

**STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND FATHERHOOD:  
CHILDREN OF FATHERS IN THE CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE SYSTEM PROJECT**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
OF THE  
FINAL EVALUATION REPORT**

**July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2008**

**For submission to the Office of Head Start  
In response to the original Program Announcement No. ACYF/HSB-2003-01  
For grants to develop innovation and improvement projects that address the  
President's Head Start initiatives in the priority area of  
Strengthening Families/Fatherhood**

**June, 2008**

## Introduction

*Strengthening Families and Fatherhood: Children of Fathers in the Criminal Justice System*, otherwise known as *Fathers for Life – A Head Start Father Involvement Model*, developed as an Innovation and Improvement Project (IIP), funded through the Office of Head Start. Fathers for Life – A Head Start Father Involvement Model (referred to in this document as *Fathers for Life*) addressed the priority area of Strengthening Families/Fatherhood of the President’s Head Start initiatives. Office of Head Start first awarded Missouri Department of Social Services Family Support Division (FSD) funding to develop a sound logic model and theory of change during a 9-month Planning Phase. During the 3-year Implementation Phase that followed, the logic model continued to develop as the project entered early stages of implementation. This Executive Summary describes the project model and the evaluation results of its implementation in the state of Missouri, the local communities, and the lives of the participating fathers. Some concluding comments summarize the successes and challenges of the initiative, the lessons learned, and other considerations and suggested next steps.

The project assumed the following: (a) it is important to optimize the development of all young children; (b) young children benefit from the support of fathers, including many fathers who are in the criminal justice system; and (c) society benefits from efforts to strengthen all of its families. The following core components were considered necessary for implementation of the Fathers for Life model: (a) administrative functions of a lead agency and Head Start organization; (b) leadership from state and local stakeholder teams; and (c) an interagency network of service providers to promote program implementation. Effective use of these structural elements was projected to result in public awareness, personnel training, identification and recruitment of fathers, and coordination and delivery of services across agencies, which lead toward improved outcomes for children. Together these features of the Fathers for Life model aimed to build a stronger system to foster the collaboration needed to address the complex issues, develop program features to improve staff competencies, and deliver interventions that promote fathers’ success. It was hoped that all of these efforts would culminate in optimal outcomes for the children.

## Fathers for Life Model and Theory of Change

### Previous Development

The Fathers for Life project built on components of a previous initiative, the Incarcerated Fathers Collaboration Project,<sup>1</sup> completed in September 2003. This project piloted new interventions for fathers incarcerated in two Missouri Correctional Centers. Then, with the support of the Missouri Head Start-State Collaboration Office, local Head Start programs, the Missouri Department of Corrections Division of Probation and Parole, and local Probation and Parole

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<sup>1</sup> Fuger, K.L., Stanfill, A.M., Todd, M.L., Brown, G.E., et al (2003). *Incarcerated Fathers Collaboration Project Evaluation Report*. Kansas City, MO: University of Missouri-Kansas City Institute for Human Development.

districts, extensive data collection occurred during the Planning Phase of this IIP. Findings from the Planning Phase heavily influenced further development of the model.<sup>2</sup>

## Logic Model

The Fathers for Life initiative was instituted to address this program goal: ***Strengthen low income families with children that have an incarcerated father or a father under supervision of the probation or parole system.*** These primary objectives – addressing the needs of children, fathers, families, personnel, and the system – were established to accomplish this:

- ***Objective 1:*** Support children currently enrolled in Head Start/Early Head Start who have incarcerated fathers, and increase referrals of eligible children with incarcerated fathers into Head Start/Early Head Start.
- ***Objective 2:*** Provide parenting support to incarcerated fathers and fathers under supervision of probation/parole whose children are enrolled in or eligible to enroll in Head Start/Early Head Start.
- ***Objective 3:*** Improve family well-being for families of children enrolled in or eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start, whose fathers are incarcerated/on probation or parole.
- ***Objective 4:*** Provide training and resources to Head Start/Early Head Start teachers, service coordinators (e.g., family advocates or family liaisons), and other professionals working with children of incarcerated parents and their families.
- ***Objective 5:*** Develop a statewide plan to address the effects of incarceration and poverty on young children and their families.

This initiative is built on a theory of change at a systemic level to address the prevalent challenge posed by young children having a father in the criminal justice system. The Fathers for Life Logic Model and the associated Theory of Change are presented on the next page.

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<sup>2</sup> Fuger, K. L. (2005). *Strengthening Families and Fatherhood : Children of Incarcerated Fathers Project – Planning phase findings.* Kansas City, MO: UMKC Institute for Human Development.

