

**A Rapid Ethnographic Assessment of
Programs & Services (REAPS) for Fathers
in Stark County, Ohio**

Prepared By:



**National
Fatherhood
Initiative[®]**

www.fatherhood.org

With Contributions From:

Public Strategies, Inc.
Stark County Community Action Agency

An Initiative of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood

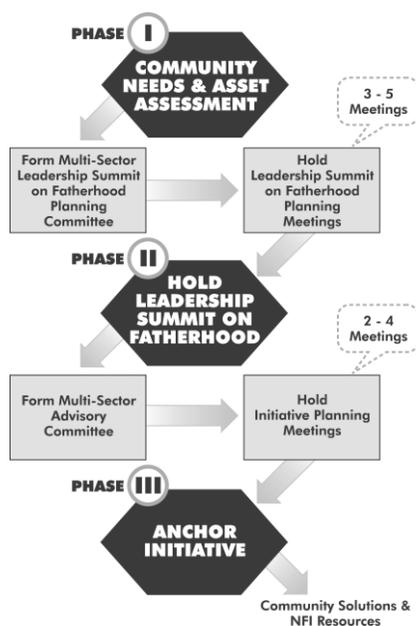
April 2011

Introduction

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood (OCF) has partnered with National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) in 2011 to assist 12 Ohio counties mobilize around responsible fatherhood. Stark County was one of the 12 counties selected to participate in this Community Mobilization Initiative.

NFI's Community Mobilization Approach (CMA), which is diagrammed in Figure 1 below, consists of 3 phases: (1) a needs and assets assessment of the counties' abilities to promote responsible fatherhood; (2) a Leadership Summit on Fatherhood attended by county leaders; and (3) implementing an action plan for a fatherhood initiative generated by a broad cross-section of county sectors.

Figure 1



This report is the culmination of Phase 1 of this ongoing initiative in Stark County.

Secondary Data on Fatherhood

According to 2009 U.S. Census Bureau data, over 24 million children live apart from

their biological fathers. That is 1 out of every 3 (33%) children in America. Nearly 2 in 3 (64%) African American children live in father-absent homes. One in three (34%) Hispanic children, and 1 in 4 (25%) white children live in father-absent homes. In 1960, only 11% of children lived in father-absent homes.

Children who live absent their biological fathers are, on average, at least two to three times more likely to be poor, to use drugs, to experience educational, health, emotional and behavioral problems, to be victims of child abuse, and to engage in criminal behavior than their peers who live with their married, biological (or adoptive) parents.¹

The annual cost of father absence in America is staggering. The Federal Government spent at least \$99.8 billion providing assistance to father-absent homes in 2006. This is a conservative estimate; it does not include federal benefit programs for communities, indirect costs related to poor outcomes of children from father-absent homes, and long-term costs in reduced tax income from low-earning single-parent families.²

In Ohio, father absence is at 25.7% or 7.3% lower than the national average and Stark County ranks about even with the state average at 26.5%. Stark County's largest city, Canton, is significantly higher at 49.5%.³

There's no doubt that father absence and poverty are strongly related. Data shows that it's more difficult to get fathers to provide financial support when they are not married to the mother and when they lack an emotional connection to their children. Children in father-absent homes are five times more likely to be poor. In 2002, 7.8% of children in married-couple families were living in poverty, compared to 38.4 %

¹ National Fatherhood Initiative, 2007. *Father Facts Fifth Edition*.

² Nock, Steven L., and Einolf, Christopher J. 2008. "The One Hundred Billion Dollar Man."

