



Ohio Practitioners' Network for Fathers and Families

www.opnff.net

Spring/Summer 2007  
Newsletter

## I Testify, I Testify

By Calvin Williams,  
OPNFF President

You would too if you were in front of the Ohio House and Senate Finance Committees with an opportunity to support the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood and the related funding included in the Governor's proposed budget.

Along with Diane Karther, Al Grimes and Sandi Hoch, I stood before our legislators making the case for repopulation, increased funding and a more effective structure for the OCF. What a thrill! I'm ready to do it again but I think the next time I'll bring a seat cushion, some water, coffee and a couple of energy bars.

The testimonies are printed in this newsletter. Using the rationale, data and passion for fatherhood contained within them, you can call or e-mail the representatives and senators from your district and testify yourself. They are so interested in the fatherhood issue yet need to be educated, informed and inspired. **Who best to do that but you, me and the rest of the OPNFF members?**

Even after the vote on the budget, let's continue to make it clear from now on that fathers matter: that fathers ROCK!

Just how much is the need for comprehensive services and supports for fathers across our State?

In early May, I had the pleasure of doing a workshop on fatherhood at the State Homeless Youth Education Conference at Cherry Valley Lodge in Newark, Ohio. As the time drew near for my workshop to begin, attendees began filing in. It quickly became clear to the conference organizers that we would run out of space. More chairs were brought in. By the time I began the workshop, there were people standing along the walls! Why? Because they were community-based service providers to families and children from

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## Doug Thompson Settles in as New Ohio Child Support Deputy Director

Reprinted with permission from News Today, an ODJFS publication

Recently appointed Child Support Deputy Director Doug Thompson joined ODJFS on February 12 and is beginning to settle into his new position. So far he likes what he sees.

"I am impressed with the quality of staff we have here at ODJFS and look forward to creating a positive work environment for the people who serve the families and children of Ohio," said Thompson.

Thompson was the Montgomery County Child Support Enforcement Agency Director for the past seven years. He also served as President of Ohio's CSEA Directors' Association (OCDA) in 2005 and many county/state workgroups such as Ohio's Child Support Reform Shareholders' Group.

"The child support program is recognized as a critical compo-

nent for supporting families and children here in Ohio," said Thompson. "Over one million children in Ohio are touched by the child support program. I'm excited about the opportunity to strengthen our relationships and partnerships with county, state and federal agencies, parents (obligors and obligees), caretakers, associations, advocates, and many other key partners to ensure positive outcomes for families."

The Dayton area resident will be relocating to Columbus this year with his wife, Shana, and three kids (Carrie, Katie and Doug) who range from age 5 to 17, and their dog, Lucy.

Thompson graduated with a Bachelor of Science from Wright State University and earned his Master of Public Administration from Ohio University.

Outside of work, Thompson enjoys distance running (he competed in two 5k races last year) and spending time with his family.

## OPNFF Welcomes New Members

Aishatu Amnset	Eugene Little
Suileka Audino	Randi Love
Tara Byers	Deborah Lucci
Malissa Cocca	Andrea Maltrich
Audrey Colflesh	Janice Maxey
Charles Darnell	Tiara Moore
Julie DuBois	Kathy Painter
Katie Durackey	Brigid Slaton
Lesley Foyil	Amy Snyder
Abbie Frankart	Jennifer Voit
Karen Gill	Lauren Wheatley
Julia Hartstim	Ping Xu
Tonya Hayes	Shannon Ziegler
Care Hupp	Lauren Adams
R Jorgenson	James Durkalski
Gary Juncka	S Galloway
B Kermani	Susan Klein
Kurt Kless	Mark Nelson
C Landin	B Thomas
J Livengood	Jessica Walter
Brian McPeck	Yvonne Camp
Angelica Minotti	Kelly Ide
D Modranski	Vicki Marie
Joe Negrelli	Willette Riley
Alec Peters	April Vince
Ashley Quick	Karen Taff
R Rosenfield	Ken Kelleher
J Satanovsky	Cynthia Mason
Nicole Spreng	Carolyn Allen
Krystle Syszler	Kathy Berry
Brenna Taub	Barbara Bryson
Sarah Tutolo	Marvin Chappell
R Vanderwyst	Beatrice Daniels
E Vasilchek	Cassandra Davis
Crystal Warfield	Paula Drees
Michael Wright	Albert Earl Jr
T Zebrowski	John Edwards Sr
Clay Bell	Carolyn Farmer
R Brazzile	Darryl Gaston
Karma Cline	Steve Guyton
Linda Coulter	Craig Miracle
Sandy Dyer	Teresa Mitchell
Margaret Keller	Stacy Mitchell
T Kovacsiss	Joseph Mudra
Charles Lowe	S Organiscak
Tamara Lutes	Reynolds-Angien
Neal Mann	Jesse Ruiz
Larry McKinstry	Darlene Scott
Maurice Payne	Darrin Snyder
Paula Selway	Michael Walton
Charles Simons	L Winchester
J Swind	Diane Karther
Raisa Veremly	Mark Robinson
Chris Wolf	Myron Hines
Sandra Woodall	Alisa Smedley
Lesley Anderson	Marvin Smith
Christine Ashe	Harold Stephens
T Berghausen	Peter Mattress
S Butler-McCray	T Mejia-Johnson
Deloris Davis	John Harvis-Bey
Deborah Dexter	Ericka King-Betts
Ann Duff	Ric Kruszynski
Jill Forster	Barbara Pensgen
L Fusselman	R Rodriguez
Kim Hall	Jessica Sabin
Charnice Holmes	S Schumacher
Michael Jackson	Eli Williams
Judy Joyce	H Witherite
Ellen Kitchens	Karon Anderson

