

FATHERHOOD:

Insights and Perspectives from
Leaders in the Fatherhood Movement



FATHERHOOD:

**Insights and Perspectives from
Leaders in the Fatherhood Movement**



PROJECTSM
Fatherhood

**Fatherhood: Insights and Perspectives from
Leaders in the Fatherhood Movement**

Copyright © 2009 by Children's Institute, Inc. All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be used without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews, which do not require permission. This book is available in individual chapters at www.projectfatherhood.org and in its entirety at www.childrensstitute.org.

FIRST EDITION

First printing, June 2009

Edited by Elizabeth Bailey and Betsey Binét
2B Communications, Inc.

ISBN 978-0-9841168-0-5

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Fatherhood in Social Context

By James Garbarino, PhD **7**

Fathers, Fathers Everywhere – Not to Be Seen

By Eloise Anderson **15**

The Inestimable Value of Responsible Fathering

By Ken Canfield, PhD **23**

Why Fatherhood? Why Now?

By Hershel K. Swinger, PhD **31**

Implementing Project Fatherhood to Help Homeless Fathers

*By Susan Lux, Miguel Lorenzana, Karla McLean
and Jana Plasters* **41**

Fatherhood in Recovery: Fathers, Families and PTSD

By Jerry Tello, M.A. **49**

Project Fatherhood at Heavenly Spirits, Inc.

By Monica Williams **53**

Birthing Daddies

By Kathryn Hall-Trujillo, MPH **61**

Fathers and the Courts: A Conversation with

The Hon. Michael Nash **69**

“It’s a father thing.”

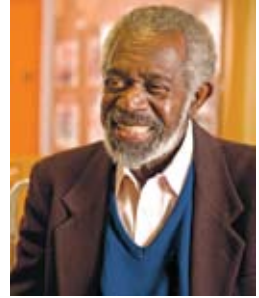
By Gregory J. Boyle, S.J. **81**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We owe a debt of gratitude to all of the distinguished professionals who contributed to this publication and to Dr. Ronald W. Banks, director of Project Fatherhood at Children's Institute, Inc. Thanks also to 2B Communications, Inc., for editorial and production expertise. Special thanks to Susan Cuscuna and Lizanne Fleming of Children's Institute, Inc., for their assistance in preparing content for this book.

INTRODUCTION

As a professional involved with the child welfare system, I've seen the primary focus of attention on the mother's role in the family, while the father's role has been largely ignored. Yet, research and my own experience argue that fathers who are actively engaged in raising their children have a profoundly positive impact on those young lives.



Over many years, I've learned that fathers are eager to participate but are often held back by poor social and economic conditions, cultural and legal bias, and the absence of a father when they were growing up. But the consequences are devastating to the children and to our communities. Children growing up without their father in their lives are five times more likely to be poor, three times more likely to use drugs, and twice as likely to end up in jail.

I started Project Fatherhood at Children's Institute, Inc. (CII) to give chiefly poor, urban, culturally diverse fathers an opportunity to connect with their children and play a meaningful role in their lives. Project Fatherhood starts with fathers, but the program is ultimately about the children. We know that if a man is a success at parenting, all the other aspects of his life will fall into place. The benefits to children, and ultimately to society, are exponential.

In 2007, CII launched the Project Fatherhood Community Grants Program to fund small community and faith-based organizations' efforts to replicate the program in conjunction with the federally funded Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. To date more than 7,000 fathers have participated in the program, and their numbers are growing.

On the following pages, you'll learn why it is vital that society support the engagement — and often the re-engagement — of all fathers in their children's lives. You'll hear from some of the community Project Fatherhood program leaders. And you'll discover the incalculable impact that fatherhood programs are having on future generations.

Hershel K. Swinger, PhD

Children's Institute, Inc.



Fatherhood in Social Context

By James Garbarino, PhD

The legendary anthropologist Margaret Mead once wrote, “Motherhood is a biological necessity, but fatherhood is a social invention.” That is a good place to start a discussion of the social context of fatherhood. When we look across time and cultures, we can see that parenthood for women is tied to their essential biological role in the process of bringing children into the world and, in most situations, caring for them in the early years of life; but the role of the father is intrinsically ambiguous and relies upon cultural prescription for its social significance.

A SOCIAL INVENTION

Even in our fractured modern society, a woman who gives birth knows that she is the mother of “her” child. Unlike motherhood, paternity is always in doubt, and belief in one’s paternity is always an act of faith based in a particular relationship and person. It is also faith in the strength and validity of

a set of social conventions designed to structure the roles of men and women. Thus, fatherhood is essentially a social invention with diverse forms. Social science documents that some cultures have all but done away with fatherhood as a social role linked to biological relationship. Others have found ways to bond men to their children closely and intimately.

All this may seem abstract and theoretical, but it does provide an important starting point for looking at contemporary issues of fatherhood in the context of American society today. Once a child is conceived, it is a biological given that it will dominate a woman’s life for the better part of a year. The child’s continued existence depends upon the nourishment and care it receives from its mother (or some other woman) in her arms and at her breast. Even in “modern” societies, a script exists for women to follow,

should she choose to do so – a script of unconditional nurture, commitment, and love.

On the other hand, the meaning of fatherhood has been quite different. Fathers play their role in the moment of conception, to be sure (although even this is being

made optional by modern technology), but it is only a brief,

albeit dramatic, biological contribution of genetic material to get the process of child development started.

Sociobiologists even argue that what makes “sense” from an evolutionary standpoint is for men to maximize their opportunities for paternity by impregnating as many women as possible, since their investment and the costs to them of each child “fathered” are small relative to that of women, who can only give birth to a relatively small number of children.

This has two important implications for understanding the contemporary social context of fatherhood.

First, it means that there is traditionally a kind of tug-of-war between the sociobiology of fatherhood (with its imperative to impregnate as many women as possible to generate as much genetic “success” as possible)

and the cultural norms and social structures established to bind men to their children (so that the women who bear them can count on support in raising those children). But the modern social context has changed the terms of this contest for women who can support children on their own (and

thus don’t need men) and for men who cannot support children and/or are freed

from the cultural norms and social structures that ordinarily bind them to the mothers of their children. The result is a lot of children growing up without live-in fathers and, in many cases, with fathers who are totally absent. Father absence is a fact of life for about a third of American children (about 25 million of the 75 million kids in the United States). This issue is a portal to understanding fatherhood in social context in America.

FATHERHOOD AND IQ

To enter this portal we need a perspective on human development that begins with the realization that there are few hard and fast simple rules about how human beings develop; complexity is the rule rather than the exception. Rarely, if ever, is there a simple cause-effect relationship that works the same way with all people in

every situation. Rather, we find that the process of cause and effect depends upon the child as a set of biological and psychological systems set within the various social, cultural, political, and economic systems that constitute the context in which developmental phenomena are occurring.

This insight is the essence of an “ecological perspective” on human development as articulated by scholars such as Urie Bronfenbrenner. It is captured in the answer to the question, “Does X cause Y?” because the best scientific answer is almost always, “It depends.” It depends upon all the constituent elements of child and context.

How does this matter? It matters in the context of what else is going on in a child’s life, because one important corollary of our ecological perspective is the fact that generally it is the accumulation of risks and assets in a child’s life that tells the story about developmental progress, not the presence or absence of any one negative or positive influence. Father absence is no exception. For example, Arnold Sameroff’s classic study of threats to child development included

eight risk factors, of which father absence was one (the others are both parental characteristics, educational level, mental health status, substance abuse and family characteristics, economic status, race, maltreatment, and number of children).

The results indicated that the average IQ scores of children were *not* jeopardized by the presence of one or two risk factors. Since research indicates that what matters for resilience is that children reach an “average” level of cognitive competence (about 100), it is highly significant that children with zero,

one or two risk factors averaged IQ scores of 119, 116 and 113, respectively. But IQ scores declined significantly into the dangerous

range with the presence of four or more (averaging 90 with four risk factors and 85 with five). In Sameroff’s research, each risk factor weighed equally in the effect; it was the accumulation of risk factors that accounted for the differences. Thus, if we ask, “What is the impact of father absence on development of basic intellectual competence?” the answer is, “It depends.”

“...one important corollary of our ecological perspective is the fact that generally it is the accumulation of risks and assets in a child’s life that tells the story about developmental progress...”

If father absence is the only risk factor, then the average child will still be doing well (an average IQ of 116). But if the child is already facing three other risk factors (for example, being poor, dealing with the impact of racism, and dealing with a mother with low educational attainment or mental health problems or substance abuse or any other risk factor), the average child will exhibit below-average intellectual competence (the average IQ with four risk factors is 93) and thus at risk for academic difficulties and reduced resilience. Sameroff and his colleagues report the same pattern when it comes to social and psychological problems. Of course, there may be effects of father absence beyond its effect on intellectual development, most notably in its effects of the child's accumulation of "developmental assets."

Standing against the accumulation of risk are the number of developmental assets in a child's life. Research conducted by the Search Institute has identified 40 developmental assets – positive characteristics of family, school, neighborhood, peers, culture, and belief systems. As these assets

accumulate, the likelihood that a child or adolescent will be engaged in negative outcomes such as substance abuse, early onset of sexual activity, and antisocial violence declines (in the case of violence, from 61% for kids with 0-10 assets to 6% for kids with 31-40 assets). Conversely, as the number of assets increases, so does the likelihood of positive outcomes such as success in school, good health habits, valuing diversity, and delay of gratification.

SOCIAL TOXICITY

Asset accumulation predicts resilient response to stress and challenge, and this is particularly important in

modern America, where there are so many "social toxins" that can bring kids down. Social toxicity refers to the

extent to which the social environment of children and youth is poisonous in the sense that it contains serious threats to the development of identity, competence, moral reasoning, trust, hope, and the other features of personality and ideology that make for success in school, family, work, and the community. As with physical toxicity, social toxins can be fatal – in the forms of suicide, homicide,

"As with physical toxicity, social toxins can be fatal – in the forms of suicide, homicide, and drug-related and other lifestyle-related preventable deaths."

and drug-related and other lifestyle-related preventable deaths. But mostly it results in diminished “humanity” in the lives of children and youth by virtue of leading them to live in a state of degradation, whether they know it or not.

“We can see social toxicity in the values, practices, and institutions that breed feelings of fear about the world...”

What are the social and cultural poisons that are psychologically equivalent to lead and smoke in the air, PCBs in the water, and pesticides in the food chain? We can see social toxicity in the values, practices, and institutions that breed feelings of fear about the world, feelings of rejection by adults inside and outside the family, exposure to traumatic images and experiences, absence of adult supervision, and inadequate exposure to positive adult role models. These feelings and experiences arise from being embedded in a shallow materialist culture, being surrounded with negative and degrading media messages, and being deprived of relationships with sources of character in the school, the neighborhood, and the larger community.

All of these social toxins provide an important influence on the social

context of fatherhood and/or heighten the importance of fathers who are present and actively engaged in the lives of children. They undermine fathering (for example, the pop culture that glorifies fathers who are absent from the lives of their children and poisons the consciousness of boys and young men). They increase the need for strong, effective parenting to build resistance to negative influences in the life experience of children and youth, resistance that is enhanced by stable families including present and engaged fathers.

The presence vs. absence, the involvement vs. disengagement of fathers, can play a role in each of these assets. This is one way to interpret the many studies that link father absence and disengagement to lower levels of “social capital.”

“WRESTLING WITH YOUR FATHER”

What are the mechanisms that link father absence to accumulation of risk factors and decline in developmental asset accumulation? There are no doubt many such links. We can identify two that speak to the social context of fatherhood. One has been

identified with respect to aggression and violence by psychologist Richard Tremblay. Tremblay's research documents that aggression is virtually universal among males and females in infancy. Most children learn to manage, control, and channel their innate aggression in socially acceptable and culturally prescribed ways. He identifies "wrestling with your father" as one of the important mechanisms in learning how to do this. Little boys (and increasingly to some extent little girls) learn "the ropes" of aggression through wrestling with their fathers. This finding may be an important explanation for the oft-repeated finding that fatherless boys have disproportionate problems with managing aggression and violence.

"Most children learn to manage, control, and channel their innate aggression in socially acceptable and culturally prescribed ways."

A second example concerns the role of fathers in risk and asset accumulation for children. While in Sameroff's study each of the eight risk factors is examined as a single variable (and each has a separate impact), all of them are in some way linked to fatherhood. Poverty is more likely when a family has only one parent, particularly when that parent is the mother (as it is in 90% of single-parent households). Women

with low educational attainment, mental health problems, and substance abuse problems are less likely to attract and hold husbands who can earn the income necessary to prevent poverty, in contrast to the welfare programs of the State that do provide minimal economic support. Women who have the education and level of functioning necessary to support a family independently are less likely to put up with the inevitable burdens of marriage and more likely to believe they can compensate for the absence of a father in the home. The corrosive cumulative effects of race and racism on males and male-female relationships further strengthen the links between father absence and risk accumulation.

When it comes to asset accumulation, father absence tends to reduce the likelihood that children will have the motivation, access, and personal attributes that predict developmental asset accumulation. They are less likely to experience the stability and unconditional regard in the home that are the foundation for the 10 assets that are directly linked to family or the child's sense of self (such as, "My family provides a high level of love and

support,” and “I believe my life has a purpose.”). They are less likely to have the material and psychological support necessary to develop the cultural assets (such as “I read for pleasure three or more hours per week,” or “I play organized sports three or more hours per week.”) Present and emotionally engaged fathers can bolster the process of developmental asset accumulation just as they can prevent the accumulation of risk factors.

When all is said and done, few dimensions of the social context are more important to children than those that directly or indirectly shape the role of fathers, as both a cultural construct and as a day-to-day factor in family and community life.

James Garbarino, PhD, holds the Maude C. Clarke Chair in Humanistic Psychology at Loyola University, Chicago.



Fathers, Fathers Everywhere – Not to be Seen

By Eloise Anderson

MY THOUGHTS

I can't remember ever not being fascinated with fathers. As a child I thought fathers were the most important thing in the world. I noticed, even as a child, the difference in how those of my friends who had fathers and those who did not behaved. As I got older it became even more interesting to notice how mothers behaved when they had husbands versus those without husbands. Cohabitation was not the norm, but a few women had men living with them, and their children behaved more like those with no fathers at all. These were the observations that colored my view, favoring fathers in families.