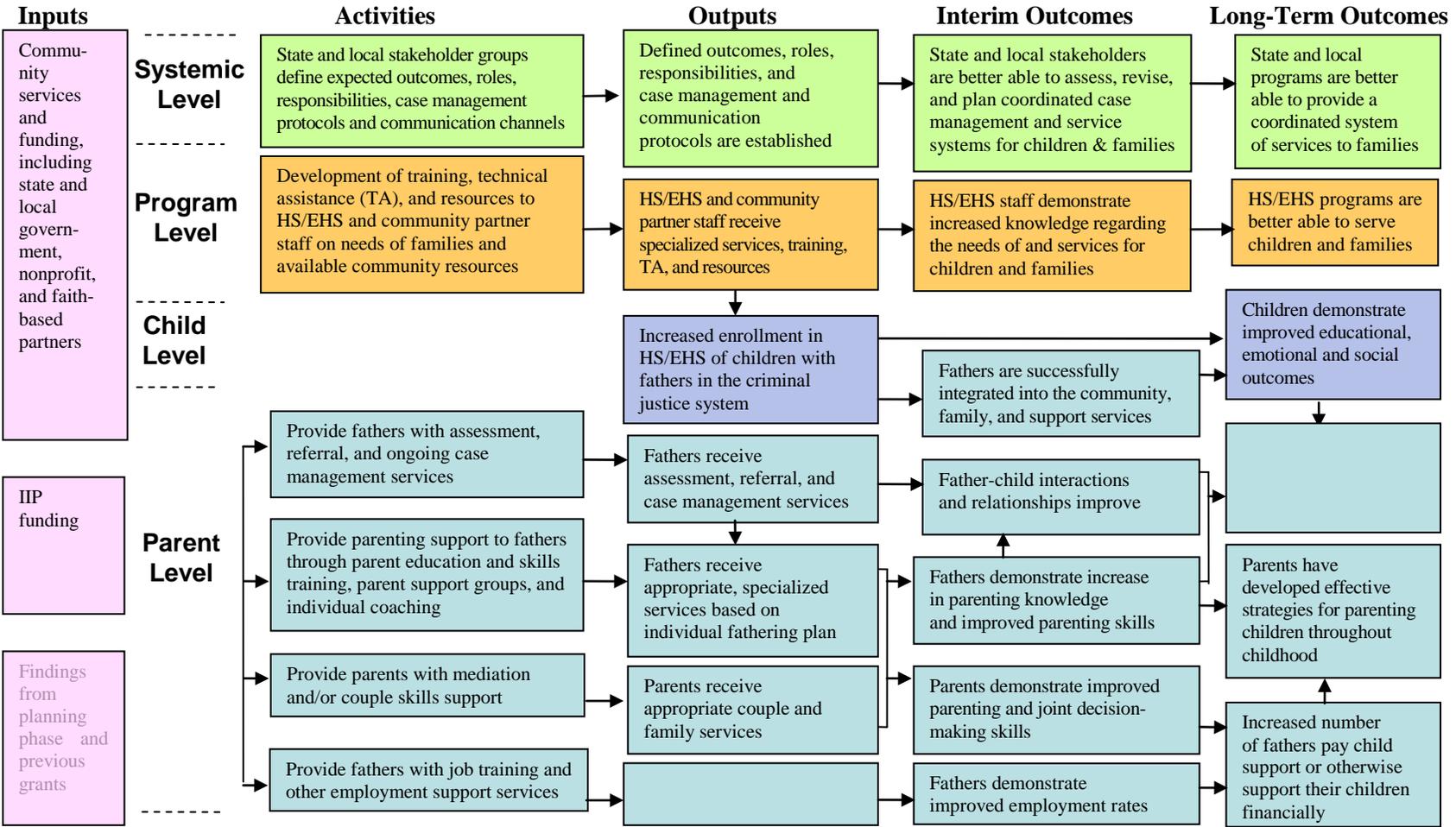
Fuger, K. L., Jenson McDonald, R., Brown, G. E., Reeves, N., & Arnold, J. D. (2005). *Strengthening Families and Fatherhood: Children of Incarcerated Fathers Project evaluation report of planning phase.* Kansas City, MO: UMKC Institute for Human Development.

# FATHERS FOR LIFE

## Strengthening Families and Fatherhood: Children of Fathers in the Criminal Justice System Project

### Missouri Department of Social Services, Jefferson City, Missouri

**Theory of Change:** By providing Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) families with fathers in the criminal justice system with specialized services (e.g., case management, parenting skills training, couples skills support, employment training and other employment support services), families will be strengthened and children will have a decreased risk of experiencing emotional, social, or educational problems.



## Key Model Components

Through the course of the project, the emergent Fathers for Life model was refined. Three elements were considered to be vital for successful implementation, as described below.

**Lead Agency Administration.** As grantee of the IIP funding from Office of Head Start, FSD provided all fiscal oversight and administration of this project. Similarly, at the local level the Head Start grantee in the community filled an administrative role within its service delivery area.

**Leadership of Stakeholder Teams.** An Executive Steering Committee (comprised of the FSD Project Manager, the Missouri Head Start-State Collaboration Office Director, and the Project Evaluator from UMKC-IHD) assisted FSD in project development decisions and participated with FSD in communication with the Office of Head Start. Partner agencies represented on the State Steering Committee further expanded the expertise and leadership needed to guide the developing Fathers for Life initiative. Among the 18 agencies and organizations represented were government entities, statewide professional associations, Head Start agencies, correctional centers, university programs, a statewide faith-based organization, and private service delivery organizations. Stakeholder teams at the local level similarly provided leadership and advisement to the project in their communities.

**Interagency Network for Program Implementation.** An interagency network at the state level contributed expertise for curriculum development and training, recruitment of sites, and coordination of services across agencies. Fathers for Life manuals were developed from these endeavors for replicating the initiative.<sup>3</sup> They will be adapted for widespread availability through the Office of Head Start's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC). Aided by these resources, interagency networks at the local level offered training, identified and recruited participants, informed the public, and coordinated and delivered key services to fathers and families.

**Adaptability of the Fathers for Life Model.** Beyond these core elements, a menu of options was given to communities to consider in their dynamic application of the Fathers for Life model to address circumstances of local families. The following supports were among the options:

- Staffing guidelines;
- Supports for team development;
- Interventions tailored to specific needs of fathers and other family members (e.g., for father support,<sup>4</sup> for parent training,<sup>5</sup> for improved employability,<sup>6</sup> for resolution of co-parenting issues,<sup>7</sup> and for improved family relationships<sup>8</sup>);

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<sup>3</sup> Missouri Department of Social Services. (2008). *Fathers for Life: A Father Involvement Model for Early Head Start/Head Start – Interventions Manual*. Jefferson City, MO: Author.

