on the boards of several local and state agencies that address matters affecting low-income families in Wisconsin, including the YWCA, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, and Asha House, a Madison- and Milwaukee-based program serving victims of violence and their families.

Technical assistance to community organizations

During the past year, the Center's technical assistance efforts addressed such issues as identifying the policy and social service needs of low-income men and noncustodial parents; helping a small foundation develop a policy and funding orientation directed at the needs of African American men and boys; and examining the intersection of fatherhood and domestic violence issues for men re-entering their communities after a period of incarceration.

The Center continued its work with the 21st Century Foundation, a small foundation concerned with African American policy and social services needs, to help develop a framework for supporting African American men and boys. The foundation is seeking to develop a directed funding program to support organizations that serve African American males and develop an overarching policy framework through which such support programs can lead to meaningful and enduring change and better outcomes for African American males in the US. The Center has provided the foundation with on-going support in the framing of the policy agenda and developing specific policy initiatives and actions. The Center has also received support from the foundation to raise awareness about issues affecting African American males and will use this experience to help inform the foundation's broader policy objectives.

The Center finalized its work with the Vera Institute of Justice on a project aimed at raising awareness about the issue of domestic violence for men and fathers who have recently been released from prison. Center staff worked with the documentary filmmakers Hudson River Film and Video, who have produced an earlier film ("Manhood and Violence: Fatal Peril," 2004) about a prison-based batterer intervention and violence prevention program. The current film, for which CFFPP served as consultant and policy analyst, concerns men with a history of domestic abuse who are re-entering their community after being incarcerated. The film's initial broadcast was at the Center's institute on domestic violence and fatherhood in San Antonio, TX in October 2005. A revised version was shown at the Center's TA Seminar for fatherhood and domestic violence program practitioners in Chicago, IL in June 2006. A final version of the film with a discussion guide will be included in the Center's January 2007 guidebook "Collaboration and Partnership: Fatherhood Practitioners and Advocates Against Domestic Violence Working Together to Serve Women, Men, and Families."

In addition to national technical assistance, the Center provides on-going technical assistance to fatherhood and other community organizations at the local and state level (e.g., to the Urban League of Greater Madison's fatherhood program and to the Milwaukee Fatherhood Collaborative). The Center provides legal information on such areas as child support policy and practice, domestic

violence policy, Medicaid reimbursement requirements, and the negotiation of the paternity establishment and child support systems, with a particular focus on assisting individuals and families who are contending with multiple barriers. Such assistance is provided by Center staff upon request.

Fatherhood and domestic violence

In the past year the Center continued with its two-year project to create dialogue and develop collaborations among fatherhood programs and advocates against domestic violence. The Center received funding from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) to create a targeted technical assistance project to develop this dialogue and provide cross-training to domestic violence advocates and fatherhood program staff at the national level. Support from the Public Welfare Foundation and the Ms. Foundation has allowed us to broaden the project and include additional programs.

The project is a two-year project: the first year was directed at developing dialogue among organizations, providing cross-training between domestic violence and fatherhood programs, and developing a national institute on these areas. The Institute, entitled "Collaboration Between Fatherhood and Domestic Violence Programs in Communities of Color: A Focus on Prevention" was held in San Antonio, TX on October 11-13, 2005. In June 2006, the Center hosted a two-day TA Seminar for domestic violence and fatherhood practitioners in Chicago, IL. The TA Seminar provided cross-training information to experts in both fields and developed materials and other supports to help program representatives from the fatherhood and domestic violence fields initiate conversations (and, potentially, collaborative projects) in their local communities.

The ultimate objective of the project is to provide domestic violence and fatherhood advocates with resource materials to assist them in developing local collaborations. Based on our efforts over the past two years, the Center is currently completing production of a guidebook/curriculum directed at this issue. The guidebook will be published in early 2007 and is entitled: "Collaboration and Partnership: Fatherhood Practitioners and Advocates Against Domestic Violence Working Together to Serve Women, Men, and Families" by Jacquelyn Boggess, Rebecca May, and Marguerite Roulet.

Financial literacy, debt reduction, and asset development for noncustodial parents

The Center initiated the financial literacy project because we believe that existing financial literacy models are not able to accommodate the specific needs of low-income noncustodial parents who are struggling with child support debt. These individuals are frequently unable to take advantage of federal assistance programs, are subject to liens that do not permit them to develop assets, contend with mounting debt due to high interest rates on child support arrears, and can face incarceration for failure to meet existing child support debts and payment obligations. While programs can effectively teach financial management skills to individuals, it can still be close to impossible for these individuals to manage their debts and avoid incarceration.

Our project is a two-year project whose overarching objectives have been to examine the applicability of existing financial literacy and asset development models to noncustodial parents who are struggling with child support debt. The Center is developing specific policy papers that address the following: (1) financial literacy models and their relevance to low-income noncustodial parents, (2) the child support system as it pertains to low-income noncustodial parents and its intersection with financial literacy, (3) models for addressing child support debt reduction for low-income noncustodial parents (arrears management), and (4) the suitability and availability of workforce development programs to low-income noncustodial parents.

FY 2006 Funders

Ford Foundation
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
Community Shares of Wisconsin
Department of Justice—Office on Violence Against Women
Public Welfare Foundation
Vera Institute of Justice
State of Wisconsin—Department of Health and Human Services

A copy of the 2006 annual financial audit (prepared by Wegner LLP) is available upon request.

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