Working in predominately black communities as a young adult, I began to notice fewer fathers there than in my childhood community. Where had the fathers gone? There still were children in almost every household –

men coming and going, women having children with each new relationship. Mothers were treating their young sons as men and their daughters as peers; the family structure was corrupted, each member seeking the father.

For me, thinking about fathers means thinking about what it takes for a man to become a father and the types of support he needs to fulfill this role. I think that in order for a man to become a father he first must become a man and must have children with a woman he respects and cares about. I hesitate to state that he will “support” because the notion of “support” is often a material thought, and I think “support” is larger than the material.

RAISING BOYS

First off, how do men become men? They start out as this little bundle; the question at the beginning is what do we want for him? How should parents

go about developing his character? What does he need to become a man? Frivolous behavior, lack of worthy aims, and lack of self-control are considered boyish. Manhood: reserved and selected expression, mature, consciously learned, under careful control of reason. Men are expected to control their aggressive passions. It is expected that the movement from boyhood to manhood is a transition whereby he learns to suppress or moderate his aggression and focus those energies into socially acceptable competitive work. There is also the expectation that he will bring to the male-female relationship more wealth than she; that he will have the resources to provide.

Without getting into all the issues boys face compared to girls, it is important to note that boys from birth are more at risk of dying than girls. Therefore, the first concern of parents and the society is to assist boys in getting in touch with their emotional self and to have a way to express it nonviolently. Boys have a need to feel emotionally connected. They need close, supportive relationships that protect them. They need male modeling from

their fathers and other men as well as modeling from their mothers. My observation has been that single mothers who bring men into their lives and homes who are not the father of their son(s) often abandon their sons emotionally and neglect them, leaving them on their own for support and connection – often from a gang.

Never-married mothers and divorced mothers often have in common unresolved issues with the father of their son(s). Often, unresolved anger is unleashed on the son.

“Boys have a need to feel emotionally connected. They need close, supportive relationships that protect them.”

The more the son resembles the father in physical appearances and mannerisms the more he may receive the displaced anger of the mother. He learns early from the mother that men are no good, abandon their children and mistreat women. They display frivolous behavior, have no worthy aims, and lack self-control.

For those boys who live with both parents it clearly is good if the father loves the mother. I was taught that the best thing for a child is for the father to love the mother. All things flow from that love. However, I think it equally important that the mother love, know, and understand her son’s father, for it frees her to nurture her son, to

support his maleness and assist him in developing and understanding his emotions.

Widows are much better at supporting their sons' emotional maturity and keeping them

connected with their fathers because they hold on to the love, knowledge, and understanding they had of the father. The father – not frivolous, who had worthy aims and self-control – was a man, a good man.

“Carl Jung said ... if a male is brought up mainly with the mother, he will take a feminine attitude toward his father.”

MEN AND THEIR NEEDS

What's to be done with men whose mothers made them “Momma's little man?” My experience indicates that we humans get our needs met in the family. When mothers are never married or divorced, what becomes of the father role in the family? Where does the son get the support of the father, and on whom does the mother rely? What kind of man does the son become? Carl Jung, probably my favorite observer of humans, said if a male is brought up mainly with the mother, he will take a feminine attitude toward his father. The male will see his father through his mother's eyes. Therefore, boys become men who see men as inadequate, brutal, unfeeling, obsessed with sex, and

uncompassionate. These men have injured images of their fathers.

Chances are the son will become this image. Many fathers' behaviors toward their children are not in reaction to

their children but in reaction to the mother, who herself sees the father through her own loss of father and the unresolved anger of her mother. Men who grow up with mothers who have issues with their son's father and her own father will see themselves – how? Unmarried men in America are more likely to have low incomes. They also are more prone to mental and physical health issues such as addictions, physical disease, and early mortality. They also earn less over their lifetime than any other group. Many black men, and more and more men of other ethnic groups, are unmarried and suffer these consequences. So it seems that one of the things men need is marriage.

Women are the vehicles by which men enter marriage. Without the woman's invitation, men become studs, constantly excited by new women and sexual challenges. With their invitation, women show men the possibilities of a relationship and convey their need

for a man in their life. Marriage is not the only way, but it provides the most dependable way for a man.

The problem society faces is that, having grown up in families without marriage, women and men do not know how to make a marriage work. If they grow up in families where there have been many generations of single parenthood and cohabitation, then marriage is a “movie” with no model to use when conflicts arise.

But even more devastating to men is that while a few men without fathers as models

“A woman has no idea what to expect of a man if she has never had a father.”

turn out to be wealthy and powerful, many more turn out to be thugs – unfit for family life.

I believe what men need most is their own fathers; they suffer from father loss. This is true for women as well. Many men who did not grow up with their fathers do not know how to be men, or particularly how to be fathers, because they never had one. A woman has no idea what to expect of a man if she has never had a father. She is unable to separate sex and affection because all she has known is sex, even though she is seeking affection. Fatherless men have no idea how to provide affection; all they’ve

known is sex. It’s what their mothers have shown them by the many men in their lives and how they have responded to men.

Men need nurturing and encouraging male role models.

NOW YOU’RE A MAN, MY SON.

The problem society needs to solve is how to get men and women to have children as a married couple.

More babies were born in the U.S. in 2007 than in any other year in the nation’s history, according to federal data. Also

in 2007, births to unwed mothers hit a record high of nearly 40 percent. Father loss in society continues to drive teenagers into situations where the outcome is teen single parenting. It drives women to believe that it is of no consequence to bear and raise a child without benefit of marriage. What will happen to society when 40 percent of the children have lives without their fathers? We should look to the inner-city slums for a glimpse of the future. A few unmarried families can be absorbed and supported, but not 40 percent.

In Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s report, *The Negro Family: The Case For*

National Action, he voiced concern about the black family. He concluded that the structure of family life in the black community constituted a “tangle of pathology...” and that “at the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family. It is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community at the present time.” He also argued that the matriarchal structure of black culture weakened the ability of black men to function as authority figures. This particular notion of black familial life has become a widespread, if not dominant, paradigm for comprehending the social and economic disintegration of late twentieth-century black urban life. This was 1964-65, when about a quarter of black births took place outside of marriage. Now it's three-quarters or more. What is America's fate when 40 percent of babies are born into families without marriage?

Black matriarchy was a popular stereotype of the black family structure in the 1950s and 1960s. The motherhood role black women were expected to fulfill created an unrealistic view of the black mother as a “superwoman.” This image of the superwoman de-

picted the black mother as someone who conformed to the typical image of a good mother: nurturing and caring for her children but at the same time unfeminine, strong-willed, and domineering. Now, all women long to become “superwomen,” and the American matriarchy has been established. What will become of the sons of the American matriarchy? More prisons to contain their sons, and their daughters getting pregnant at younger and younger ages.

WHAT'S TO BE DONE?

In the 1950s, '60s and '70s the society-watchers (the academics), women advocates, and policymakers doubted the significance of fathers in shaping the experiences and development of their children, especially their daughters. Today, I think society may be coming to its senses – fathers matter.

The society is in search of policies that benefit fathers and needs to know which policies push fathers away from their families. Father programs are searching for strategies that support and enhance fathers' commitment to their children. Maybe the keys to getting men to marry, and keeping men with their families and connected

to their children, are in the hands of women and the mothers of their children.

Women have to demand that the advertised view of men as immature and childlike be replaced with images of capable, grown-up men in intimate and equitable relationships with women. Also, many women don't really trust men to be parents and believe that they don't really need men to be parents.

Therefore, every day, everywhere, children are growing up without their

fathers. Mothers with sons should be taught about the needs of boys and men and what effect they have on the development of their sons, especially as it relates to how they view girls and women. Mothers need to address their own father loss and how it has manifested itself in their lives. Girls and women should be made aware of their behavior and how it affects their relationships with boys and men. Unmarried mothers of daughters need to understand that the relationships of their daughters are neither *their* relationships nor a replay of their failed relationships.

Poor fathers have different issues

from middle-class fathers, and our policies and laws need to recognize those differences. Many fathers who do not live with their children are not "deadbeat dads." They could provide for their children but choose not to. There are some men who can provide for their children and do not, and they should be held accountable. However, there are many more fathers who are low-income and poorly educated, who have weak connections to the

work force and who want to be a part of their children's lives but don't know how. What the

society should do is teach these men how to work, assist them in finding jobs, support them in maintaining employment, show them how to advance, and provide them with information, mentors, and support on how to be first a man and then a father. Programs that work with men need to be operated by people who are concerned about supporting men. Most women cannot do this work, mainly because they do not understand men, are hostile to men, and are themselves afflicted with unresolved father issues.

Men and boys have to be taught that sperm is not a woman's responsibility.

Boys and men need sex education taught by doctors, lawyers, fathers, and men of all professions. Masculinity has to be seen as something other than producing children that one is not willing to rear or reside with.

Where are all the fathers? Usually not too far from their children, watching – without a voice, without a presence, and stripped of their value.

Eloise Anderson is founder of the non-profit organization Anderson Resource Management Services (ARMS) and the former director of the California Department of Social Services. Her concerns in founding the organization are based in her experiences over many years with child protection services and its poor outcomes, especially for boys coming out of foster care. She has had similar concerns for fathers, particularly noncustodial and those fathers coming out of jail or prison who want a second chance.



The Inestimable Value of Responsible Fathering

By Ken Canfield, PhD

The economics of fathering, more specifically *fatherlessness*, is a topic that has received no small attention.¹ Recent data estimates a figure of 100 billion dollars annually as the cost of fatherlessness.² This a significant sum, but does that cost include the staggering emotional, moral, and “loss of potential” costs that plague a child when they don’t have a dad? Certainly not, and it likely doesn’t get close.

Conservatively, twenty-five million children under the age of 18 don’t live with their dad.³ Add to that the number of children who live with their dad but aren’t connected to him relationally, emotionally, psychologically, or spiritually. I’d say that’s a much clearer picture of the true costs of fatherlessness.

On the national scale our federal deficit is paralleled by our “fathering deficit.” If we have trillions of dollars borrowed to underwrite our federal deficit, how much are we in arrears for the loss of potential that a generation of fathers have failed to invest, to help their children or their children’s children succeed? It has to be a big number, maybe in the tens of trillions.

Now let’s flip that argument and, instead of looking at the deficits, let’s explore strategies to develop the potential of our children by calculating the value of *fatherfulness*; that is, having fathers are who engaged and involved in their child’s development. The research on child well-being, prevention and developing strengths gives a boost to this discussion.

Infants who have time alone with their dad show richer social and exploratory behavior than do children not exposed to such experiences. They smile more frequently in general, and they more

1 B. Scafidi, The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing, *Institute for American Values*. Georgia Family Council and Institute for American Values, 2008.

2 S. L. Nock and C. J. Einolf, The One Hundred Billion Dollar Man, The Costs of Father Absence, *NFI*. June 2008

3 Fathers Count. Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1994.

frequently engage in playful behaviors with their dad.⁴

Children who feel a closeness to their father are twice as likely to enter college

or find stable employment after high school, 75 percent less likely to have a

teen birth, 80 percent less likely to spend time in jail, and half as likely to experience depression.⁵

A four-decade study found that when dads encouraged their daughters to excel and achieve and were emotionally close to their sons, their daughters were more successful in school and in their careers, and their sons achieved greater status later in life.⁶

The data is powerful. While the costs and consequences of fatherlessness

“The absence of a father leaves a child at risk, with hopelessness and disaster waiting in the wings.”

have been described in great detail in the literature, the benefits and assets created by fatherfulness have been less so. The absence of a father leaves a child at risk, with hopelessness and disaster waiting in the wings. But the presence of a dad, particularly one who is humble and compassionate, can breathe hope and life into a child.

How much is the role of “responsible fathering” worth? What does a thousand trillion equal? A quadrillion. And I’d say that at a minimum, that’s the collective asset value of responsible fathering. If we fail to activate this asset and make strategic investments in the next generation, we will be settling for the status quo, which in reality is stagnation. The time has arrived for us to tap into the inestimable value of responsible fathering and cast a vision of hope, so our children’s limbs will not hang limp and lifeless, but rather be resilient and strong.

We need a clarion call to fatherfulness out of which we create a movement that resurrects the ideals, the virtues, and the practices of responsible fatherhood. We need to challenge men that being a father is a matter of honor,

4 Frank A. Pedersen, Joan T. D. Suwalsky, Richard L. Cain, Martha J. Zaslow, and Beth A. Rabinovich, “Paternal Care of Infants During Maternal Separations: Associations with Father-Infant Interaction at One Year,” *Psychiatry* 50 (August 1987):203.

5 F. F. Furstenberg Jr. and K. M. Harris, “When and Why Fathers Matter: Impacts of Father Involvement on the Children of Adolescent Mothers,” in *Young Unwed Fathers: Changing Roles and Emerging Policies*, ed. R. I. Lerman and T. H. Ooms (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

6 John Snarey, *How Fathers Care for the Next Generation: A Four-Decade Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 278.

a privilege, something a mature man should devote his life to. We need to equip fathers with the tools and secrets of their trade and empower them to succeed in their homes, where the sincerity of life is truly revealed.

“We need to equip fathers with the tools and secrets of their trade, and empower them to succeed in their homes...”

And when we have made progress that is measurable, we must then turn our attention to the fatherless, those who have been waiting and hoping someone would hear their call. Someone like Latasha.

When we visited Latasha last week to arrange for her to meet her dad, she wept. She hasn't seen her father for 13 years. He has been incarcerated for 10 years and has another 7 before he is paroled. He asked if “Get on the Bus,”⁷ an organization that is dedicated to uniting children with their incarcerated parents, could bring Latasha to see him on Father's Day, as he wants to reconnect with her.