Missouri Department of Social Services. (2008). *Fathers for Life: A Father Involvement Model for Early Head Start/Head Start – Professional Development Manual*. Jefferson City, MO: Author.

Missouri Department of Social Services. (2008). *Fathers for Life: A Father Involvement Model for Early Head Start/Head Start – Technical Assistance Development Manual*. Jefferson City, MO: Author.

<sup>4</sup> 24/7 Dad™, Long Distance Dads™

<sup>5</sup> Proud Parents, Focus on Fathering and individual parent educator visits, 24/7 Dad™, Long Distance Dads™

<sup>6</sup> Parents Fair Share, Missouri Career Centers

<sup>7</sup> Parenting Apart, Mediation Achieving Results for Children (M.A.R.C.H. mediation)

- Staff training curricula (for cross-training,<sup>9</sup> for understanding the importance of fatherhood,<sup>10</sup> and for using added classroom resources<sup>11</sup>); and
- Suggested resources to help staff in classrooms and in Correctional Centers.

During the piloting of the Fathers for Life model, a graduated, tiered approach for implementation was employed. Two of Missouri's 22 Head Start grantees were selected as Tier 1 sites to receive more intensive support and services beginning in Year 1. A service coordinator in each community (whose salary was funded by the grant) rallied support to initiate Fathers for Life. In the second year, three additional grantees were added as Tier 2 sites. While the service coordination was not built into the funding for these sites, the sites benefited from the enhanced model development, curriculum development, and lessons learned from efforts in the Tier 1 sites. Finally, in the third year all other Missouri Head Start grantees and their delegate agencies were invited to participate as Tier 3 sites. While the efforts of the seven agencies that volunteered are just beginning and are only briefly described in this evaluation report, these sites benefited from finalized materials and the experiences of both Tier 1 and Tier 2 sites. Ultimately the desired outcome is a set of resources to assist other states and other local communities in implementing Fathers for Life with limited technical support.

## **Evaluation of the Fathers for Life Model**

The evaluation findings focused on three aspects of the model:

- Statewide infrastructure development,
- Local program development, and
- Interventions with fathers and families.

To learn about these components, many sources of data were collected, including work plans with Office of Head Start, minutes, rosters, tracking records, progress reports, post-training surveys, focus groups of local teams, and key informant interviews of state and local stakeholders.

### **Evaluation of Statewide Infrastructure Development**

These features at the state level were studied:

- State leadership,
- The State Steering Committee,
- The communication plan used,
- Product development,
- Public awareness, and
- The capacity building that occurred through training of facilitators and staff and technical assistance.

Together this information assisted in the creation of a Missouri profile, intended to be a useful example to assist personnel from other states interested in applying the model.

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<sup>8</sup> *Relationship Enrichment Skills*

<sup>9</sup> *Working Collaboratively for Families*

<sup>10</sup> *Dads Matter*

<sup>11</sup> *Sharing Special Topics Books with Children*

**The Missouri Fathers for Life Profile.** The Fathers for Life project drew upon the strengths of the same grantee and Project Manager as the previous initiative the Incarcerated Fathers Collaboration Project<sup>12</sup> completed in September 2003. This earlier project resulted in the formation of a synergistic interagency Steering Team that maintained solidarity through its consistent focus on the best interests of the children. This underlying focus carried over into the Fathers for Life project, aided by the continued involvement of a number of the same Steering Committee members. Trust that built over the years enabled a core group of leaders to move forward more readily with the current Fathers for Life initiative. Along with this commitment the agency leaders brought both expertise specific to their roles and administrative authority over others within their agency's internal infrastructure. Because each agency had statewide presence, leaders were able to authorize agency participation at the local level and sanction local stakeholder teams.

Consequently, the State Steering Committee's role diminished during implementation once the system was in place. The project's focus shifted from the development of a system to the creation of curricula and products; preparation of coordinators, facilitators, and staff to implement the system; and establishment of teams at the local level. The Steering Committee continued to provide oversight through established communication tools and periodic meetings, and they expressed their interest in the local implementation process and outcomes.

As the current funding ends, the state structure needs to be reshaped for long-term sustainability in the absence of the Department of Social Services as a lead agency. Conversations have begun about the State Steering Committee working in collaboration with the Head Start-State Collaboration Office to regenerate direction for the work and to assume leadership responsibilities. Leadership roles might also be shared with the Missouri Head Start Association. The State Steering Committee is not sustainable without new structure, but the longstanding relationships remain strong. As the 3-year grant ends, opportunities to seek additional funding to continue this work continue to be explored.

## **Evaluation of Local Program Development**

In a pattern similar to the evaluation of the state model development work, these components of the local work were examined through many varied sources of data:

- Leadership from the local Head Start organization,
- Local capacity building through professional development training, and
- Local team development.

Professional development training was delivered either regionally or on site to meet the logistical needs of the participants. Facilitator training on interventions gave facilitators the competencies to conduct group sessions. Cross training sessions for Family Support, Probation and Parole, and Head Start personnel promoted a shared understanding of the work across agencies and fostered professional relationships among agencies. Training on the

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<sup>12</sup> Fuger, K. L., Stanfill, A. M., Todd, M. L., Brown, G. E., Arnold, J.D., Nobles, J., Schurman, E., & Stephens, D. J. (2003). *Incarcerated Fathers Collaboration Project: Evaluation report*. Kansas City, MO: UMKC Institute for Human Development.

importance of fatherhood aimed to improve community, agency, and participant awareness of the pivotal role fathers play in their children's lives. Training for Head Start staff guided personnel to effectively use the classroom books and other materials provided to the sites. A total of 5,552 books were distributed to Head Start programs; 9,321 children and staff gained access to these additional reading materials.