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## More New Members!

Jennifer Ault	Lynn Markley
Elizabeth Baker	Ina Markley
T Brenneman	Aimee Matusik
Janet Buchanan	Pat McConnell
C Crockett-Harris	Dena Miller
Robbin Delancy	R Montgomery
Maureen Earle	Susan Pettit
Jannell Ector	Angela Roberts
Debra Foster	Vicki Santos
Tuana Fuller	Jorinda Seyerle
Cheryl Gadd	Amy Spreinde
Jim Harris	Christina Starling
Y Hunnicutt	Jim Still-Pepper
L Kennedy-Brn	Paul Tompkins
R LaCroix	Sandra Untied
Jeff Linser	Monica Van Nort
Jane Malloy	BJ Yates

## I Testify...

(Continued from page 1)

Loraine, Hancock, Montgomery and Franklin Counties just to name a few, and they see fathers trying, struggling, disconnecting. Because they are frustrated and desperate for answers, resources, ideas and programs to help children get what they need from their dads.

The attendees left with optimism and hope as I spoke of not only the burgeoning fatherhood programs and initiatives, but of the support coming from our state government. Evaluation comments such as: "I'd like to see more programs in all areas of Ohio that support fathers and children"; "good to know there are groups fighting for fathers, we have more fathers/children at the shelter"; "Such a needed topic and so overlooked; the only complaint is not enough time"; underscore the desire people have to support fathers.

I can testify to you right now that this issue will not go away nor be absorbed or taken on by other well-intentioned family serving efforts. It needs a distinct and acute focus. It is elemental to the DNA of family life and child well being.

## OPNFF and ECMH to host Fantastic Fathers Conference, June 22, 2007 in Columbus

OPNFF and The Early Childhood Mental Health Organization are co-sponsoring the Statewide Fantastic Fathers Conference, Friday, June 22, 2007, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, at the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Auditorium, 1980 West Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio.

This conference is targeted to practitioners who work with young children and their families.

Training schedule:

- 8:00 Registration
- 8:30 Introduction
- 8:45 Topic: Fatherhood, Poverty and Children's Mental Health  
*Speaker: Calvin Williams*

- 9:30 Topic: Male and female developmental differences and the implications in the learning environment; *Speaker: Neil Tift*
- 10:30 Break
- 10:45 Panel Presentations and Discussion  
1. Reasons father participation in early childhood programs is low; 2. Ways to engage fathers and inspire their participation and support; 3. Programs, interactive activities, and curriculums for dads and their children in school/preschool environments;  
*Panelists: Burl Lemon, Luis Vazquez, & James McDonald*
- 12:15 Lunch
- 1:00 Topic: The challenges and opportunities of working with teen fathers; *Speaker: Bob Farmerie*

- 1:45 Topic: State and national initiatives that are impacting fathers and families; *Speakers: Muqit Sabur and Scott Neely*
- 2:45 Break
- 3:00 Question, Answers and Implementation Discussions
- 3:45 Evaluation and Wrap up

To Register go to the Calendar page on the OPNFF website, [www.opnff.net](http://www.opnff.net), and download the Registration Form or contact Twinkle French, Columbus Children's Hospital Early Childhood Mental Health [frencht@chi.osu.edu](mailto:frencht@chi.osu.edu); Phone: (614) 355-8622