Fulfilling his request required mounds of paperwork. First, Latasha's dad had to make a written appeal. He wrote, “I lost contact with my daughter 13 years ago, and today I got a letter from her. I

would like you to contact my daughter and ask her to come and see me. I really want to see her.” Second, letters

and phone calls were made by a third party to see if Latasha, who lives three hours away, wanted to come. When our staff worker,

Lea, finally sat down with her and read her father's request, Latasha was overwhelmed. She deeply misses her father, even though she hasn't seen him in over a decade and he has made some very poor choices about his life. As Lea left the meeting after getting all the paperwork in order, Latasha asked if she could keep the note from her father, because that's all she has to live on for the moment. “Absolutely,” Lea replied. “Here it is.”

Now, I'm not naïve in thinking that bringing a daughter and a dad together to spend the day in a less-than-optimal environment (the prison visitors center) will change the world. But it's a beginning; a bold beginning. And if daughter and dad are willing, we must make it happen.

If you multiply Latasha's story times 1.6 million, you have the approximate number of children under the age of

7 www.getonthebus.us

18 whose fathers are incarcerated⁸. To facilitate connecting these children with their fathers, where appropriate and wanted, is a daunting task. However, if we dare to believe that “responsible fathering” is a vital contributor to child well-being, how can we mobilize the resources to make father-daughter connections between Latasha and her dad possible and successful? And what preventive strategies can we develop to help dads succeed in their goal of being a responsible father, even if it’s from behind bars?

This is a huge undertaking, and to do so, we need to go to the heart of a father. I’ve

written extensively about this tactic, because the primary influence on a father’s heart is a man’s father⁹. In other words, a first step toward becoming a responsible father is to come to terms with one’s past by resolving feelings, attitudes, and actions as a son.

Fathers, damaged by their fathers,

“...a first step toward becoming a responsible father is to come to terms with one’s past by resolving feelings, attitudes, and actions as a son.”

pass on their pain to their sons and daughters. Unless the cycle is broken, the damage wreaks havoc for generations. No one knows this more clearly than incarcerated fathers. There is strong evidence of intergenerational imprisonment in which a father, grandfather, brother, or older male relative had also been incarcerated¹⁰. As Samuel Osherson¹¹ concluded in his masterful piece, *Finding our Fathers*, “The psychological or physical absence of fathers from their families

is one of the great underestimated tragedies of our times.”

Despite the overwhelming

amount of research confirming the impact of a father on a son’s ability to father, many men I have met are reluctant to think about their fathers and deal with underlying feelings. Some reluctance is certainly a fear of pain. You can dredge up some hurts that seem overwhelming. Yet, psychologist Donald Joy¹² points

8 From Prison to Home: The Effect of Incarceration and Reentry on Children, Families, and Communities, Effects of Parental Incarceration on Young Children. Ross D. Parke University of California, Riverside, K. Alison Clarke-Stewart University of California, Irvine, December 2001. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/HSP/prison2home02/parke-stewart.htm>

9 Ken Canfield, *The Heart of a Father* (Chicago: Northfield, 2006).

10 Mumola, Christopher J. (2000). *Incarcerated parents and their children* (NCJ182335). Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Justice.

11 Samuel Osherson, *Finding Our Fathers* (New York” Fawcett Columbine, 1987), 6.

12 Donald Joy, *Unfinished Business* (Wheaton: Victor, 1989), 34.

out, “Men with a damaged father connection will be healed only to the extent that they can describe the loss and the pain.” Donald Joy learned this truth by leading hundreds of men through small-group experiences over his distinguished career. I have had the same experience, as have Dr. Hershel Swinger, George Williams, Ron Nichols, Rick Wertz and many other leaders who have labored in the vineyards of fatherhood.

I believe that small groups have the greatest potential to achieve lasting and positive change. In Latasha’s father’s case, he was meeting with other incarcerated men, and working on his own fathering, as well as on personal issues, in a small group long before the visit with his daughter. It was during those times that he learned he was not alone. Ninety percent of the men in his small group grew up without a dad. When Latasha’s father recognized his vulnerability and was able to verbalize to other men how being fatherless had stifled his potential and impacted his choices in life, it became clear to him that he didn’t want that for his little girl. So he wrote her a letter.

“I have participated in those groups and have heard fellow fathers attribute their learning to the shared experiences with other fathers and the group leader.”

This epiphany or revelation came as a result of being in a small group with other fathers. These fathering groups have a profound impact on how men learn. I have listened to hundreds of fathers give testimony over the years about how the small-group experience helped them learn from other men, identify new goals, and put them into specific, concrete actions related to their fathering.

Children’s Institute, through Project Fatherhood, has been a pioneer in shaping both the content and process of strengthening fathers through small groups. I have participated in those groups and have heard fellow fathers attribute their learning to the shared experiences with other fathers and the group leader. It is a transformative experience.

Social psychologists¹³ have also confirmed that members of a group experience higher achievement and greater cooperation than individual efforts in learning. In addition, we have

13 Tindale, R.S., Heath, L., Edwards, J., Prosavc, El, Bryant, F., Surez-Balcazar, Y., Henderson-King, E., and Myers, J. (1998). Theory and research on small groups. New York: Plenum Press.

learned that group members (fathers in small groups) are more apt to:

- Take on difficult tasks and persist, despite difficulties, in working toward accomplishing goals;
- Remember what they learn;
- Achieve a higher level of reasoning and critical thinking; and
- Maintain a positive attitude.

Again, applied to training fathers, whether in prison or a board room, we have the

“I have seen more than their fathering skills strengthened through the small-group experience...”

opportunity to help another father who may face challenging economic or personal issues. This was the idea Al Gore had in mind when he called for a father-to-father initiative¹⁴. Fathers would meet together for mutual support and extend that outreach to specific fathers in need. In Gore’s words, “I’m asking you to join me in launching a nationwide father-to-father movement. We must mobilize a national movement of fathers meeting together to mutually support and reach out to one another.”

Although this initiative did not mate-

rialize as Gore had hoped, the Bush administration carried the vision forward by providing significant funding to establish fatherhood training for men, particularly fathers in challenging circumstances. Bush said,¹⁵ “Promoting fatherhood was a commitment I made as governor, it’s a commitment I make as President, and it’s a commitment I have made every day since our little girls were born...”

In many cases, the real power of this process – where the inestimable value of a father is vividly portrayed – is among the urban poor. Dads in these settings are facing challenging economics and complex family situations. I have seen more than their fathering skills strengthened through the small-group experience and through their mutual¹⁶:

- Giving and receiving of financial help and assistance;
- Exchange of resources and information; and
- Giving and receiving of feedback on task work;

14 Gore, A. (1994). Speech given at the Family Reunion IV, Nashville, Tennessee July 11th.

15 Bush, G. (2001). Speech given at the Fatherhood Summit, June 11, 2001. Washington, D.C.

16 Williams, G. (2000). [jttp://fathers.com/urban/index.html](http://fathers.com/urban/index.html)

- Challenging of one another's reasoning;
- Advocacy and increased efforts to achieve;
- Influence on one another's behavior; and
- Engagement in the interpersonal and small-group skills needed for effective teamwork.

Regardless of how one comes to the fields and practice of responsible fathering, through the streams of fatherlessness or fatherfullness,

one thing is sure: Unless we create opportunities and a forum for men to become proactive in sharing their pilgrimage, including their challenges and losses, we will have failed to reach our potential. To do so, with humility and dedication, we must challenge every adult male to the high calling of being a father or father figure for the generation to come.

Ken Canfield, PhD, is executive director of the Boone Center for the Family at Pepperdine University. He is also the founder of the National Center for Fathering in Kansas City.



Why Fatherhood? Why Now?

By Hershel K. Swinger, PhD

*“I used to think it was poverty.
Then I thought it was racism.
I finally decided it was child abuse, or drug abuse.
Now I know it’s about being fatherless.”*

Twentieth-century poet and philosopher George Santayana wrote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” History is a source of inspiration and of indignation, the breadth of human accomplishments and failures. How did we get to where we were in the early 1990s? How did we find ourselves where we are today?

I USED TO THINK IT WAS POVERTY.

A milestone in the history of the United States’ response to underprivileged families began with the 1935 Social Security Act, which gave us Aid to Mothers with Dependent Children. Astonishingly, married women did not qualify because if their children had a father, surely that father would want to take care of them, would be

able to take care of them. The Social Security Act was designed to keep disadvantaged children from suffering because of poverty. But there were two major flaws with Aid to Mothers with Dependent Children. You were required to remain poor in order to qualify for the grants; and the more children you had, the more money you received. Inadvertently, the system left fathers out of the equation, presenting them as untrustworthy and casting them in a negative light in order to ensure that the funds would continue. The skepticism toward public social services that fathers still feel today was set in motion.

Aid to Mothers with Dependent Children was one of many programs designed to help move the United States out of the Great Depression.

More than 2 million African Americans were on relief in 1933, but between 1935 and 1943, the creation of the Works Progress Administration provided 8 million jobs. Eighty-seven percent of WPA workers were men, and 70 percent of the jobs were unskilled. The program built many public buildings, roads, parks, bridges, and schools. It fed children and redistributed food, clothing and housing. In 1940, the WPA changed policy and began vocational educational training of the unemployed to make them available for factory jobs and the onset of war production.

“Segregation had given African American children a false sense of inferiority, self-rejection, and loss of self-esteem, which negatively affected their ability to learn.”

Leading up to and during World War II, 100 percent of the nation’s work force was employed, including women and minorities. Husbands and sons drafted into the military sent home an allotment. Because of working mothers and fathers, for a large percentage of poor families heretofore on public welfare, the need for Aid to Mothers with Dependent Children was eliminated.

The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights, and other veterans’ benefits greatly improved the welfare of children

whose fathers had joined the service. Following World War II, in 1948, the United States military was racially integrated. The nation established the model of a highly productive society that shared and invested its prosperity for a more affluent and more fulfilling future. The idea was to try to make life fair for everyone. Optimism reigned.

THEN I THOUGHT IT WAS RACISM.

In 1954, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. It was a landmark decision, applying the Equal

Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment that overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine that had legalized segregated schools for decades. Segregation had given African American children a false sense of inferiority, self-rejection, and loss of self-esteem, which negatively affected their ability to learn. The ruling changed American public schools forever, paving the way for integration and the civil rights movement.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a historic piece of legislation in the United

States that outlawed racial segregation in public places and in employment. Conceived to help African Americans, the bill was amended prior to passage to include women, who officially became minority-class members for the first time. We believed if minority people were included in all aspects of life, things would be better for children overall. The promise was to rid the society of racism.

“Visitation, custody, and financial rights and responsibilities of fathers are determined by the courts, not by the needs of the children.”

In the United States, divorce used to be difficult to obtain, and usually it was impossible without good reason: adultery, abandonment, alcoholism, abuse. In 1970, California enacted a no-fault divorce law that enabled women and men to get out of marriages without having to place blame. While many social and economic factors have conspired to weaken our marriages, no-fault divorce laws pushed us over the edge. Between 1970 and 1996, the number of children living with both parents declined from 85 to 68 percent. During this same period, the proportion of children living with one parent grew from 12 to 28 percent. Today, nine in ten women are awarded physical custody of their children despite the fact that children’s protective services workers

have learned that biological fathers want their children, but the judicial system is reluctant to turn their children over to them without social and/or economic support. Visitation, custody, and financial rights and responsibilities of fathers are determined by the courts, not by the needs of the children.

Somewhere between 1935 and today, the stigma of having sex or a child outside of marriage was removed.

There is no longer any shame or disgrace when unmarried political leaders, professionals, and celebrities blatantly have children. As recently as 1960, three-quarters of African Americans were born to a married couple. Between 1970 and 1992, the proportion of babies born outside of marriage leapt from 11 to 30 percent. In the first two years following a divorce, family income among white children falls about 30 percent; for black children, it falls by 53 percent.

I FINALLY DECIDED IT WAS CHILD ABUSE, OR DRUG ABUSE.

In 1962, Henry Kempe and his colleagues first coined the phrase “battered-child syndrome” and identified it as a clinical condition

in children who have suffered continuous serious physical abuse such as beatings, bruises, scratches, hematomas, burns, or malnutrition.

Battered child syndrome results in life-threatening and sometimes life-extinguishing injury to a child, usually inflicted

by parents,

guardians, or other adult caregivers.

According to

the definition of

battered-child syndrome, children are abused and neglected because of what happened or didn't happen when their parents were caring for them.

In 1975, the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect implemented the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. First, the term "child abuse and neglect" needed to be defined, followed by a mechanism for addressing it. Early research found that most child abusers were abused themselves as children, repeating the pattern when they grew up and had children of their own. Overdisciplined and deprived of parental love in their infancy, they looked to their own children for what they had missed.

During the 1970s, it was thought that the number of children who were abused and neglected was relatively

small and that their adult caregivers needed to be treated for the emotional problems that caused them to abuse their children. We did not look closely at those who were abused as children and did *not* grow up to abuse their children. Until the 1970s, child abusers

were treated as criminals, and their children were frequently placed in foster care while the

court ordered their parents to receive treatment or to be placed in jail.

We also learned that "the system" was the worst parent of all. Children raised in institutions had the worst outcomes of any at-risk children. Most of the treatment was aimed at women and children because the majority of children in the child protective services system were without fathers. Because of spousal abuse, substance abuse, and sexual abuse, men were viewed as the cause of the problem, despite the fact that about half of the children who entered the system were neglected by their mothers. For a while, mothers who used cocaine bore "crack babies," and that was viewed as the cause of the problem. Cocaine use in pregnancy was treated as a moral issue rather than a health problem, so treatment programs for substance-abusing mothers and their

"Children raised in institutions had the worst outcomes of any at-risk children."

children were established. A number of women abandoned or lost custody of their children, had their parental rights terminated, and were prosecuted and jailed because of their addictions. The methods of treating child abuse and neglect were psychodynamic and/or behavioral. The preferred modality for child abuse and neglect was and is parent-education classes. Groups of adults meet to learn how to appropriately parent their children. This method has had mixed results. In California, traumatized children receive individual therapy from trained mental health professionals. When the numbers of abused children reached millions nationwide, it became profoundly clear that we were very good at identifying and reacting to child abuse and neglect, but we didn't know how to prevent it.

NOW I KNOW IT'S ABOUT BEING FATHERLESS.