The findings were compiled into a community profile for each of the five Tier 1 and Tier 2 sites. These profiles point to both the commonalities and the variations among communities, from which inferences can be made about the necessary elements of the model and the level of adaptability needed to replicate the model in new sites. While this evaluation did not focus on the activities of the participating correctional institutions, a few details that describe their involvement in the project are cited, as well.

**Tier 1 Sites.** One primary distinction about the Tier 1 sites was the provision of funding to support the coordination of the Fathers for Life project at the local level. The Head Start grantee in each Tier 1 site hired a Fathers for Life Coordinator who led efforts associated with public awareness, community involvement, recruitment and tracking of participants in the Fathers for Life activities and research study, and service coordination.

***Bootheel Region Fathers for Life Profile.*** The six-county area served by Delta Area Economic Opportunities Corporation (DAEOC) is located in the southeast corner of Missouri, often known as the Bootheel. DAEOC is located in Portageville, one of the numerous small towns in the region. This area was selected as a Tier 1 site due to the incidence of fathers in the criminal justice system, widespread poverty, and lack of sufficient resources to meet the needs of the families. Following the convening of the Bootheel Fathers for Life Board and identification of characteristics and needs of the area in Year 1, Board members and project personnel made presentations at 17 types of agencies and organizations across the region to raise awareness of the program and to open pathways for recruiting participants. Promotional materials were also disseminated.

These activities and individual recruitment efforts resulted in the completion of 136 risk assessment/case management intakes, which added 52 research participants over the course of the project. Fathers were referred for employment services, mediation with mothers of their children, and *Relationship Enrichment Skills* training. Relationships established through Board meetings and cross-training sessions aided in helping fathers find services. The Board worked with area correctional facilities to provide intervention services to fathers at transitional housing units, resulting in 21 fathers that graduated from the *Long Distance Dads* program. A work release program was explored but did not come to fruition due to logistical barriers.

Under contract and joint supervision by the Family Support Division, DAEOC hired a Fathers for Life Coordinator to provide case management for fathers in the criminal justice system and their families. He assisted participants in accessing community resources to develop strengths and skills, made presentations at agencies and organizations across the Bootheel region to raise awareness of the program and to open pathways for recruiting participants, and provided administrative leadership to the Bootheel Fathers for Life Board.

Training in parenting skills was provided to 199 men using *24/7 Dad™*, *Proud Parents*, and *Focus on Fathering* curricula. The level of participation ranged from 1 to 99 participants, according to the type of intervention, location, and schedule. Creative means were used to encourage participation such as combining interventions with other activities such as “Family Fun Nights” and “Play Day with Dad at the Park,” as well as enlisting a local Girl Scout troop to assist in the park by playing with the children during the fathers’ participation in the classes.

***Missouri Valley Region Fathers for Life Profile.*** The Missouri Valley Community Action Agency (MVCAA) serves a seven-county area and is the fiscal agent for the Head Start in Marshall and the Early Head Start in Sedalia. Poverty and a high incidence of men on probation or parole contributed to this site’s selection as a Tier 1 site. Additionally, the Head Start Director in Marshall expressed a strong desire to participate in order to enhance the Head Start services to families and children through this project. The 13-member Fathers for Life Advisory Council provided project leadership for this region.

A Fathers for Life Coordinator was hired by MVCAA to coordinate the services of the project in this location. His responsibilities in this region were the same as the responsibilities of the other Fathers for Life Coordinator in the Bootheel Region.

As with the Bootheel region, the Fathers for Life Coordinator and members of the Board made presentations to 14 types of organizations across in each district of the Missouri Valley region to raise public awareness of the program and to recruit participants. Over the course of the project, risk assessment/case management intake was completed with 73 men, with 28 also participating in the research study. A total of 111 fathers participated in parent training sessions. Three men were referred for employment services, 13 men were referred to M.A.R.C.H. Mediation, and 2 fathers were referred to *Relationship Enrichment Skills* training.

**Tier 2 Sites.** By the second year of the project, the Project Manager and State Steering Committee proceeded to implement Fathers for Life in three additional sites by building on the state infrastructure and the lessons learned in Tier 1 sites. During the first year a number of stakeholders from Tier 2 (and Tier 3) were already identified and included in coordinator or facilitator training to expedite implementation. Training curricula and first drafts of technical assistance materials were used to assist the Tier 2 sites in their local efforts. Thus, early on, the statewide capacity for program implementation was built, and communities were prepared for systemic expansion of the Fathers for Life program. Tier 2 sites, however, did not receive funding for Fathers for Life coordination. These sites needed to determine existing personnel to incorporate these roles into their job duties.

***St. Louis City Fathers for Life Profile.*** Grace Hill Settlement House is a community agency and Head Start grantee in the urban core of the City of St. Louis, with nine center locations and one partnering center. This site was selected because it represented a community where the challenges of reentry are exacerbated by significant generational poverty and high crime. The concentration of fathers in the criminal justice system is high for this small geographic region.

Seven members, including representatives from the four key partner agencies, comprised the Fathers for Life Steering Committee. They believed that they made significant progress

toward communicating and addressing barriers to their collaborative work during the first year of their participation (Year 2 of the project).

Grace Hill Settlement House built the Fathers for Life coordination roles into the position of The Partnership Compliance Specialist. Some of his primary responsibilities included providing leadership to the team, recruiting participants, service coordination, and coordinating interventions.