**The Conference is free of charge. See you there!**

## Around the State with OPNFF

### NASW Training in Akron

OPNFF Board Members, Muqit Sabur and Rev. Dr. B. Alexander Moore conducted a workshop in March, 2007 in Akron, Ohio, on behalf of the Ohio Chapter, National Association of Social Workers, Northeast Ohio Region. The training session was entitled: "**A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Male Perspective on Domestic Violence and Child Abuse.**"

The workshop examined types of abuse; *verbal, psychological/emotional, financial, physical and sexual.* The workshop also educated attendees on the statewide network of fatherhood organizations and encouraged the social workers to partner with fatherhood organizations in working toward the reduction of domestic violence and child abuse occurrences. More than

fifty individuals attended the workshop.

### Massillon Father's Take A Bow

On April 23, 2007, OPNFF Board Vice President James McDonald of Zanesville spoke on the topic, "Father's Take a Bow" at the R. G. Drage Career Center in Massillon, Ohio to an audience of dads and their families from Stark County. The program was organized by Pat Smith of the Canton Area Association for Education of Young Children.

Prior to Mr. McDonald's presentation, the audience was spellbound by the ancestral sounds of the Greg Rice Drum Group. The OPNFF presentation responded to four questions: 1 - What happens when dad is home? 2 - What happens when fathers are absent? 3 - What

does it take to be a good father? and 3 -How can you help other men who are fathers?

The men were asked to share one thing they got from their fathers (or father hero) that they would transfer to their children. The evening concluded with a delicious meal and great fellowship and laughter.

**Are you interested in having OPNFF participate in a local event or provide a training in your community on best practices in fatherhood programming? Contact us through our website [www.opnff.net](http://www.opnff.net) or email us, [info@opnff.net](mailto:info@opnff.net).**

**We look forward to hearing from you!**

## Testimony on Fatherhood Issues Delivered to the Ohio House of Representatives and Senate Finance Committees

Four fatherhood advocates delivered testimony to the House Finance Appropriations Committee on April 19 and the Senate Finance Committee on May 31 as part of their hearings on the 2008-09 biennial budget for the State of Ohio. Excerpts from that testimony is reprinted below with the permission of those that testified.

### Calvin Williams, Lighthouse Youth Services

My name is Calvin Williams; I am the Program Director for Lighthouse REAL Dads, a program of Lighthouse Youth Services in Cincinnati. Our program, in partnership with Hamilton County Job & Family Services Child Support Division and Messer Construction Company, serves 17 to 24 year old fathers who are behind in their child support payments.

I come before you also as President of the Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families, or OPNFF, representing 425 members in 43 Ohio counties, and growing.

Too many of Ohio's fathers are unskilled and unsure parents, physically or emotionally absent for their children and families. Confused, broke and operating from a hole where their father was not, a circle of anger, guilt and avoidance leads to deeper separation and despair.

Moms suffer. Not only from a lack of financial support, but from the emotional strain of resentment, low self worth, and the silent humiliation of not being able to provide for the children. Needless to say, the children suffer most, setting the cycle in motion once again.

Despite these odds, despite these conditions – in fact, because of them, fathers flock to programming designed to support them, shattering myths that they aren't interested, don't care or are unwilling. From Hamilton to Muskingum, Defiance to Sandusky and Clermont to Cuyahoga, fathers respond to the faintest sound of support.

In some urban areas of Ohio, as high as 70% of births are to unwed mothers; overall in our state 33%

of all births are so. Custody, social and health supports are provided to mothers in these situations. It is critical, especially for these fragile families, that we provide support services to unmarried, non-custodial fathers to keep them engaged and involved in the lives of their children.

Comprehensive fatherhood services bring a large return on their investment, saving the state dollars by reducing incarceration rates, out of home placements of children, and by lifting families out of poverty while increasing self-sufficiency.

Healthy, engaged fathers are a critical component of any effort to turnaround Ohio. Children are more successful when fathers are actively involved in their lives, and family economic stability will increase as fathers successfully participate in the workforce.

Research confirms that adolescents with a healthy father present are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as early sexual activity, drug or alcohol use and criminal activity.