Statistical studies began to appear about the outcomes for children who do not have their biological fathers in their lives. According to the FBI, a missing father is a more reliable predictor of criminal behavior than race, environment, or poverty.

Who is going to father our children?

The U.S. Census Bureau reported in 2004 that more than 25 million children lived apart from their biological fathers. That is one out of every three children (34.5 percent) in the United States. Nearly two in three African American children (65 percent) live in father-absent homes. Nearly four in ten Hispanic children (36 percent), and nearly three in ten Caucasian children (27 percent) live in father-absent homes. The United States reportedly leads the world in fatherlessness.

The numbers get worse every year. Substandard public schools are definitely not working; physical and mental health care are inadequate; no one is deterred by state legislatures' stricter criminal sentencing; incarceration, parole, and probation are neither rehabilitative nor threatening. Faith-based and government programs – “wars” on guns, drugs, gangs, violence, teen pregnancy, welfare, and far-flung conflicts – have all been lost. In order to understand our behavior and change our collective thinking, we need to study the past and find a way to correct the future. We must do it for

the sake of the children. The current statistics have been current too long.

From the wild Irish slums of the 19th century Eastern seaboard to the riot-torn suburbs of Los Angeles, there is one unmistakable lesson in American history: a community that allows a large number of young men (and women) to grow up in broken families, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority, never acquiring any set of rational expectations about the future ... that community asks for and gets chaos. Crime, violence, unrest, disorder – most particularly furious, unrestrained lashing out at the whole social structure – is not only to be expected; it is very near to inevitable. And it is richly deserved.”

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY)
“A Family Policy for the Nation,” *America*
September 18, 1965

PROJECT FATHERHOOD

In 1994, we were not yet focusing on men as an integral part of the family when Children’s Institute, Inc. (CII) reached out to fathers and began the process of engaging them in the lives of their children. At the time of Project Fatherhood’s creation, CII was a residential care facility housing 78

infants and toddlers who had been removed from their parents due to child abuse or neglect. With a grant from the Office of Minority Mental Health, we proposed to demonstrate a free program utilizing biological fathers to decrease physical and emotional father absence; to ensure that fathers are emotionally and financially supportive parents; and to help them concentrate on their children’s crucial needs. We wanted to prevent their sons from perpetrating aggression as child abusers, spousal abusers, sexual abusers, drug abusers, and violent gang members by focusing specifically on the relationship between fathers and their children. By increasing the involvement of disadvantaged fathers in the lives and upbringing of their children, those fathers would demonstrate the validity of our model. We hypothesized that if we addressed the factors of stress, separation and loss, child abuse and neglect, poor self-esteem, and intergenerational issues, the fathers would parent their infants and young children in a conscious manner that would maximize the chances of the child growing up to be a healthy individual.

While fatherhood is a near-universal experience for men, there are wide differences in culture, knowledge, and skills that fathers bring to parenting.

Men meet in groups to eliminate the psychological isolation associated with antisocial behavior. Combating shame and disgrace, men feel relief and self-respect when they realize their potential to be fathers. The components of the Project Fatherhood model are Men in Relationships Group, Job Club, children's groups and significant others groups. Through Men in Relationships Group, the fellowship of fathers can make something positive happen by helping their children reach their potential. And if a man is not fulfilling his role as a father, the issues in his background that prevent him from doing so can be resolved. Job Club training reaches out to unemployed fathers struggling with poverty and offers skills, tools, and attitudes that prepare them for employment. Because biological fathers need to be integrated into the whole family as well, the groups for significant others and children mend that bond. Once the family is accepted into CII's Project Fatherhood, they participate for life and are encouraged to come back at any time. If a group becomes too large or has progressed through the five levels of relatedness, the men are encouraged to pair off

“Men meet in groups to eliminate the psychological isolation associated with antisocial behavior.”

with a trained professional and begin a group in their own neighborhood for the benefit, care, and well-being of everyone's children. Our children's group members have demonstrated improved confidence, social skills, and school achievement. While the community can't always find a solution to the economic and human problems facing families, Project Fatherhood groups can be started with the limited resources and the multiple needs of local schools, agencies, or faith-based organizations.

As a method of service delivery that allows fathers to be on a par with counselors who are not traditional therapists, and neither interprets nor confronts group members, Project Fatherhood flies in the face of traditional treatment. By offering peer-to-peer dialogue about issues in members' present and past lives without judgment, labeling or diagnosis, the focus becomes saving the lives of the children by not doing anything to fathers but with them. In fact, the goal of this process is to develop a fellowship of caring adults who relate to one another in a supportive, constructive way, and who can relate to their own children in the same way.

TRAINING

We train professionals to be Project Fatherhood group leaders in a five-day, 40-hour process that replicates the exact program model through which they will take the fathers and significant others. Expecting a typical classroom training experience on day one, people are anxious but prepared to take notes. After being introduced to these unique methods of practicing respect, self-disclosure, and mutuality, defenses are down and the group becomes one, allowing participation by all attendees to experience the group dynamic. By Friday's final training day, future group leaders are describing their experience of the process in very personal and revealing ways:

"It was really good to be able to learn about this new approach for working with fathers who have multiple needs and limited resources. It was a really wonderful opportunity to be able to participate in this training, where the really excellent staff modeled for us the way to do a warm, relationship-based approach that seems to be very effective..."

Denise Johnston

Executive Director

Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents

"The project challenged my thinking

and made me realize that in our mission to serve the poor, to give the poor what the rich can buy, we're able to offer something else, something more, that lifts up what I truly believe our clients really want, which is to live out their role as parent."

Carla Scarr

Valley Family Center

"This effort takes all of us working together and not in a competitive way, but in a way that...this will change the world. I strongly believe that, and that's why I'm here to take the training again. And I thought I knew what I knew, but I've learned even more this time..."

Charlene Meeks

Program Director

California Institute of
Health & Social Services

We believe that all fathers can and do love their children and want the very best for them. Self-motivated fathers can provide a wealth of social capital and demonstrate that despite what they've gone through in their lives, they want to be close to their children. Fathers have the ability to give and accept love, to treat others with love and respect, and to love and respect themselves. When a man fulfills his biological imperative of being a father,

the rest of his life will fall into place, and he will bring to his child and the society at large a more personally successful and productive member.

Children in the United States are at risk, but they have great potential to do well if we can mobilize fathers. To prevent child abuse and neglect, to curb family violence and make families whole, and to secure a decent future for every one of us, we must count on our family members, social service agencies, elected officials, businesses, and anyone who comes into contact with families and children. We are all

in this together and all of us qualify as partners in this community effort. All of us have to for the sake of the children. While they say it takes a village to raise a child, it will take our children and their fathers to raise our village.

“The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Hershel K. Swinger, PhD, is Senior Vice President, Leadership Center, at Children’s Institute, Inc., and founder of CII’s Project Fatherhood program.



Implementing Project Fatherhood to Help Homeless Fathers

By Susan Lux, Miguel Lorenzana, Karla McLean and Jana Plasters

In 2007, the Weingart Center Association (WCA) applied for and received a small grant from Children’s Institute, Inc., to replicate its highly successful Project Fatherhood program. At the time we applied for the grant we had no idea how important this relationship would become to our organization and how impactful the partnership would be to our program and our participants.

Nationwide, Los Angeles County has the largest homeless population, with more than 80,000 people sleeping on the streets on any given night. The Weingart Center Association is located in the heart of Skid Row in downtown Los Angeles and brings to life its mission of providing high-quality human services that help to break the cycle of homelessness.

This mission is realized through intensive case-management services, mental health services, and an employment continuum in a variety of specialized residential programs that target veterans, women, parolees, probationers, and those in early recovery from addiction. Individual plans focus on obtaining competitive employment and maintaining sobriety with the end goal of maintaining a savings and moving into permanent housing. For an idea of the scope of this task, in 2007, the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority (LAHSA) conducted an intensive census of homeless living on Skid Row. LAHSA’s count determined that each night some 5,200 men and women can be found on Skid Row either in shelter programs or on the street. The WCA programs account for approximately 600 of

*“My family is better off without me.”
– Project Fatherhood participant*

those beds, or a little over 11% of the population. Of the people surveyed, 76% were men, and more than 80% were between the ages of 25 and 55. Mental illness was identified in 51% of the population, and 50% admitted to having substance abuse issues.

As anyone who has had the pleasure of working with Children’s Institute’s Dr. Hershel Swinger

knows, his passion for fathers and Project Fatherhood is contagious, and he takes

no prisoners in his approach to making fatherhood and father-child reunification the single most important therapeutic intervention we can provide to clients. As we quickly learned, Project Fatherhood challenged us to change our service paradigm on how men and fathers were viewed in our programs. Before we received the grant, we had not perceived the men living on Skid Row as fathers. We knew that many of our male clients had children, but that information was gathered for statistical purposes and not incorporated into their case plans. But it was accepted for our female clients. In almost every instance, if a WCA case manager found that a mother was separated from her

“Project Fatherhood asked us to shift our focus and consider the crucial role of the father on the success of their children...”

children, a plan was initiated at the start of her stay to help reunite her with her children. A focus of treatment became providing the mother with parenting skills, working with the Department of Children and Family Services, if needed, and advocating on behalf of the mother for family reunification. For our male participants, the focus was almost exclusively on employment

and maintaining sobriety, with the end goal of establishing a savings account and moving into permanent

housing. Project Fatherhood asked us to shift our focus and consider the crucial role of the father on the success of their children, and to apply the same sense of urgency in helping fathers that we gave to our mothers. This transition was to change the entire culture and therapeutic milieu of our agency.

As with each of the funded Project Fatherhood programs, we had a challenging learning curve. WCA would be the first agency to implement the program with homeless and formerly homeless fathers who had ten-, twenty- and thirty-year histories of drug and alcohol addiction, long periods of incarceration, and significant periods of homelessness. Our first major hurdle

in implementing the program came not from the participants but from our own case managers. They were reluctant to refer participants to the group because they could not see how helping fathers to reconnect with their children helped our male participants find employment or maintain their sobriety. Months were spent re-educating case managers about the positive benefits associated with father-child reunification and how it could actually lead to greater stability for these men. Eventually we were able to encourage case managers to refer fathers; however, this remains an area of continual re-education for our case management staff.

Once participants started to attend group sessions the real work began. As we worked with the fathers in preparing them to reconnect with their children, we started to encounter the next hurdle and soon realized that developing both the children's support group and the significant others group would be more difficult than anticipated. Most of the fathers had little or no contact with their children, and a larger percentage did not even know where their children were. Extended family members

“Many of the fathers were afraid to locate their children because they knew that they owed large sums of money.”

were daunted by the idea of coming to Skid Row to participate in the project. Ultimately, we decided to focus efforts on developing the fathers group in the hope that the other two groups would follow. Unfortunately, over the course of the year, we were never able to get the two support groups started – a testament, in part, to the amount of effort required to help homeless fathers reconnect and re-engage in their children's lives.

While the fathers' hesitation and resistance to contacting their children was complex, the largest single barrier was the fear of repercussions associated with failing their financial responsibilities. Men emerge from homelessness or prison with large restitutions owed to the state, and there is enormous pressure on them to eradicate a history of poor or nonexistent child support. Many of the fathers were afraid to locate their children because they knew that they owed large sums of money. It was not uncommon for our fathers to owe as much as \$80,000 to \$100,000 in back child support. One father stated that he never worked at a job more than a couple of months to ensure

that his check was never garnished. In response to this challenge, we contacted the Los Angeles County Child Support Services Department, and over the course of the year we developed a strong partnership. Representatives from the department came to our facility to conduct monthly information sessions on child support, after which they took information from attendees regarding their cases for evaluation. In most situations the County was able to reduce significantly or even eliminate the amount of money owed. One father who reported that he had been running for years, thinking that he owed large sums of money, discovered he owed nothing; he had had \$88,000 in debt removed. For those who did give back support, the County worked with them to set up reasonable repayment plans.

Even when the issue of back child support was eliminated, fathers still struggled with their own fear, shame, and guilt about not being available for their children. One of the most difficult dynamics to address when working with chronic substance abusers is reunification with their families. Families have spent years on this roller

coaster of ups and downs, watching fathers get clean only to relapse, or to obtain employment and then relapse, or to make promises they don't keep because they relapse. Most of the individuals who end up on Skid Row have "burned all their bridges" with their families.

"Most of the individuals who end up on Skid Row have 'burned all their bridges' with their families."

Their addictions lead to a family's mistrust and their unwillingness to believe that

the person has really changed. This mistrust leads to many families not really wanting or encouraging the father's participation in the lives of his children. Moreover, many fathers truly believed that their children no longer needed them, especially if the children were older. They reasoned that their children had learned to live without them while they were lost in their addictions or incarceration, and that by trying to reconnect, they would somehow disrupt their children's lives. Others believed that their children had simply forgotten about them. Most believed that because they had little or no money, they had nothing to offer their children. We heard over and over from participants that they wanted to "get themselves together" before they contacted their children. Usually this meant having a job and an apartment of their own.

Working with the fathers on these issues, we started with a single rule: “Don’t promise anything you can’t deliver.” We placed no limits on how or when a father contacted his children; we simply asked that if they promised to call them next week, they kept that promise. For some of our fathers, their commitment was to write their children monthly. For others, it was that they would call each week. Some wrote letters to their children in the hope that one day they would be able to give the letters to their children. The focus was always on the idea that the most important part of being a father is consistency and having your children know you are there for them.

When several of the fathers finally faced their fears of rejection and contacted their children, the synergy within the group shifted dramatically. As fathers came back to the group and shared their overwhelmingly positive experiences, more fathers began to consider the possibility of contacting their children. In one case, a father who had lost touch with his teenage son about eight years ago and wanted to find him sought advice from the Fatherhood group. Another father

“...a father who had lost touch with his teenage son about eight years ago and wanted to find him sought advice from the Fatherhood group.”

offered to help the man search for his son on the Internet. Eventually they located his son’s Facebook page, and e-mails quickly lead to a telephone call. Now living in Chicago, the young man told his dad that he had thought of him every day. The father came back into group, told the story, and broke down in tears. He said he always believed that “my son was better off without me” and had no idea how much his son had actually missed him. Such was the experience of group members time and time again. Since the inception of the program not one father has had a negative experience when he finally contacted his children.