To raise public awareness and facilitate recruitment, grant project staff, the Fathers for Life Coordinator, and/or the Parents Fair Share Coordinator introduced the project to seven agencies and organizations in the community. The Steering Team reviewed lists from different sources, including one provided by a Presiding Judge from the local drug court, to identify potential participants. These activities and individual recruitment efforts resulted in the completion of risk assessment and case management intake with 19 fathers in the criminal justice system, gaining 2 research participants during the year. Thirty-six fathers were referred for employment services, and six accessed these services. Thirty-one fathers participated in *24/7 Dad<sup>TM</sup>* training, and 99 fathers attended *Proud Parents* group sessions. This is the only Tier 2 site that conducted *Dads Matter* training sessions for personnel, with attendance of 72 staff members from the Grace Hill Settlement House Head Start program. Materials to guide staff and parents in helping the children were also made available through placement of 1,108 books in Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms.

***Park Hills Fathers for Life Profile.*** East Missouri Action Agency (EMAA) is a community action agency and the Head Start grantee serving eight mainly rural counties in east central Missouri, operating 10 Head Start centers. Communities in this region face significant economic and social challenges due to high unemployment and poverty. There are four adult correctional facilities located in the region with several others in neighboring counties. A local Steering Team of seven members provided leadership to the project; Head Start, Child Support, Corrections, and Children's Division were well-represented on the team.

Significant challenges for implementing Father for Life in this region were related to the capacity of the agency to implement a program of this scope without additional resources. EMAA determined that Fathers for Life coordination would be distributed among the Head Start Family Advocates serving as case managers, although their existing workloads made it difficult to accommodate additional families beyond Head Start enrollees. Agency personnel also reported that they believed the interventions required too much investment from fathers and their families.

In consideration of these limitations, the Steering Team chose to focus their efforts in two counties, Washington and St. Francois. Presentations were made to three organizations, and 13 fathers received intervention services. A total of 585 books were also placed in the Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms within this region to aid teachers, children, families, and fathers.

***St. Joseph Fathers for Life Profile.*** The Community Action Partnership of St. Joseph (CAPStJo) is the Head Start grantee serving four counties in northwest Missouri. The agency operates 12 child care centers and partners with 2 additional centers to offer Head

Start services in the region. During the first year, CAPStJo identified a staff member to coordinate the Fathers for Life program in the area as part of her position as the Head Start Director. She participated in coordinator and facilitator training, began rallying support for the project, and convened the local stakeholder team. Shortly thereafter, however, she accepted employment at another agency. The grantee experienced difficulties replacing her role on this project at that time.

The 11-member stakeholder team in St. Joseph held two energizing meetings before the Head Start agency personnel changes interrupted further development of the team. In addition to changes in agency leadership, consensus about the potential effectiveness of such programs was not achieved among key agencies, further limiting the implementation of the Fathers for Life program in St. Joseph.

However, some interventions for fathers and families were accomplished prior to the personnel changes that stalled implementation. Two participants received *24/7 Dad™* training, and materials were made available to fathers and families through 483 books being placed in Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms.

### **Tier 3 Sites**

All remaining Head Start grantees and their delegate agencies were given the opportunity to participate in the Fathers for Life project at the Tier 3 level. The following seven sites expressed an interest in participating in Fathers for Life at the Tier 3 level beginning in the final year of the 3-year project:

- Children's Therapy Center Early Head Start, Sedalia;
- YMCA of Greater Kansas City (a delegate agency of the Mid-America Head Start);
- Independence School District (a delegate agency of the Mid-America Head Start);
- Ozark Area Community Action Agency Head Start, Springfield;
- Douglass Community Services Head Start, Hannibal;
- Northeast Missouri Community Action Agency Head Start, Kirksville; and
- South Central Missouri Community Action Agency Head Start, Winona.

In October 2007, project staff members visited each of the sites to discuss their implementation of the project in their communities. They provided project manuals, books, and other resources to the sites. At the Tier 3 level, leaders at each site self-selected the components of the Fathers for Life program that they believed would best meet the needs of their community and would be feasible for them to implement. Based on these decisions, the Project Manager provided additional resources associated with the components they intended to deliver and enlisted key personnel in training for the interventions that were selected.

Tier 3 sites were given two primary responsibilities for their participation in the project. First, each site was required to track the time and location of each intervention offered, along with the number of participants. These data were to be submitted on a monthly reporting form. Second, each site was required to cooperate with evaluation efforts to record their experiences in implementing the project.

The Project Manager intends to conduct an exit interview with leaders from each of the Tier 3 sites during the 6-month extension of the contract. More information will become available at that time concerning the implementation efforts in the Tier 3 sites.

## **Correctional Institutions**

The Boonville and Algoa Correctional Centers participated in Fathers for Life through state and local steering team representation and on-site Fathers for Life activities. *Focus on Fathering* classes and individual father visits were led by parent educators from the Parents as Teachers program of the local school districts. Total attendance at *Focus on Fathering* group sessions was 1,519, with 908 in attendance at sessions in Algoa and 611 at sessions in Boonville. Likewise, 578 individual Parents as Teacher visits with fathers occurred, including 430 at Algoa and 148 at Boonville.<sup>13</sup> Parent educator visits were initially conducted weekly in Boonville, but tapered off to once per month as the project approached completion. The Algoa Correctional Center also offered *Long Distance Dads™* training and support group sessions, with session attendance of 166 and a total of 77 fathers participating (unduplicated). The Algoa facility also chose to designate Friday as Parent Education Day to highlight the parent education opportunities.

