

Child Support's Role in Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families



The child support program is one of the few government programs that systematically reach men, and the only one to do so in their roles as fathers. Over the past two decades, we have learned a great deal about the circumstances of low-income families and fathers, and the role of the child support program

in furthering responsible fatherhood and healthy families has continued to grow. The results of demonstration projects and research help to inform us as we pursue evidence-based practices in our program that highlight the importance of financial and emotional support from both parents. We now know that financial and emotional support go hand-in-hand.

The child support program contributes to the Federal and State funding and technical assistance available for comprehensive services to low-income parents through collaborations with TANF, child welfare, courts, the workforce system, corrections departments, veterans programs, domestic violence programs, and many faith- and community-based fatherhood programs.

These collaborations help carry out President Obama's commitment to responsible fatherhood and healthy families. The President spoke compellingly about the importance to children of having two committed and nurturing parents when the White House hosted a Father's Day event. Then, in August, the White House launched the first in a series of forums called Regional Town Hall Meetings on Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families. The forum opened with a video of the President's Father's Day speech.

This forum, held in Chicago (see the article on page 4), brought together representatives from fatherhood groups that have long partnered with the region's child support community through grant projects and case work. Discussions included topics familiar to many of us in the child support community—barriers to employment, including incarceration and transportation; working with employers and community-based organizations to support recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts; and a more holistic family-focused approach to supporting children.

The regional forums aim to gather information from parents, community leaders, and State and local government representatives. The national conversation emerging from these forums will help the Administration to identify and implement sound practices and policies that support healthy families.

Even during this economic downturn, I am pleased to see that many State child support programs are implementing policies and practices that help remove barriers to responsible fatherhood; Pennsylvania stands out as one such State. Pennsylvania's unprecedented performance numbers demonstrate that the child support program can increase its effectiveness when it includes responsible fatherhood services in its mix of enforcement strategies. The article on the front page highlights a few of the State child support efforts, under the leadership of Director Dan Richard, including a project that partners with parents and community employment resources.

I look forward to seeing more community-building efforts among all levels of government toward our mutual goal of improving our services to strengthen families and improve child well-being.

Vicki Turetsky