Emotionally, the most difficult barrier for these fathers to address was their belief that if they could not provide financially for their children, they had nothing to offer. Frustrations around their inability to get and maintain employment sabotaged many group members. Some struggled with not wanting their children to “see them homeless,” while others wanted to achieve success before contacting their children. We interwove the concepts of the 12-Step Program into the groups to help members accept

and view reconnecting with their children in their current situation as part of their recovery process. The two group facilitators, both of whom had histories of addiction while parenting their own children, helped members to become more balanced in this area. We developed a list of things fathers could contribute that did not cost anything. Suggestions included walking their children to or from school, meeting them after school, helping them with homework, or caring for them while their primary caregiver was at work. We encouraged them to move away from thinking they needed to bring or buy their children something every time they visited their children. New group members still struggle with this, but we continue to reinforce the idea that consistency over the long haul is most important.

As we enter our second year of Project Fatherhood, an entirely new set of challenges awaits us. How do we help participants locate their children when their attempts have been unsuccessful? What happens when there has been some contact with the child but the significant other is not helping to facilitate continued contact? How do our fathers handle and address

“How do our fathers handle and address their emotions when another man has stepped into the father role for the child?”

their emotions when another man has stepped into the father role for the child? As they begin to confront these new issues, the overwhelming response of fathers is that participating in Project Fatherhood has helped them cope with such challenges with grace and dignity. The group has helped one father, who was unable to locate his daughter after a year of searching, remain clean and sober while facing the uphill battle. Another father’s significant other changes her address

every time he locates his child. The group reinforces that it is not about him and the changes he has made, but more about the significant other trying to protect the child from what she has experienced in the past. For still another, whose significant other refused visitation rights after he was unable to help with a dental bill, the group urged him not to give up the hope that he will one day reconnect with his son.

One of the most moving stories of the last year was a father who came to group one day and said that he wanted to shake the hand of the man who had been caring for his children while he was away. In the past, he

said, he would have created a scene and threatened to harm both his girlfriend and her new boyfriend. But participating in the group made him realize how important a father figure was to his children, and he owed the new boyfriend a debt of gratitude for caring for his children. He said he surprised even himself when he realized he was not angry at the new boyfriend, but really appreciative of all the man had done while he had been away.

Along with new challenges, our understanding of the issue is also evolving. As one of the group counselors stated, “I’m just now realizing that some of our fathers may never reconnect with their children. But the group is a way for them to reclaim a part of themselves, a way to learn how

to deal with the loss of their children in a healthy way.”

WCA has incorporated the Project Fatherhood group into the very foundation of our clinical services. Project Fatherhood is no longer seen as a separate program requiring specialized funding. Rather, due to the shift in our service paradigm, it has crystallized our vision that every father has a right and a responsibility to be an active participant in his child’s life. For the fathers and staff of WCA, this has been a life-changing experience, one that we would encourage all organizations to undergo at least once.

Susan Lux, Miguel Lorenzana, Karla McLean and Jana Plasters are members of the Weingart Center Association Project Fatherhood team.



Fatherhood in Recovery: Fathers, Families and PTSD

By Jerry Tello, M.A.

Reginald is 28 years old, married, and the father of three children. A mechanic, he has worked in the same shop since graduating from high school. After serving in the Reserve Officers Training Corps in high school, he continued his military service by joining the National Guard. Other than his work and monthly commitments to the National Guard, he has devoted all of his time to his family and children. Several years ago, he deployed to Iraq and served for 14 months. He experienced severe open combat and the death of several close comrades.

Reginald's return was met with much jubilation, but after several months at home, his wife reached out for assistance. "My husband's different now," she said. "He's not the same person. He's edgy and mad at the kids all the time. When we spend time together it's almost like he's not there. He drinks more, and that makes everything worse. We need help."

The United States Defense Department reports that more than 500,000 troops were deployed to Iraq alone, and with the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan wars requiring more men and women to serve, that number is almost double. Many of the men involved are fathers who are now returning to communities all across the nation. These wars have not only created many fatherless (and motherless) families, returning fathers have physical, mental, and emotional wounds. The mental and emotional impact is referred to as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD results in survivors often experiencing problems in their intimate and family relationships.

At the other end of the spectrum is Jose, the 22-year-old father of a three-year-old girl and a one-year-old boy. Jose lives in the same East Los Angeles neighborhood his family has lived in for three generations — an area in which three gangs control

the streets. Many of Jose’s family members, including brothers and uncles, have been major players in one of the gangs. Drugs, violence, sirens, and helicopters are part of Jose’s daily life. Although Jose has managed to support his family and stay out of direct involvement in the gang lifestyle, he feels the effects of living every day in that environment. With the recent death of his grandmother something seemed to change in Jose.

He began drinking every day, became irritable, yelled at his children constantly, and finally hit his wife.

That got him referred to a batterers intervention program.

In an interview with the couple, Jose admitted to having occasional difficulty sleeping, to having nightmares, and to “feeling trapped living in that neighborhood.” With further assessment it was obvious that Jose was suffering from symptoms of PTSD.

Although Reginald and Jose come from different backgrounds and their life circumstances are very different, they both are experiencing the residual effects of trauma, which has interrupted their ability to fulfill a lifelong dream they both share — to

be a good father. By serving their country, both men were attempting to fulfill their responsibilities as men and fathers in an honorable way. As a result, they are left with issues that may disable them forever. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD survivors can feel a lasting sense of terror, horror, vulnerability, and betrayal

that interferes with their relationships.

PTSD symptoms can interfere with trust, emotional closeness,

communication, responsible assertiveness, and effective problem solving. And in attempting to cope, many have become habitual and/or addictive users of alcohol and other substances, which often contributes to their violent, reactive behavior.

Unfortunately, most fathers who have either mild or moderate symptoms of PTSD do not get assistance until they have committed some type of crime or violent behavior. Those who are able to mask the symptoms through avoidant activities numb their anxiety and symptoms by the use of substances, and frequently do not come to terms with their issues until

they have destroyed their relationships with a spouse and/or their children. At the same time, the military and/or community organizations are not prepared to deal with the issues that these fathers and their families face. With the number of war and community trauma victims increasing every day, it is imperative that we take a closer look at how we can be better prepared to respond appropriately to the needs of these fathers and their families.

Fatherhood programs or organizations that work with fathers should consider incorporating some of the following in order to assist fathers in dealing with their trauma-related issues and to start the healing process:

- Begin an awareness effort in your organization and community in order to sensitize staff, programs, and the community to issues of trauma and recovery.
- Create a fatherhood support group for returning veterans and victims of trauma.
- Incorporate awareness and education on issues of PTSD in fatherhood and parenting programs as a vehicle to decrease

shame and motivate victims to seek additional assistance.

- Develop a list of culturally appropriate emergency and therapeutic resources available to fathers and their families.
- Incorporate stress-reducing activities such as meditation, exercise, holistic health methods, and healthy nutrition in order to reduce anxiety and begin the healing process for fathers and their families.
- Create a volunteer “Fathers in Recovery” program where fathers who are on the path to healing can share their stories and reach out to other fathers in need.

In the end, we must be prepared to extend ourselves to all fathers – along with their gifts as well as their baggage – so we can assist them to heal and recover their ability to be the best fathers possible.

Jerry Tello, M.A., is an internationally recognized author, motivational speaker and therapist. He is director of the Sacred Circles Healing Center in Whittier, California, and a member of the Sacred Circles performance group, dedicated to family-community peace and healing. He is also the proud father of Marcos, Renee and Emilio.



Project Fatherhood at Heavenly Spirits, Inc.

By Monica Williams

The term *developmental disability* refers to a severe and chronic disability that is attributable to a mental and/or physical impairment that begins before an individual reaches adulthood. These disabilities include mental retardation, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, Down syndrome, and disabling conditions closely related to mental retardation or calling for comparable treatment. Quadriplegic clients need nurses' aides to help with toiletry and hygiene; the visually impaired require Braille or other vision assistance; it is essential to provide the hearing-impaired with an interpreter; and the wheelchair-bound need extra help as well.

The developmental services system, both in California and the nation, has come a long way since the 1950s and earlier, when individuals with developmental disabilities faced isolation, segregation, and lack of individual freedoms. Today, many

“Having brothers and sisters who are not special needs makes them angry at you, because I need a lot of help to eat, get dressed and go to the bathroom.”

more opportunities are available. One example, Heavenly Spirits, Inc.'s Life Skills Program, has provided community-based services for individuals with disabilities in the high-need, low-income area of South Los Angeles since 2000. Heavenly Spirits embraces and teaches life skills to a client base of mostly men ranging in age from 17 to 52 who want to improve their personal appearance, social relationships and acceptance, gain self-confidence, encourage mutual cooperation in solving problems, develop a stronger sense of community, foster cross-cultural sensitivity and respect for all life, and acquire a sense of self that will promote healthy choices. These necessary life skills help clients resolve conflicts without violence and help them to become positive and productive members of society, allowing them to live a more meaningful, responsible, and personally gratifying life.

In our society, we respond favorably

to people who are attractive. For the most part, we tend to treat them with respect and affection. We perceive them as intelligent and, as a rule, offer them a better quality of life. We like to search for and celebrate what we call “beauty.” We never consider the developmentally disabled population to be physically attractive. Their abnormalities often display physical awkwardness and facial distortions. Judging people entirely by their appearance allows us to stigmatize them, and allows them to fall victim to the prejudices of how people look.

Many children in the United States have no fathers physically or emotionally present in their lives, and statistically they can expect a life of poverty, drug abuse, and incarceration. Having no father at home results in too many teenage pregnancies and too many high school dropouts. Low-income fathers are demonized as resistant to participation, disinterested in their children, and the primary source of the family’s problems. Disabled men are rarely seen as strong or competent, and when they are even considered dads, they are perceived as incapable of parenting their children.

“I always thought my dad didn’t want me because I was retarded and ugly. Now I know he just didn’t know how to be a dad and love me.”

Because all children have a strong desire and need to connect with their fathers despite any disabilities, the Project Fatherhood program was added to the existing services that Heavenly Spirits provides. Connecting fathers with their children should be a natural and precious experience, but when added to the special requirements of developmentally disabled fathers, the absolute needs of the father can take precedence over the nurturing and growth of the child.

If a baby has physical or mental abnormalities, everyone treats that baby differently. Because of the disabled children’s delays, most people find them harder to bond with, which is why both developmentally disabled dads and children often feel unloved. First, their physical appearance separates them, then their actual disability further distances them from families and caregivers. Many have been told they are ugly, retarded looking, slow and dumb. Many do not like looking at themselves in a mirror. No one takes pictures of them. For most there are no baby photos, sports pictures, family portraits, no

souvenir snapshots with Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny. Moreover, their families and caregivers have kept no photographs. They have no mementos of growing up, of having been looked at, of even having been seen.

The developmentally disabled are one of the most socially isolated populations to begin with, and trying to incorporate the complex relationship between fathers and their children, particularly sons, into a social network creates multiple challenges. If you are separated by perceptions of appearance as well as physically unavailable or unknown to your father or child, the difficulties are more extreme than in the normal population, although their separation can also be based on involvement with the judicial system, incarceration, drug abuse, and custody battles. The same issues that affect the general population — poverty, prejudice, racism, homophobia —

are compounded for the developmentally disabled.

“I wish there were pictures of me as a baby boy so I could show my son what I looked like as a baby.”

Made possible through grant funding, the Project Fatherhood program provided an uncommon and radical addition to the existing program services available at Heavenly Spirits

by bringing fathers who have been absent for a variety of reasons back into the lives of their children, creating relationships where none had previously existed. Finding one’s family is sometimes like starting a family for the first time. But Project Fatherhood provided a safe and supportive environment where many of the fathers and children had never even met one another before.

Fathers, children, and significant others were referred from inside the day program by word of mouth, in-person recruitment, and through the Department of Developmental Services’ regional centers. For people without birth fathers, caregivers acted as surrogates.

On the site of the Heavenly Spirits day program center, a group of both disabled fathers with a non-disabled child, and children of non-disabled dads met in one room together every Saturday for one year. There, they talked to one another about

something as fundamental as loving your child – a task so daunting and demanding that for most it had been an overwhelming responsibility in the past. They spoke freely to people who

were genuinely interested in what they had to say, and found camaraderie and comfort. Eating shared meals together, they learned how to improve their own lives and the lives of their children.

The group dynamic promoted disclosure, allowing everyone the opportunity to tell their own story and listen to everybody else's, including the facilitator's, who had a clinical background and was the father of a disabled child.

Recognizing and identifying with one another through their pasts, particularly the struggles

with their own fathers, helped the men understand themselves as well as how to – and how not to – parent. Significant others and children's groups met in adjoining rooms. The co-facilitator of the fathers' groups often led the significant others group with the support and aid of Heavenly Spirits staff and childcare aides. There were children and fathers who had never had the opportunity to socialize while supervising their children or even participate in the basic care and hygiene that comes with being an active parent. Many clients attempted to establish harmony with their significant others for the first

“My dad blames my mom for my being a regional center kid. I used to blame myself. The group made me stop blaming anybody.”

time. Sometimes, after only two group sessions, a new level of acceptance and forgiveness was reached.

For Heavenly Spirits groups, simplicity of lessons, themes, and topics was very important. Project Fatherhood's curriculum of exploring self-esteem, alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence, and relationship dynamics, was followed, but at a slower pace than with non-disabled fatherhood groups. For example,

material covered in one week with a non-disabled group could take two months. The group started slowly, exploring

the question, “What is a father?” For many of these clients, the very idea of being a father was a foreign concept. Emphasis was placed on nonabusive parenting and examining the best ways to parent special-needs individuals. Clients were able to lay down their fears of unmet financial burdens and obligations, and they became increasingly aware of the legal and individual responsibilities of a father to his child. Learning to care, to be kind and tender toward someone, gives people the chance to be in service and is one of the greatest boosters of self-esteem. Building a positive circle of support within the group, at

home and in the community at large, enables people with developmental disabilities to lead more independent, productive, and integrated lives. Other topics discussed in the group included grief and how to handle it, and how to accept one's circumstances and not blame others for them. Role reversals occurred: What can we do for each other? Do we remember how to laugh and play, or are we having familial fun for the very first time? Bringing a sense of humor into play as well as learning patience and manners, how to wait calmly and listen, are indispensable for everyone, but particularly compelling needs for fathers. The new ideas were introduced and spread across many sessions throughout the year. Exciting trips and outings were added to the curriculum, and both fathers and children took pictures of each another. Having a photograph of a loved one for the very first time is how memories are made. For nonverbal clients, physical contact and holding hands had a potent impact.