The Fathers for Life project provided two resource books to each State Correctional Center library (Boonville, Algoa, and 17 other facilities).<sup>14</sup> Over the course of the project these books were placed in prison libraries, providing access to parenting materials for approximately 20,674 incarcerated fathers, along with corrections staff members and family members.

Near completion of the Fathers for Life project, improvements were made to the visitation areas in the Boonville and Algoa facilities to make the settings more appropriate for children and more conducive for cultivating the father/child relationship. Floor plans and recommended materials developed during the Incarcerated Fathers Collaboration Project were adapted to meet the needs of these two institutions. These areas are reportedly widely used and appreciated by fathers and family members.

Stakeholders who participated in key informant interviews or focus groups emphasized the importance of having fatherhood interventions on site at correctional institutions. These two aspects of service delivery were deemed important to consider in gauging the success of Fathers for Life in prisons: (a) the facilitator's skill in gaining inmates' acceptance, and (b) the consistency of service delivery. The Fathers for Life project – through Steering Committee representation by Corrections staff, parent training, resource materials, and enhanced visitation areas - was reported to have made significant contributions at the participating facilities and throughout the Missouri Corrections system.

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<sup>13</sup> This count is duplicative; fathers could attend more than one group or individual session; this evaluation did not track participation of individual inmates.

<sup>14</sup> *Dads at a Distance: An Activities Handbook for Strengthening Long Distance Relationships*, by National Institute for Building Long Distance Relationships, and *Parenting from a Distance: Your Rights and Responsibilities*, by Jan Walker.

## Evaluation of Interventions with Fathers and their Families and Children

In addition to the other multiple sources of evaluation data, fathers' responses to these instruments were incorporated in the findings: pre- and post-surveys of research participants, intake data, and pre/post administrations of *The Fathering Inventory*, *The Fathering Skills Survey*, the *Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory-2 (AAPI-2)*, and the *Parenting Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF)*. Anonymous post-intervention surveys completed by all participants (including fathers that were not part of the study and not necessarily on probation/parole) were also included.

These aspects of interventions with fathers were studied:

- Building a support team and
- Capacity building through training and support.

Among the training/support opportunities were the *24/7 Dad™* father training and support group, the *Focus on Fathering* parent training series, *Proud Parents* session about fathers' rights and responsibilities, assistance at Missouri Career Centers in gaining training/employment, and resources in Head Start classrooms to help children cope with issues they face related to the father's involvement in the criminal justice system.

The analysis of the additional survey data resulted in the development of profiles of the fathers upon entry in the Fathers for Life project, as well as a summary of outcomes for the fathers that were assessed initially and at discharge from the program.

**Father Profiles.** Of 230 men who received case management in Fathers for Life, 76 enrolled in the research study. Most were referred through their Probation and Parole Office. Following is information describing them:<sup>15</sup>

- The **racial distribution** of the sample was 55% white, 42% African-American, 1% American Indian, and 1% bi-racial (white and African American).
- No participants identified themselves as **Hispanic** or Latino, and all indicated that English was the primary language spoken in their home.
- Fathers' **ages** ranged up to 49 years and averaged 28 years at the time of enrollment.
- Sixty-five percent of the men had never been married, 18% were married, 16% were separated, and 1% had another **marital status**.
- With regard to their highest level of **education**; 60% had graduated from high school or completed a GED program. Twelve that graduated had also received additional vocational or college education.
- **Housing**: while 47% rented a house or apartment, 36% lived with relatives, 10% lived with friends, 4% owned their own home or apartment, and 3% lived in transitional housing. Ninety percent considered this housing situation to be permanent.
- **Employment**: at enrollment in Fathers for Life, 40% were employed. Of the 30 employed men, 63% described this work as full-time, 23% as part-time, 3% as seasonal, and 10% as sporadic. Forty-seven fathers (71%) reported that they were current seeking a job. They cited these issues as affecting their employment: being on probation or parole (56%), accessing transportation (54%), limited education (16%), and limited job skills (15%).

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<sup>15</sup> Sample size at Time 1 varies from 66-76 for the different assessment measures.

- **Custody status:** 50 of the 73 men were probation, 15 were on parole, 5 were on probation and parole, and 3 fathers had another status.
- All but 8 of 73 fathers had **court-ordered conditions:** drug or alcohol counseling (42%), parenting classes (14%), anger management classes (11%), and other classes or conditions (19%).
- Sixty-five percent of the 76 fathers reported that they were currently paying **child support**; of the 49 fathers that pay child support, 43% reported making regular payments. According to 73 fathers, most (73%) had child support arrearages, and 83% of the 53 with this debt are reportedly making payments on these arrearages.
- The fathers described **their children**, including the number of children, their ages, and their gender. The 76 men were fathers of 180 minor children – 38% with 1 child, 24% with 2 children, 17% with 3 children, 9% with 4 children, and 12% with 5 or more children. One hundred eighteen of the children were less than 6 years of age. The ages of minor children averaged 4.8 years; they were equally distributed among males and females.
- **Child residence:** 29 of the fathers stated that at least one of their minor children lived with them most of the time. When considering all 177 children for whom residence information was known, 30% of the children reportedly lived with the father most of the time, while 70% lived with someone else most of the time.
- For the most part, fathers described meaningful **relationships with their youngest child** and an expectation of high involvement.
- **Child contact:** over half of 70 fathers (53%) reported seeing their youngest child in person at least once a week, while 20% saw the child at least once a month, 6% saw the child less than monthly contact, and 21% had no face-to-face contact, which was usually because the child’s mother did not allow contact.
- The **relationship with the mother of the youngest child** varied greatly. Some described effective communication, successful problem-solving encounters, and minimal conflict; others described much more strained communication, difficulty resolving co-parenting problems, and extensive conflict; and yet others described relationships somewhere between the extremes along this continuum.
- The highest percentages of fathers expressed **difficulties meeting their own needs** in these areas: transportation (33%), legal assistance (32%), and health insurance (18%).
- The highest percentages reported **needs in these areas pertaining to their father role:** Seeing their child more often (64%), paying child support (63%), improving their parenting skills (52%), improving relationships with their child’s mother (43%), solving parenting issues better with their child’s mother (43%), and learning more about child development (40%).
- While 29% of fathers did not seek **help from community agencies**, some accessed support from such organizations as the following: social service agencies (21%), Head Start (18%), Workforce Development (15%), church (11%), school district (10%), and Community Action agency (10%).
- The highest percentages of participants selected from a list these types of **supports that they considered to be helpful** to fathers: get on the right track (59%), prepare for and find a job (52%), and access more education and training (47%).
- Among supports being developed by the Fathers for Life, the highest percentages of men expressed an interest in these: employment support (44%), 24/7 Dad<sup>TM</sup>, (42%), family mediation (30%), and special topics father classes (28%).