I, and all the fathers, children and families that I know ask you to be visionary leaders by ensuring that the following recommendations be adopted and passed: 1. Appropriate \$10 million per year in TANF funds in fiscal years '08 and '09 for fatherhood programming throughout the state of Ohio, and for special fatherhood programs within state agencies, such as ODRC and DYS. 2. Funding for the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood and fatherhood programming should be a separate line item in the state budget, ensuring the integrity of funding and activity. 3. The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood should be repopulated and working this spring, so that it is active at the beginning of the fiscal year on July 1, 2007. 4. The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood should be a free-standing entity by the end of calendar year 2007.

Thank you for your consideration of this very important matter.

### Sandi Hoch, Cuyahoga County Board of Health

Mr. Chairman and members of this committee, my name is Sandi Hoch. Thank you for this opportunity to address you today and to share my

passion for addressing barriers to father involvement and for the prevention of too early fathering. I hope, in some small way, that I can help you understand the importance of the Ohio Fatherhood Commission to Ohio's children, and how it can help ensure that all of Ohio's children grow with two loving and committed parents in their lives.

The birth and pregnancy experience present us with a unique opportunity to intervene and make a difference with all fathers, especially teen fathers, and link them to their children for a lifetime.

I worked in a birthing hospital for over 25 years. I saw many teen mothers and fathers or "fragile families". There are so many barriers young fathers face on the road from biological father to successful parent. These young men come to the hospital as late at night as they can to visit, several buddies with them for support. Their bravado is meant to hide their worries about what they can bring to a child's life.

They visit late at night in many instances to avoid seeing their girlfriend's family. In the worst case, they feel judged and are ashamed of how little they can bring to their baby financially. Usually they just feel invisible in hospital and healthcare settings.

It begins in the birthing area where staff often assumes he is not involved, or not interested. It continues in the postpartum or mother-baby unit (think about that name), where no one provides him with discharge instructions on how to take care of their baby, even though they are going home to separate houses and he will have his baby alone, in his care, on a regular basis. He does not go home with information on the importance of putting his baby on her back to sleep, or to "Never Never Shake his Baby", or even how to prepare formula for his baby. No assurances are made that he has a safe crib in his home or that he knows what to do in basic emergency situations.

There isn't even a line on the baby's chart for his name and address. Teen mothers receive all this

information and more. The idea of serving fathers, and especially teen fathers, is radical to healthcare providers. These young men need our help and additional support to develop the vital skills they need to share responsibility for parenting. These young men want to nurture. They often don't know how.

Fatherhood programs like ours in Cuyahoga County, that addresses barriers and provides training and awareness for agencies, hospitals and prenatal providers, and classes for dads are just one small part of comprehensive fatherhood programming.

Programming is already in place in many parts of this state for fathers and for prevention of too early fatherhood. These programs could be replicated. "Boot Camp for New Dads" could be put into place in any birthing hospital in our state, and it is a highly successful example of veteran fathers teaching new dads about birth and babies.

### Al Grimes, Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative

My name is Aldonis Grimes and I am the Fatherhood Coordinator of the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative. I believe that many of you are aware that Cuyahoga County Commissioner, Peter Lawson Jones, a former colleague of yours, was instrumental in the creation of this commission and I bring you his greetings. I want to begin by giving you some information about our county fatherhood initiative.

The Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative began in November of 2004. The goals of the program are to (1) Promote public awareness of the importance of a father's involvement in the lives of their children (2) Provide linkages to other public systems and improve our current service delivery to fathers (3) Fund fatherhood related programs on the county level and (4) hold an annual conference to promote healthy father-child relationships, address the social problems that result from father absence and strategize what we must do, as a community, to ensure that every child has a dad in his or her life.

Here are some of our accomplishments over the past two years. First,

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Ohio Practitioners' Network  
for Fathers and Families

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## HAPPY FATHERS DAY!!

OPNFF wishes a very happy Father's Day to fathers, grandfathers and father figures throughout the State of Ohio. We salute and value your love for your children, your commitment to their well-being and your contribution to your communities. Thank you!

## Testimony on Fatherhood, continued...

*(Continued from page 3)*

our community outreach effort has generated over 6000 calls from fathers to our 24 hour, First Call for Help line. These fathers are seeking services to assist them in becoming better fathers and receive referrals to programs and services.

Secondly, as part of the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative, an audit was conducted of every county department to ensure that fathers are treated fairly when they come to the county for services and included in the process when there are issues involving children. As a result, many of the departments have made lasting changes to encourage father friendly environments and services.