An outing into the so-called normal world is a momentous experience for the developmentally disabled. For most, it is a time when they are stared at by old and young with curiosity, pity,

even fear. But everyone wants to have fun, and there's safety in numbers. A child walking with his or her dad feels wanted and safe and proud.

"I love my daughter. She smiles and touches my face."

A Project Fatherhood group of fathers and children took a trip to a nearby IHOP restaurant, where they requested quiet tables toward the back of the restaurant, always aware of and trying to avoid discomfort. Eating pancakes together was fun. One adult disabled son sat close beside his non-disabled father, excitedly holding his hand and laying his head on his dad's forearm. This young man suffered from epilepsy and schizophrenia but was able to live on his own. The next week, on the following Saturday, at the exact same time, the son found his way back to the same IHOP, sat in the same booth in the room at the back, ordered the same meal from the menu, and waited for his father to return and sit beside him again. Recognizing the young man, the IHOP manager called Heavenly Spirits, and a staff member arrived at the restaurant, paid the bill, gently explained the situation to the client, and drove him home to his independent living apartment. While the story is heartbreaking, it illustrates the power of just a one-time father-child reunion.

Project Fatherhood incorporated the central mission of Heavenly Spirits by providing necessary life skills to improve social relationships, gain self-confidence, foster mutual cooperation in problem solving and, most important, make a human connection or reconnection with people who need to be in each others' lives. Project Fatherhood was a huge success for Heavenly Spirits in the following ways: No one had to pay for the program, which encouraged people to participate. The fact that the program was free allowed nearly 200 clients to be served.

During the course of the program, the largest group was composed of 26 fathers, 11 children, and 15 significant others, including caregivers as well as family members. The grant funded special-needs staff, and this allowed for interpreters and aides. Transportation was provided, and this was enormously important for this Project Fatherhood group, because it both enabled involvement and promoted regular, continuous attendance. Just making contact between family members can be a huge obstacle to reconnecting, and the program facilitated that process. Clients' families who lived out of state were given bus tickets for

weekend visits. Sharing meals provided the fathers', children's, and significant others' groups opportunities to come together and nurture their bodies as well as their souls. All of these elements helped strengthen and prepare these fathers and children for the chance to come together and make physical, social, and emotional connections.

A nine-year-old boy in the children's group was identified by the regional center as terminally ill and medically fragile. Due to ongoing, extensive medical procedures and interventions,

he was unable to attend or participate in the group.

So the group unanimously took

it upon themselves to give him a special adventure. The boy's foster mother, his father, his father's girlfriend, and his regional center liaison joined with a nurse and members of the Heavenly Spirits staff to take the boy to Disneyland and spend a night at the Disneyland Hotel. The boy described the trip as the best day of his life. Reunited with his father, he currently lives in an assisted-living home.

It is impossible to measure the growth, the caring, and the strength that was achieved in such a short time. The year

went by so fast. Believing that all fathers want the best for their children, Project Fatherhood is guided by the principle that all children need their fathers in their lives to become whole. The most moving testament to the program's success at Heavenly Spirits was that the true common bond between these men was not that they were all disabled, but that they were

all fathers. The distance between us is based far more on our physical differences than our emotional ones. Regardless of who you are or what you look like, the pressures and joys of fatherhood are universal.

Monica Williams is administrator of the Heavenly Spirits, Inc., Life Skills Programs and directs its Project Fatherhood program.



Birthing Daddies

By Kathryn Hall-Trujillo, MPH

Chip told me that even though he and Alice had been together since they were teenagers and had three children, he had never been present at any of their births. And he wasn't sure he wanted to be present at this one.

Chip and Alice were participating in The Birthing Project, and Chip was the first man in BrotherFriends, our new program for fathers. Our signature program for women, SisterFriends, had been around for years. Quite simply, the model is to provide pregnant teens and women with the guidance and support of an experienced woman who serves as her SisterFriend during her pregnancy, delivery, and the first year of her baby's life.

The Birthing Project was a response by community women in 1988 to the alarming infant mortality rate of African American babies. The best minds in health were shaking their heads and saying they just didn't understand why our babies were

dying at such a disparate rate. We decided that we could not stand by and wait for them to figure it out. We developed an action plan to form our own organization with the intention of helping women learn how to use the available health and social services system and to help that system learn to integrate us into it.

After years of successfully providing this service to women, we were constantly asked why we did not offer a similar service to fathers. Our response was, "If men want to do this, they will have to figure out how to plan and implement their own services." We responded this way because as a group of grassroots women of color, we understood how important it is to have services that are not only culturally appropriate and gender-appropriate/competent but, more important, how critical it is to have the people with the problem involved in claiming, naming, and solving the problem.

So one day, a critical mass of men led by Tchaka Muhammed – the only man involved in the founding of The Birthing Project – decided it was time to develop their own program. BrotherFriends provides the same guidance and support as SisterFriends but from a male perspective. Experienced volunteer fathers, BrotherFriends, assist new dads in understanding the necessity for early and continuous prenatal care as well as demystifying and providing tools to deal with the emotional roller coaster both moms and dads experience.

For that first BrotherFriends group, the BrotherFriends helped their brothers look for work or employment training. They helped them find housing and figure out how to complete applications and attend medical and social service meetings and appointments with their partners. They helped them identify and get themselves into and through substance-abuse recovery. They helped them cope with the rising sense of frustration and anxiety. They helped them learn not to hit. They helped them find car seats. And then ... it was time to get ready for the birth.

“They helped them learn not to hit. They helped them find car seats. And, then...it was time to get ready for the birth.”

THE BIRTH

None of the men knew anyone who had been present when their baby was being born, including their father, uncles, and homies. Only Tchaka had participated in the birth of his own children. For the most part, the men decided that their job was to get the mother to the hospital, wait patiently in the waiting room, and then hand out cigars.

Tchaka convinced them that it was necessary to be in the delivery room to protect and show support for the mother and to begin to write themselves into their children’s lives from the moment they were born

– not as an afterthought, not as someone who only needed to bring Pampers and milk.

When the big day arrived, Chip called Alice’s SisterFriend and then he called Tchaka, his BrotherFriend, to meet him at the hospital. When Tchaka arrived, he found Chip patiently watching in the hall by the door to Alice’s room. When Tchaka asked him why he was outside, Chip responded that he had been waiting for him. The two of them entered the room, and Tchaka at first stood next to Chip near the bed. After

awhile, Tchaka moved away. As Alice's contractions became stronger, Chip decided he needed to go to the bathroom. Then he needed a cigarette. Then he needed to go back to the bathroom. Then he was hungry. On the visit to the cafeteria, he and Tchaka talked about why he was so nervous. Chip struggled to find the words. He was afraid of the unknown. He didn't like being in the position of not knowing what he was supposed to do. He was uncomfortable watching Alice in pain and doing all the work. As a man he was supposed to know what to expect and how to deal with it. His job was to fix things.

During the course of the conversation, Chip and Tchaka worked out a game plan. Chip realized that a certain amount of his fear stemmed from the fact that even though he assumed childbirth was natural for women, he remembered that all women didn't make it through the birth, nor did all babies. After some thought he also remembered that the strength of his relationship with Alice was their ability to face things together. His concern for her was greater than anything he was afraid of. All he really had to do was let

“As a man he was supposed to know what to expect and how to deal with it.”

Alice know that he was by her side, no matter what.

JOY

Chip and his BrotherFriend returned to the delivery room, where they remained for the duration of Alice's labor. Chip held Alice's hand and watched, wide-eyed, as the little baby's head peeked out of Alice's body. When the baby slipped out of her mother in a gush of fluid and blood, and when he saw his little dark-haired daughter, he broke into a full grin.

Alice breathed a deep sigh that women often describe as “exhaling,” in the sense that, “Now, I can breathe.” She later said that although she knew Chip loved their children, this was the first time she felt that it was equal – that they were parents together.

Tchaka left Chip holding his little girl, whom he named Joy, cradled against his chest, staring at her face, still smiling.

Chip had completed his alcohol recovery program, but Alice had not. He had actually entered several programs before he completed one during his Birthing Project participation.

Alice had never been able to enter a recovery program because she had not want to leave her children. When Chip went, she stayed behind with the kids.

This time it was different. The three older children were now in protective-custody foster home, and Chip promised Alice he would care for Joy while Alice was in an alcohol recovery program. There was no reason not to believe him, because he had become Joy's primary caretaker. Every time we saw him, his precious baby was in a Snugli® held close to his body. Chip confided that what he wanted more than anything for his longtime sweetheart, babies' mama, and running buddy to come home clean and sober so they could put their family back together.

When Alice was released from recovery, Chip and Joy were there when she came home. Together, they adhered to their children's protective services program and, within the year, they and all their children were reunited as a family.

A NEW GENERATION

Alice and Chip called me recently just to say hello and check in. Joy is 13

years old now. Alice and Chip have been officially married for four years, and they are grandparents to the new baby of their eldest daughter. We laughed as we walked down Memory Lane: how Tchaka gave Chip courage to stay in the delivery room; how Chip felt as he witnessed Joy being born; and how, even though he was well into his thirties, that was the day Chip claimed his manhood.

As the BrotherFriends program has grown, more men have participated in the birth of their children. The experienced dads speak of the

“The experienced dads speak of the importance of being involved in their children’s lives even before they are born.”

importance of being involved in their children's lives even before they are born. They share the loss of their own

fathers, even before birth, and the lack of role modeling they had had.

The vast majority of the fathers at The Birthing Project are not married to, or in a committed relationship with, their baby's mother. The men are able to sort through their feelings, identify their goals, and develop strategies to be good fathers.

Thanks to the volunteer BrotherFriends, a new generation of fathers is emerging. They show up for prenatal care visits,

childbirth education classes, and in the delivery room. They feel that they deserve to be there because they are working to be the fathers they want to be. They are creating a new story that includes them as men who were there to protect and support their baby's mother, to welcome their babies into the world, and to pass on to the next generation the indescribable sensations and sacredness of new life. Their sons will not have to lament their own lack of role models.

“They are creating a new story that includes them as men who were there to protect and support their baby’s mother...”

And, we – the women who usually create and provide the services and programs for pregnant and parenting women – are learning to listen to and deal with our own feelings about the role of fathers in the work we do. This has not been easy. Many of us felt that the women we serve had been hurt by and needed to be protected from the men in their lives. Many of us had chosen this work in the first place because we had been disappointed and hurt by men in our own lives. We had heard the collective, community story of no-good, deadbeat dads, and we were passing this on to ourselves and the next generation of service providers.

We have had to look at the circle we have made and expand it to include our colleagues and partners in the fatherhood movement. We have had to reconsider the words we use and revise our vocabulary to be more father-friendly and gender-competent. We have had to make space in the delivery room for fathers to be present in body and spirit. We have had to step back and let fathers step up.

We didn't realize it in the beginning, but we had been as hesitant to share power with men as other professionals had been to share with the grassroots community they had vowed to serve. We didn't think ours was a power trip; we thought we were protecting our mothers and babies from men who would not or could not take care of them.

As an expert in the field of maternal and child health, I was well aware of the studies that were telling us that fathers are one of the most decisive factors in terms of birth outcome. As one example, women are more likely to access prenatal care and initiate breastfeeding if their partner is supportive. The primary problem was, we just did not know how to integrate

men into our health and human services system. Thanks to pioneers in the field like Dr. Hershel Swinger and Jerry Tello, community advocates like Tchaka Muhammed, and men like Greg King, who are developing the practice of fathering into a profession, we have been able to go beyond our fear of men and begin to create a space for them in our organization and to figure out how best to support each other in claiming their right and responsibility to father their children.

As a woman of color, I am also aware of the

political and social implications of the absence of fathers in the lives of our families. Every news report, research analysis, and social commentary reminds us that our children are disproportionately failing in school, locked up in the criminal justice system, homeless, violent, and prone to substance abuse because they don't have fathers. If this is indeed the truth, or even a part of the truth, it behooves us as a society to figure out how to rectify this problem at the systemic level.

Tchaka, our BrotherFriend program co-founder, and one of the first men I met who had attended the birth of all his children, explained that he was driven to be present at the birth

of his firstborn for a political reason. He had heard that when babies are born, they are slapped on the butt by the doctor. As a political and social activist, he considered the slap physical violence, and the fact that it would be administered by a white man, racially demeaning. Tchaka did not want his child's welcome into the world to be a slap by a white man. When he explained this to the doctor and was assured that this was no

longer practiced, Tchaka was able to relax and, as he describes it, "experience a

spiritual and paternal connection to my child that has enabled me to stay present in the lives of my children."

For Tchaka, Chip, and countless other fathers, being present at the birth of their child anchored them in a way that could not be driven away by the political, economic, societal, or personal realities of fatherhood in the United States. Witnessing that first moment of life grabbed their hearts and minds and restored the ancestral bond between father and child, renewed the social contract that defines a man by how well he loves and cares for his family, and defied the forces of racism and classism that declares them unfit to assume their position.

As we women watch our men – whether our children’s father, son, brother, friend, or client – stand there, wait for, and welcome our baby, we are reassured that they are capable of being the fathers we need them to be. It is not that they were unwilling; it is more likely that our collective history of slavery, oppression, and adaptation to societal realities that do not sustain them or us has weakened their knowledge of their role and how important it is to our survival.

We in the The Birthing Project are doing our part to change the course of history

by assuring a space for fathers as close to the beginning of their children’s lives as possible. Our newest Birthing Project is in response to the devastation left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. It is housed in New Orleans in Life Changers Resource Center for Fathers, because men have taught us that birth is not just about birthing babies – it is about birthing families.