Three Likert scale instruments measured **key father attributes**:

- *The Fathering Inventory*, assesses a father's attitudes and opinions about his identity and his roles with his children and family;
- *The Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2)*, measuring five parenting attributes; and
- *The Parenting Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF)*, measuring three attributes of parental stress. Each assessment was administered at intake and again at completion of participation in the Fathers for Life program.

The 74 fathers expressed a wide variety of **opinions and attitudes about their father role**.

On average, 73 fathers initially demonstrated the following **parenting characteristics**:

- More appropriate expectations for children than many in the general population (65<sup>th</sup> percentile);
- Moderately low nurturance and empathy for children (31<sup>st</sup> percentile);
- Views about corporal punishment characteristic of the general population (50<sup>th</sup> percentile);
- Tendencies that match the general population with regard to adult expectations of their roles with children (46<sup>th</sup> percentile); and
- Difficulties viewing children with power as a threat and unrealistic expectations for unquestioning obedience (28<sup>th</sup> percentile).

Mean initial scores of 66 fathers on the Total Stress scale at the 77<sup>th</sup> percentile indicated moderately high **parenting stress** associated with the parenting role, on average. They ranked at the 74<sup>th</sup>, 77<sup>th</sup>, and 60<sup>th</sup> percentile on the respective subscales of Parental Distress, Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction, and Difficult Child.

**Key Informant Interview and Focus Group Findings.** Focus groups of stakeholder teams and interviews of stakeholders involved in the Fathers for Life project added to the data describing fathers' outcomes. Unless otherwise noted, generalizations in this section were commonly shared across sites. These characteristics were described:

- **Negative Family History.** Many of the men come from homes where the father was absent or did not serve as a good role model, resulting in a lack of knowledge about how to be a good parent. Such negative childhood experiences were sometimes reflected in the father's current family relationships. A negative relationship with the child's mother often worsened with incarceration. Fathers often had inconsistent contact with their children, although they generally wanted to have a relationship with them.
- **Life Skills and Organizational Skills.** Often fathers had not cultivated the skills to successfully address their responsibilities and supervision conditions upon release. One informant stated, *Most of these guys have never had anything positive happen to them. They've never achieved anything whether it's been in life or with their families.*
- **Employment Barriers.** When potential employers learned of drug-related violations, they often failed to hire the ex-offender. Employers were also known to hesitate to hire an ex-offender after hearing of instances in which men got fired to collect unemployment benefits or got hurt to collect Workman's Compensation.

- **Child Support Barriers.** Fathers reportedly accrued significant arrearages to their child support by the time they were released; they were required to make regular payments on both their current amounts and arrearages or run the risk of being returned to prison. One focus group member described this situation: *These men are in their 30's and 40's and had fathered 3 or 4 children [who] are 16 to 30 years old. Over the years, they have accrued \$40,000 to \$60,000 of child support in arrears. At this stage in life, they are getting their first stable job....* Many men lack education and work experience to earn a livable wage. If they become employed, their wages are garnished to pay child support, court costs, and other fines. With the cost of transportation and housing, there is little incentive for them to get a job.

## Father Outcomes

### Change from Pre-Survey to Post-Survey Administration

A non-experimental pre/post design was employed in this study of a treatment group only. A number of variables were examined for change from the time of the pre-survey to the time of the post-survey (at discharge or the end of the study). These components were compared for the 31-32 men that completed the assessment at both Time 1 and Time 2. Among the analyses conducted were Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests, *t*-tests, analyses of variance, and *Chi*-square cross-tabulations.

Following are areas in which **changes were seen from pre- to post-surveys** of participating fathers:

- A smaller percentage needed help to find a job by Time 2 (61% to 29%).
- A smaller percentage desired employment support services (71% to 45%).
- A smaller percentage was involved with Workforce Development (19% to 6%).
- A smaller percentage needed help paying child support (71% to 42%).
- Fathers perceived improved communication, increased ease in resolving parenting issues together, and reduced conflict with the mother of their children.
- A smaller percentage indicated needs in these areas to assist them in filling their father role: help paying child support, enhanced parenting skills, and more child development information.
- On average, fathers valued the roles of both parents in children's lives to a greater degree.
- Fathers tended to understand to a greater degree that men do not always need to be strong.
- Fathers tended to understand to a greater degree that laying down the law does not necessarily get children's respect.
- Fathers tended to value children's self-expression and problem-solving skills more.