Thirdly, the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative has spent \$3,000,000 dollars on programs and services to help fathers in Cuyahoga County since its inception. These dollars have created programs and services to increase educational, vocational, and employment opportunities for unemployed, underemployed, and formerly incarcerated fathers and to improve the life skills of fathers in areas such as parenting, conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, etc

Fourth, in June of 2005, the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative held our first annual Fatherhood Conference. Over 2400 dads and their children attended the first conference. The second annual Fatherhood Conference held in 2006 attracted over 3,000 fathers and their children to the two-day event.

Involved, responsible fathers can provide children with a positive male role model and can increase the family's stability. Effective fathering has a positive impact upon each family and the community it touches. The Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative is committed to helping all our fathers build productive, meaningful relationships with their children and provide programs and services to assist these fathers.

The goals and objectives of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood are similar to those of the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative and address the same problems. It is critical to the future of our communities and children that we fund the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood adequately. We have seen the difference that the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative has made in the lives of fathers and I believe that the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood will make that same critical positive difference around the state.

### **Diane Karther, Ashland Family and Children First Council**

Honorable members of this committee, I ask that you support funding for the Ohio Fatherhood

*(Continued below)*

Commission in the budget for TANF funds this next fiscal year. Although many children have been raised successfully by mothers only, the influence of father presence or absence on children's development is indisputable. A sampling of the father factor on children's lives includes: **1) Poverty** – children in father-absent homes are 5 x more likely to be poor. **2) Infant Mortality**—infants without a father's name on their birth certificate were 2.3 times more likely to die in the first year of life compared to infants with a father's name on their birth certificate. **3) Child Health & Mental Health**- children who live apart from their fathers are more likely to be diagnosed with asthma and are more obese; toddlers living with single parents or step-parents are more likely to suffer from burns, falls, or other accidents than those living with both biological parents; living in a single-parent home doubles the risk that a child will suffer physical, emotional or educational neglect. **4) Education**- Father involvement in schools is associated with higher children's grades. Even non-custodial fathers' involvement in school influences achievement and is more influential than mother's school involvement. **5) Risk Behaviors**- boys living without their fathers report higher rates of drinking, smoking and score higher on tests for aggression and delinquency; father absence predicts that children are 2x as likely to be involved in early sexual activity and 7x more likely to get pregnant as an adolescent; even after controlling for income, youths in father-absent households have significantly higher odds of incarceration than those in two-parent families; of nearly 14,000 women prisoners, more than half grew up without their father

While many fault fathers for abandoning their families and shunning their responsibilities, the majority of men highly value their role as fathers. I've sat in living rooms talking with young fathers of children in a home-based early literacy program. The fathers regretted dropping out of school and were resigned to work low-wage jobs. These young men expressed a burning desire for a better future for their children. One of them earnestly stated that if his child could have a chance to go to college, he would work extra jobs to help him. Building on these concerns the program staff included the fathers in their referrals to adult education and included more father-friendly children's books and tips for family literacy. Another example was a Head Start father of ten whose school had failed him, who spoke up at a parent meeting to say that if it would help his child adjust to kindergarten he would meet the teacher to learn about the school's expectations.

With the requested \$10 million dollars of TANF funding, the Fatherhood Commission can provide grants to counties to develop evidence-based programs tailored to the needs and interests of fathers. Trained program staff can engage fathers in diverse family services. Also, programs can work with mothers to allow children to maintain their bonds and have positive experiences with their dads even if they live apart.

The timing couldn't be better. In my work with the Ashland County Family and Children First Council, I'm aware that our state has powerful initiatives to strengthen Ohio families. We have an array of intervention and service programs at all phases of childhood. With many, we can multiply their impact with a fathering component. For example, the Help Me Grow program for birth to three-year-olds can nurture fathering skills at the beginning stages of family life. The Governor's new cabinet on early care and education can include a fathering component. Head Start can help fathers understand ways they informally prepare their children for school. Early childhood mental health programs can train fathers to use positive guidance skills. School-based prevention programs to help children make positive choices can coach fathers in the importance of monitoring children's activities. And juvenile diversion programs can reconnect estranged fathers with their children to help them get back on a positive life track.

Ohio has an opportunity to cultivate an untapped resource. What better way is there to raise the standard of living and quality of life for our children than to help fathers remain in the home? What greater impetus is there to help an incarcerated man to straighten out his life than to do it for his son or daughter? The Fatherhood Commission will help fathers regain their self-worth, refine their parenting skills, remain in the workforce and impact their children and grandchildren's future.