Kathryn Hall-Trujillo, MPH, is Director of The Birthing Project USA: The Underground Railroad for New Life, based in Taos, New Mexico. www.birthingprojectusa.com



Fathers and the Courts

A Conversation with The Hon. Michael Nash

Q: *What significant challenges or trends are you seeing in the Los Angeles Juvenile Dependency Courts?*

A: The biggest challenge is the same one it's always been since I've been a judge: the sheer numbers of children we have to deal with. There are about 25,000 children under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Dependency court because of abuse or neglect. That's probably the highest number in the United States. On the other hand, if we go back just a little over 10 years ago, there were well over 53,000 children under the court's jurisdiction for the same reasons. The numbers have come down, and that's a positive thing. But they are still high. There are 20 dependency courts here in Los Angeles, and that translates into more than 1,200 kids per courtroom. The average in the state of California is about 1,000 kids per courtroom, and *that's* considered too high. So we're well above the norm. The average

caseload for attorneys in Los Angeles is also well above the norm, as is the caseload for social workers. So I think just the numbers alone have always been a challenge for us. And even though the numbers have gone down, they continue to be a challenge.

Reunifying parents whose children have been removed from their care is another big challenge; although here, too, there have been improvements in recent years. This includes parents who now have "organizational representation." That is, all parents have attorneys, but rather than independent attorneys who aren't affiliated with any organization, there is now an organization that represents parents and provides supervision and training not only for the lawyers, but for their support system. I think that has improved the quality of representation and brought about more vigorous representation, which is a positive thing for parents.

Our Dependency Court also has developed a substance-abuse protocol for parents that is designed to aid those who have substance-abuse issues.

This is commonly referred to as Dependency Drug Court, the type of thing that is now used in our Criminal Courts

and Juvenile Delinquency Courts. The Dependency Drug Court model is a collaborative one that links parents with resources that have a proven track record. There's significant monitoring of the parents by the court and others as they go through the program, and a model of encouragement for the parents that makes sure they're doing what they need to do. And it's had a very high success rate. So that's another trend we're seeing. I'm hoping that over the next two to four years, those five Drug Dependency Courts we have now will jump to 20, so every one of our 20 Dependency Courts will be serving as a Dependency Drug Court as well.

Another significant challenge is that many of our kids are prescribed psychotropic medications. This is a big challenge for us because under the law, our judicial officers – our courts – are required to approve requests for psychotropic medications. And

that's a very difficult process when you figure that there are no psychiatrists or psychologists on the bench. We must rely on the Department of Mental Health

Juvenile Court Unit to advise us on whether or not the requested medications are medically appropriate for

these kids. The bottom line is, the way the whole process is set up, our foster care system is being asked to step into the shoes of competent parents. That's something I don't think we're ever capable of doing. Even though the process we use here in Los Angeles is as good as any process found anywhere, it still falls short of the mark. But one of the things we've just implemented is a systematic process to do a much better job of monitoring the effects of drugs that are prescribed for our kids. Heretofore, most of our efforts have been devoted to the approval process – making sure we're getting enough information to where we can legitimately feel somewhat comfortable in approving medications. But we've never adopted a systematic process to monitor the impacts of the medications. All last year we worked on a process that we just implemented last March, and it's already showing some very promising results. I think we're the first

“The bottom line is, the way the whole process is set up, our foster care system is being asked to step into the shoes of competent parents.”

court in the nation to attempt to do this systemically. There's a bill pending in the state legislature for the second year in a row to require a monitoring program for every child who receives psychotropic medications. The legislation failed last year, and I don't know how it will fare this year. But we are in effect serving as a statewide pilot project on this issue.

Another area that's an issue for us – and once again, we're working very diligently on it – relates to kids who cross over from one system to another. Typically, this means a child in Dependency Court who's at risk for so many things, including coming into contact with the juvenile delinquency system; so we see kids crossing over from one system to another. One of the things we've worked on here in Los Angeles is to develop a protocol to increase the level of communication and collaboration between the two systems, hopefully to achieve better outcomes from these kids. And as we study them, we learn that those who cross over, particularly from Dependency Court to Delinquency Court, have substance-abuse issues. That's something you don't typically think about when you're

“... we've recently developed a substance-abuse treatment protocol for kids under the jurisdiction of the Dependency Court.”

thinking about abused and neglected kids – until it's too late. We're worried about substance-abuse issues for their parents and everybody else, but we forget that the kids are at risk of

developing these problems as well. So in addition to developing protocols for collaborating between the two systems, we've recently developed a substance-abuse treatment protocol for kids under the jurisdiction of the Dependency Court. The protocol is designed to identify the kids and link them with appropriate treatment that's designed to enhance their well-being and prevent them from crossing over into the Delinquency Court system. We piloted this program in a few of our courts and it was working so well that about a month ago we expanded it to all of our courts. So we're very pleased about that. We've learned that more and more kids have these issues. Now we have a way to deal with it.

Q: *You mentioned that the numbers of children involved in Dependency Court have gone down in recent years. Is it safe to say that the numbers will continue to go down?*

A: So far it's continued down this year,

and we're keeping our fingers crossed and hoping the trend continues. There are some reasons for this trend that give us a basis for optimism. One is that we've seen the numbers decline significantly over the years because when our numbers shot up in the mid-'80s and '90s, they were driven heavily by the crack cocaine epidemic. And while crack cocaine still exists, it doesn't exist in the proportions that it did back in those days. The system's response to that epidemic was probably not appropriate. It was more like, "Let's remove the child from the home and figure out what to do afterward." In terms of good social work, that has everything backward. The best form of social work is to assess the family first and then develop an appropriate response. Filing a case that brings the family into court should be a last resort, but back then it was the first. So we've seen the nature of social work change in the last ten years. Now it's much closer to the model of, "Let's see if we can serve these families within the community first, and bring them into the courts only when we have to." We're hoping that that type of response will carry us through any negative times we're going through today.

"The best form of social work is to assess the family first and then develop an appropriate response."

In addition, a number of years ago, the court developed a partnership with the Department of Children and Family Services and a couple of advocacy groups – the Alliance for Children's Rights and the Public Counsel Law Center – to provide additional resources so we could expedite adoptions of children from foster care. Since 1998, we've seen about 23,000 children adopted from foster care because of that partnership. That's well over the number of adoptions that have occurred in any comparable period of time in our history. So hopefully, some of the policies in effect now, and changes in the way the system works, will help us stave off any negative impacts that could flow from the negative economy. If we can stay consistent with the approach, continue to serve families in the community, and keep the court as a last resort, we won't see any major spikes in our population in the courts.

Q: In 1995, President Clinton stated, "The single biggest problem in our society may be the growing absence of fathers from their children's homes..." Two years later, Congress created a task force to promote fatherhood. This was followed by many other initiatives

and programs. What's happened in the years since, and how has it affected children and fathers in this country?

A: From the standpoint of the child protection system over the years, we've seen so many kids in our system without one parent, and in many cases without two parents. It was easy for the system not to do much when the mother said she didn't know who the father was. But as a result, we've seen too many kids who are missing out on a crucial part of their lives. And when I say that, I'm not just referring to the father. Every parent brings a whole side of their family.

When we fail to locate one parent or the other – and in most instances, it's the father – the children are

missing access to some very valuable resources in their lives. And this is crucial. It's important, I think, to identify parents as early in our process as possible, because to the extent that we can locate and empower parents to take care of their kids, the kids are better off in the long term. But even when the parent is incapable of being empowered, there are still maternal and paternal relatives who can add so much to the life of a child, whether through placements or just having

“Studies show that when kids are living with relatives, they don't move around as much, which happens too often in our foster care system.”

those added adult connections that are important in their lives. Too often we've seen kids age out of the system without any adult connection in their lives. These are kids whom the system has failed. Every child should leave this system with either a family or, at a minimum, with some significant adult connections in their lives that they can rely on as they get older and work their way to some real independence as an individual. So we've seen some efforts headed in that direction.

Now if you look at our system today, of the 25,000 or so kids we have, a

little over 19,000 of them are in out-of-home care. Of those kids, about 52 percent are in the care of relatives. This is

generally a good thing. Studies show that when kids are living with relatives, they don't move around as much, which happens too often in our foster care system. They have a greater sense of permanence and ultimately can more effectively achieve permanence. But that also means that 48 percent of kids are not living with relatives. One of the shortcomings of the system has been a less than sterling effort in identifying fathers, which means we're missing out on a whole segment of relatives

for these kids. So we're seeing an increased trend toward family-finding.

When we do identify relatives, they don't all have to be available to care directly for the child, but they can certainly be

a connection for that child.

Also, the more relatives you

identify, the more

potential resources you find that can be helpful for the parents to do what they need to do to reunify with their kids. In the past, we've been more focused on evaluating relatives from the perspective of what they can do for the kids, and not enough on what they can do for the parents, either to care for the kids or help get the parents in a position to care for their kids. So this is another area where we've fallen down, but we're making efforts to step forward these days.

Q: Have the perception of fathers in the juvenile court system changed over the years? Are there biases or misperceptions related to paternity that still persist, whether intentional or not?

A: It's hard to say. All the cases here in Dependency Court flow from the mother. I was wondering whether that is a reflection of a bias in the way we

look at things. If I have a case file, there may be six kids in a case file. Those kids are all organized in the case file based on having the same mother. So the mother will be in one case file. But a father who's had children by different

mothers could be in any number of different case files. This makes it more difficult for a father to

navigate and coordinate among his children, if he had those children by different women. As a rule, I think that the system has not focused on the fathers to the extent that it should. And we're trying to change that, because there are fathers who, with a little bit of help and encouragement, can be empowered to have a positive influence in the lives of their kids. And once again, there's a whole side of the family that comes with him and who can be a positive force in the lives of their kids. I've seen too many cases over the years where enough effort wasn't placed on convincing a reluctant mother to identify the father of her child. And efforts to locate a father, even when there was a name, were not as comprehensive as they should have been. Or, even when the name of the father was known, if that father wasn't around, there were minimal efforts at best, if at all, to attempt to locate paternal relatives to

see what resources they could bring to the table on behalf of the child. It's really important to look under every rock, if you will, to find everybody and anybody who could potentially play a meaningful part in a child's life. And that means focusing on fathers and paternal relatives as well.

"It's really important to look under every rock, if you will, to find everybody and anybody who could potentially play a meaningful part in a child's life."

Q: *What impact does a father's presence have on a child? Conversely, what impact does his absence have on a child?*

A: I'm not a psychologist or psychiatrist. But I grew up in a home with both a mother and a father. My father was a role model for me. From my perspective, it's hard to imagine growing up in a home where there aren't two loving parents and all of the other potential family members who come along with each parent – even though I see it all the time. I think there's a piece missing from one's life when that doesn't exist.

Q: *What role do the courts play in bringing people and families together?*

A: I'll give you a couple of examples that I thought were rather amazing.

I did an adoption a few years ago where the adopting parent was the natural father of the child. This was a situation in which the father had not been identified early on in the case,

and the case had proceeded through the system, and paternal rights had been terminated. The child became a legal orphan and entered the foster care system. A little later, the biological father was identified and he wanted to be a part of his child's life, so he became the foster parent. Later, as a foster parent, he ended up adopting his biological child.

When I first came into the system in 1990, I was shocked at the number of so-called legal orphans in the system. That is, children whose parents had had their parental rights terminated and the children were free for adoption. There had been minimal efforts made to adopt these kids, and so they ended up growing up in foster care, which is a negative thing. As I was going through the files that were new to me when I started here, I was surprised, first by the number of cases there were. But I was even more surprised that in many cases, there had not been a comprehensive search to locate

both parents. So in every one of those cases, regardless of where it was in the process, I required the Department of Children and Family Services to do a comprehensive search for those parents. And I was always gratified that there were a number of cases where fathers were located who came forward and did want to play a meaningful role in their children's lives. Consequently, I never, ever have proceeded with a case unless a comprehensive search had been made beforehand to locate a so-called missing parent.

Q: *What's working in the community now to help families, particularly fathers, and what more is needed?*

A: I'm impressed by the work that Dr. Hershel Swinger has been doing through Children's Institute to work with fathers, because once again, fathers have too often been the forgotten people in our system. I think it's important that we identify fathers as quickly as possible, and then evaluate them from the perspective of whether or not they are first willing, and then capable, of becoming a meaningful part of their children's lives. What Dr. Swinger has been doing is just that:

"I think we need more programs that are designed specifically to work with fathers and help to empower them."

working with those who are willing and able, and providing them with the appropriate training and encouragement, so they're ultimately empowered to assume a meaningful role in the lives of their children. I've seen it, and I'm very impressed by it. I think we need more programs that are designed specifically to work with fathers and help to empower them.

Q: *What impact has National Adoptions Day had on families?*

A: There are too many children in our system who need a home and don't have one. These children are not damaged goods. They're just kids. All they need is a home. National Adoption Day brings both legal and judicial resources together to expedite the adoption of children from the foster care system. In Los Angeles, the 23,000 adoptions I referred to earlier include the adoptions that we've done as part of National Adoption Day. It's encouraged many more people, I think, to step forward and investigate the possibility of adoption. And it's also shed a positive light on the child protection system which, for the most part, has been viewed in a negative

way. Most of the publicity we hear with respect to the child protection system has been, “Look, they screwed up again. Another child got hurt. The system isn’t working.” Well, National Adoption Day shows the positive results that can be achieved in that system. There are children who do leave the system for a healthy, loving home, something every child on earth is entitled to.