At both time periods, wide variation was seen in the amount of time fathers spent with their youngest child. Men's parenting stress remained above the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile at both time periods (n=26). The percentages of post-survey respondents with changed probation or parole status did not change substantially. However, by the time of discharge from Fathers for Life, 22% of 59 fathers enrolled in the research study were known to be incarcerated.

## Discussion and Implications

### Successes

Many aspects of the Fathers for Life project showed great promise, especially the following:

- Collaborative relationships occurred at the state level among representatives from Head Start, Probation/Parole, Family Support Division, Parents as Teachers, Workforce Development, family members, nonprofit agencies, and faith-based partners.
- The *Technical Assistance Manual*, *Interventions Manual*, and *Professional Development Manual* were created to summarize the project. The products will be disseminated through the Office of Head Start's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC).<sup>16</sup>
- The project was mobilized at the local and regional level, where invested partners made decisions within their own communities through cohesive stakeholder teams and flexible adaptations of the interventions to address local needs.
- The majority of referrals originated from Probation and Parole, suggesting effective partnership between Head Start and Corrections.
- Men perceived that their relationships with the mothers of their children improved during their participation.
- Father participants in the various Fathers for Life curricula rated them as very helpful and stated that they planned to use the information often. They saw improvements in their parenting skills and their communication with the mother of their children.

### Challenges

A number of challenges were identified during project implementation. These primary issues surfaced:

- While building Fathers for Life Coordinator positions into Head Start job descriptions effectively grounded the program within Head Start, Head Start personnel believed that implementation without designated funding for these positions would be challenging due to other mandated requirements. It is unclear whether redistribution of tasks, rather than increased staffing, could resolve this issue.
- While some initial steps were taken to consolidate service coordination, further refinement is needed in the model regarding this feature. Service coordination was compounded by the added case management to enforce court orders and stipulations of Probation/Parole and child support.
- A better determination of the skill-set needed to direct a local Fathers for Life initiative and to coordinate services with fathers would strengthen this model.

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<sup>16</sup> Missouri Department of Social Services. (2008). *Fathers for Life: A Father Involvement Model for Early Head Start/Head Start – Interventions Manual*. Jefferson City, MO: Author.

Missouri Department of Social Services. (2008). *Fathers for Life: A Father Involvement Model for Early Head Start/Head Start – Professional Development Manual*. Jefferson City, MO: Author.

Missouri Department of Social Services. (2008). *Fathers for Life: A Father Involvement Model for Early Head Start/Head Start – Technical Assistance Development Manual*. Jefferson City, MO: Author.

- Other challenges fathers faced upon reentry to the community hindered their participation in Fathers for Life.
- Some stakeholders believed that ex-offenders feared losing street credibility by pursuing a pro-social lifestyle that included nurturing their children. Financial pressures associated with child support and living costs reportedly reduced men's incentives to find legal employment.

## **Lessons Learned**

During the development of the Fathers for Life project in Missouri, stakeholders documented these lessons learned:

- A statewide approach that allowed flexibility at the local level built both structural integrity and adaptability to accommodate state and community circumstances.
- Using a tiered approach to implement the model with gradual reduction of project support maximized the utilization of resources and promoted sustainable solutions beyond the grant funding.
- The structures and values of Head Start were consistent with the Fathers for Life model; both hold a strengths-based view of the child in context of family and community. Building the model into Head Start structures strengthened the potential for sustainability and replicability.
- Building on the partnerships and resources of previous successful initiatives propelled this project forward.

## **Other Considerations**

Following are a few suggestions that were made during this project, which are worthy of further consideration:

- Establish teams more fully and orient staff to Fathers for Life more thoroughly before attempting to recruit participants or make interagency referrals.
- Consider enlisting Probation/Parole and Workforce Development personnel to serve on Head Start Policy Councils.
- Develop a mentorship program for fathers.
- Enlist stronger involvement of the faith community to support fathers during reentry.
- Consider applying this model to mothers in the criminal justice system, juvenile parents, and kinship caregivers of children with incarcerated parents.
- Determine the program components that could be presented while fathers are still incarcerated and preparing to transition into the community.
- Find new ways to foster active participation of parents or grandparents on local teams.
- Address the challenges of staff turnover to prevent gaps in support.

## Next Steps

The Executive Steering Committee and other key local and state partners met to consider next steps. They reached consensus that these next steps be proposed:

- Build partnerships within the Region VII Head Start network to replicate the Fathers for Life model in Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas, thereby benefiting more families and enhancing the adaptability of the model to different state infrastructures and locales.
- Rebuild state leadership in Missouri for long-term sustainability of the Fathers for Life model, to include key roles for the Missouri Head Start Association and the Missouri Head Start-State Collaboration Office. Explore common interests with the Early Childhood Comprehensive System work and the Missouri Re-Entry Project. Expand statewide to involve all 22 Head Start grantees and their communities. Continue to evaluate locally implemented interventions with fathers.
- Translate the Fathers for Life resources into Spanish and determine appropriate supplemental materials in Spanish.
- Incorporate Fathers for Life curricula into a well-indexed compilation of other fatherhood materials to promote more widespread usage of all these resources.
- Adapt the Fathers for Life resource manuals for application in Correctional Centers to better prepare fathers for reentry and fulfillment of their parenting responsibilities.

These steps are consistent with the evaluation findings in this report. Great strides were made at the state level, the community level, and the service delivery level during this 3-year period. Each of these suggested next steps is built on the common vision of what is perceived to be good for families and young children, which continued to be a driving, unifying force of the stakeholders involved in the Fathers for Life project.