Q: *Why did you decide to focus your career on the Juvenile Dependency Division of Los Angeles Superior Court?*

A: My career as a lawyer and a judge had been focused on the criminal justice system, and I thought it was pretty good

work. First as a prosecutor and then as a judge, I’d had an opportunity to put a lot of people

in jail, and more and more, I got less satisfaction out of that. What I found I enjoyed doing as a judge was working on cases where I could play a role in turning someone’s life around in a positive way. And I found that those kinds of opportunities in criminal court are few and far between. So when I was elevated to the Superior Court

“What I found I enjoyed doing as a judge was working on cases where I could play a role in turning someone’s life around in a positive way.”

in late 1989, I requested a Juvenile Court assignment, because I thought that might be a place where I could do some meaningful work with young people to move them in the right direction. What I had in mind at the time was the Juvenile Delinquency Court because it was what I knew. That would have been fine, and the Juvenile Delinquency Court is a fine place to work. But what happened was, I received a call from the then-presiding judge of the Delinquency Court, the late Paul Boland, one of the all-time great judges. And he said, “Mike, I’ve got great news for you. You’ve been assigned to the Juvenile Court.” I replied, “That’s great.” And then he said, “You’ll be working in Dependency Court.” And my response to him was,

“What’s that?” I didn’t even know what Dependency Court was. And he told me, “You’ll find out soon enough.”

I started in Juvenile Dependency Court in January 1990, and I took an instant liking to it. Even though the system itself had many problems, I liked the fact that I got to deal with kids on a daily basis. And I liked that virtually all the people involved in the system were there because they wanted to make a

difference in the lives of children and their families. And we've ended up helping a lot of people. The challenge over the years has been to improve the way the system works so we can increase the percentage of people we're helping. After working as a Dependency Court judge for six or seven years, I shot my mouth off at one point and said, "Boy, if they ever put me in charge of this place..." You know the old saying, "Be careful what you wish for." So now I've been in a leadership position in the court for a long time, always focusing on ways to improve the system in order to increase the number of people we're helping.

We've come a long way, but with 25,000 kids in the system, we still have a long way to go. But I still feel that the great thing about this system is that we probably help more people in need than all the rest of the people in the court system combined.

Q: *Personally, what's the biggest challenge for you?*

A: Among my biggest challenges is getting everybody to work together to advance the interests of a child,

or a family, or both. There isn't one individual in this process who can do it all. You would think that as a judge I should be able to accomplish anything because I have the power of the robe behind me, but it just doesn't work that way. If you don't have everybody working together in this system, it's never going to work right. The more you can get folks to work together and focus on common goals and common solutions, then the greater the progress for everyone who comes through the doors of the courthouse every day.

Q: *What's most rewarding about what you do?*

A: The most rewarding thing is seeing a positive outcome, and that can manifest itself in so many different ways: Seeing a child walk out of the courthouse with an adoptive family – boy, that sure feels good. Or when a family comes into the system with lots of issues that are impacting the health and safety of their kids; and the government, through the courts, has had to step in. And you work with this family over a period of time, and they ultimately deal with the issues that brought them into the court,

they get reunified, and they leave a much healthier and safer family than when they came into the system. That feels pretty darned good, too. In fact, that really is the ultimate of what we do – when we can actually reunify a family and see them leave the system knowing that the chances are that everybody is going to be just fine.

Rewards happen every single day in the court system. There isn't a day

that goes by that something positive doesn't happen for somebody. If you can take that attitude home with you every night, it becomes very easy to come back, try it again, and see how many you can help the next day. And that makes this a beautiful place to work.

The Hon. Michael Nash is Presiding Judge of the Los Angeles Juvenile Court.



“It’s a father thing.”

By Gregory J. Boyle, S.J.

1

There is a hole in the soul of nearly every homie I know that’s in the shape of their dad. Homeboy Industries, the largest gang-intervention program in the country, is always trying to create the moment of what psychologists call the “sustenance of that first attachment.” It is an offering, better late than never, of that parent-child bond that tells the fatherless they are lovable.

The Japanese speak of a concept called *amai*, a living in a deep sense of being cherished, of raising kids lovingly. I ask one of my part-timers, David, about his father. Recently released from camp and still on probation, he is cleaning the office after school.

“Oh,” he says, monotone in place, accustomed to answering this question. “He walked out on us.” Then he shakes up the dial tone of his voice and wants to go deeper, truer than he has before.

“In fact, the day he chose to walk out on us was my sixth birthday.” There is a death behind his eyes that he can’t mask. “We had a cake *y todo*, but I wouldn’t let them cut it. I waited for my *jefito* to come home. I waited and waited. Nighttime came. He never did.”

He pauses here for what I presume will be the moment for him to cry, but there is only dryness and a rage you can measure, the needle bouncing to its farthest edge.

“I cried ’til I was nine.”

2

I wait for some emotional creaking here. Nothing.

“I don’t cry anymore, I just hate him.” The great encounter with the “Father Wound” is every homeboy’s homework.

The poet Galway Kimmel writes, “Sometimes it’s necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness.” An older homeboy tells me this: “When I was 10 years old, I walked in on my dad and he had a needle in his arm, all dazed. He looked at me and said, ‘Take a good look. This will be you one day.’”

Another says, “My Dad would fuck us up. I mean, Fuck. Us. Up. You know – if we didn’t massage his feet right or bring his wallet fast enough. I decided one day, ‘I don’t want to become him.’”

Still another says, “I wish I never knew his name – wish I had never seen his face.”

There is a wound that needs excavating before that “first attachment” can attach itself elsewhere. Loveliness retaught.

3

Homies get stuck so often in a morass of *desesperación*, impasse writ large, and in the ordinary mud of inertia and laziness. The conjuring of an image of something better just doesn’t come to them. Joey is one of those “stuckees.”

At 21 years old, he seems eternally adolescent. A cherubic-cheeked, chunky kid who looks forever 12, Joey

has mastered the art of hanging out. Few do it better. He is half-hearted even in his sporadic forays into crack selling. He sells enough to feed himself at McDonald’s and resume the ardors of just kicking it. The assertion in “Freakonomics” is true enough – that by and large, very few homies are getting rich selling drugs. No one’s buying the home in La Puente; certainly not Joey.

My attempts are numerous to shake Joey out of this stupor of sleeping late, sling a little, kick it with the homies, check in with his *jaina*, endure the “woofing” of his grandma. His more purposeful older brother, Memo, sums up Joey’s level of maturity.

“He always be actin’ his shoe size – eight.”

4

This shiftlessness has become his life, for all the pointing I make in the general direction of possible exit strategies are all politely shrugged away.

Then one morning, Joey shows up at my office and his smile seems to come from a deeper, surer place than usual.

“Get ready to be proud of me,” he says, settling in.

“Okay, I’m sitting down – fire away.”

“You are talking ... to an employed *vato* right now.”

“*Serio*, dog? *Felicidades*. So where you workin’?”

Joey turns around to make sure no one is lurking nearby. “Now, that’s the thing, G. You can’t tell the homies.”

I nod.

“I’m the rat.”

The rat. A mascot. Joey *IS* Chuck E. Cheese.

“Wow ... I mean, that’s great!” I try and convince him. And myself.

“No it ain’t ... it sucks. The rat suit is all hot and it be hummin’ in there and the kids be buuuuuuggggiiinnnn. They be pushing you and putting *chicle* on you.”

“*Pero mijito*, I’m proud of you,” I tell him. “But what woke you up enough to go apply for a job?”

Joey gets sober and clear-eyed, and there is no doubting, for him, how he was led to this moment and place and rat suit.

“In two months, my son’s gonna be born. I want him to come into the world and meet his father – a workin’ man.”

That’ll do it. A new identity is forged, born of the longing to attach and the promise to provide that which had been denied you.

5

Nearly eight o’clock at night. I pass the front of the emergency room at White Memorial Hospital. On the bus bench, all by himself, is Spider, a light-skinned *huero* wearing pastel blue scrubs. He’s just gotten off work. His hair rests in limbo between clean-shaven and *pelon* and looks ready to be trained by a dollop of Three Flowers pomade and the snugness of a nylon stocking, pulled tight over the scalp.

Not yet 19, Spider works in the hospital as an orderly, moving patients and equipment. It’s a job he secured through Homeboy Industries.

Spider is from a gang in Aliso Village Projects, where he and his sister mainly raised themselves, having been abandoned by their parents. I was never quite sure how they duped the Housing Authority into thinking there was a responsible adult around. I had only met him recently and came

to know his story. He and his lady, with two small sons, now live in an apartment in Highland Park, several bus rides away.

“Get in, dog, I’ll take ya home.”

We speak of many things as we go. I question him about his bills and rent and how he’s faring. I’ve helped him get jump-started in this regard a few times already.

“I’m okay,” he says, then steers himself in a whole other direction. “You know what I’m gonna do when I get home right now? I’m gonna sit down to eat with my lady and my two *morritos*. But, well... I don’t eat. I just watch them eat. My lady, she gets crazy with me, but I don’t care. I just watch them eat. They

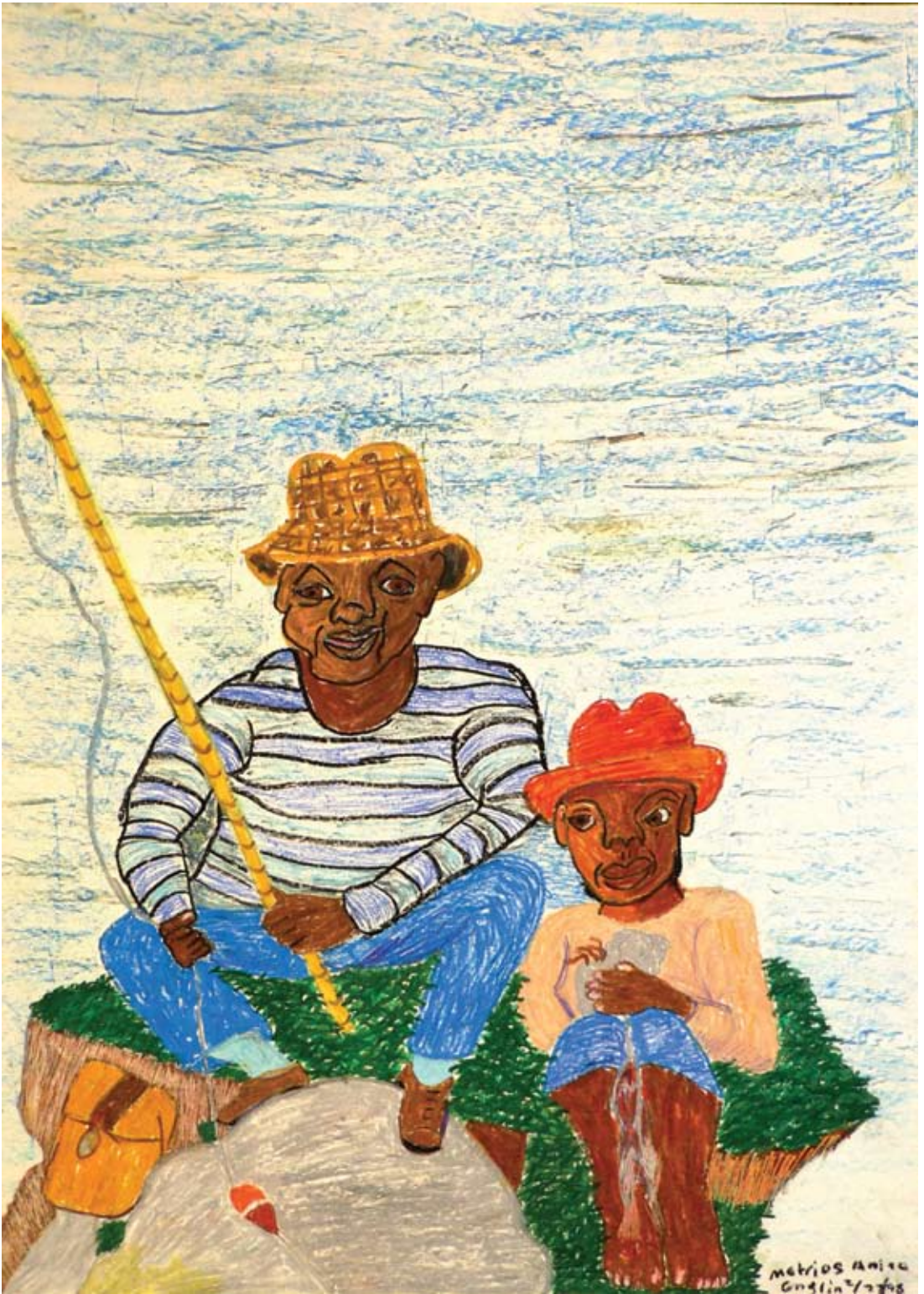
eat and eat. And I just look at ’em and I thank God that they’re in my life. When they’re done eating and I know they’re full, THEN I eat.”

And the truth is, sometimes there’s food left and sometimes there isn’t. “*Tu sabes*,” he says to me, putting his hand on my shoulder as I drive. “It’s a father thing.”

6

The sustenance (and loveliness) of the first attachment. *Amai*. The Father wound excavated, tended, healed – alive for the first time, in a deep sense of being cherished.

Gregory J. Boyle, S.J., is the founder and executive director of Homeboy Industries.



Gone Fishing by Metrius Englin.
Courtesy National Institute of Art & Disabilities.

FATHERHOOD: Insights and Perspectives from Leaders in the Fatherhood Movement

Recent research has uncovered a wealth of information suggesting that fathers are critical to a child's success later in life. Yet, for a variety of reasons, fathers have been a largely untapped resource.

Founded in 1996 by Dr. Hershel K. Swinger at Children's Institute, Inc. (CII), Project Fatherhood brings poor, urban fathers together and teaches them to teach themselves how to be loving, nurturing fathers. This publication explores the father's role in their children's lives and provides compelling evidence that programs like Project Fatherhood are working.

Project Fatherhood is a program of CII's Leadership Center, the nucleus for a broad range of multidisciplinary activities, from research and model program development to training and advocacy. The Leadership Center builds and tests innovative ideas and disseminates best practices to the larger child welfare profession.

Children's Institute, Inc. helps children who have been traumatized by violence in their homes or communities. Since 1906, CII has served high-risk children and families in some of the most devastated neighborhoods in metropolitan Los Angeles. CII serves more than 17,000 children and families and trains more than 6,000 professionals each year.

For more information about Project Fatherhood, The Leadership Center, and Children's Institute, Inc., visit www.childrensinstitute.org.



Project Fatherhood is partially funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant No: 90-FR-0088 and Grant No: 90-FR-0076. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.