³ 2005-2009 American Community Survey

percent of children in female-householder families.⁴ 19.4% of all children in Stark County in 2009 were living in poverty compared to 19% statewide.⁵ Stark County's unemployment rate of 10.7% ranked 40th highest out of 88 counties in Ohio.⁶

Stark County's teen birth rate (age 15-19) of 38 births per 1000⁷ is consistent with the state and national average of 41 per 1000.⁸ There is a clear connection between father absence and teen pregnancy since a father's behavior and values uniquely influence a girl's expectations about boyfriends and husbands. In addition, boys learn from their fathers what kind of husband and father they should become and how to treat girls and women. Research shows that boys raised in single-mother homes are at a higher risk of teen pregnancy⁹ and teenage girls without fathers were twice as likely to be involved in early sexual activity and seven times more likely to get pregnant as other adolescents.¹⁰

Children who grow up without their fathers are at greatest risk for child abuse. In fact, the presence of a child's father in the home lowers the likelihood that a child will be abused. Compared to living with both parents, living in a single-parent home doubles the risk that a child will suffer physical, emotional, or educational

neglect.¹¹ There were 3,241 new allegations of child abuse/neglect in Stark County in 2007.¹² There were 12 children per 1,000 who were abused or neglected in Stark County in 2006. That is 2 more children higher per 1,000 than the state rate.

Father Absence
National: 33%
Ohio: 26%
Stark County: 26.5%
Canton: 49.5%
Teen Birth Rate (per 1000)
National: 41
State: 41
Stark County: 38
Children Abused or Neglected (per 1000)
Ohio: 10
Stark County: 12
Adolescents Adjudicated for Felonies (per 1000)
Ohio: 14
Stark County: 14

There were also 14 adolescents per 1,000 in Stark County who were adjudicated for felonies in 2006.¹³ Often, the "story behind the story" of a violent crime committed in America reveals a "crime of fatherlessness." In other words, children who grow up without the presence of an involved, responsible, and committed father are significantly more likely to engage in criminal activity. Adolescents who live in single-parent families were significantly more likely to commit status, property, or person delinquency when compared to adolescents living in two-parent families. This was consistent even for controlling for sex,

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Children's Living Arrangements and Characteristics: March 2002, P200-547, Table C8. Washington D.C.: GPO, 2003.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2009

⁶ Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Ranking Report, February 2011.

⁷ Source URL: <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/node/2199/14>.

⁸ Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics. VitalsStats. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/vitalstats.htm>. Accessed 4/15/2011.

⁹ Teachman, Jay D. "The Childhood Living Arrangements of Children and the Characteristics of Their Marriages." Journal of Family Issues 25 (January 2004):86-111.

¹⁰ Ellis, Bruce J., John E. Bates, Kenneth A. Dodge, David M. Ferguson, L. John Horwood, Gregory S. Pettit, and Lianne Woodward. "Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy?" Child Development 74 (May/June 2003): 801-821.

¹¹ America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being. Table SPECIAL1. Washington D.C.: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1997.

¹² Ohio PCSAO Factbook, 2007.

¹³ Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. County Fact Sheet Data, 2008.

minority group status, and the mother's education (as a proxy for income).¹⁴

Education is another critical issue that father absence affects. Students living in biological father-absent homes are twice as likely to repeat a grade in school; 10% of children living with both parents have ever repeated a grade, compared to 20% of children in stepfather families and 18% in mother-only families.¹⁵ Stark County experiences an average of 13% school dropout rate as compared to the state average of 17%. Even though data indicates Stark County has a significantly lower high school graduation rate (42%) than the states average (87%),¹⁶ we were unable to gather concrete data as to the actual number of fatherless homes with children in school. But antidotal data from elementary, middle school, and high school principals indicated the majority of children with academic challenges such as; school retention; dropout; truancy; multi-discipline's; and functioning below grade level come from single parent homes, the majority of which are father absent homes.

Stark County Leader Focus Group Results

There were fourteen focus group participants in addition to representatives from the county lead agency. These individuals represented a broad cross section of the community and had unique experiences working with fathers and families. Participants represented the following organizations/community sectors (Note: some sectors were represented by more than one individual):

- American Rescue Workers
- Canton City Council
- Canton City Health Department

¹⁴ Anderson, Amy L. "Individual and contextual influences on delinquency: the role of the single-parent family." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 30 (November 2002): 575-587.

¹⁵ Nord, Christine Winquist, and Jerry West. *Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools by Family Type and Resident Status*. (NCES 2001-032). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Studies, 2001.

¹⁶ Stark County, Ohio Selected Social Characteristics in the United States:2005-2009. Page 2 of 4.

- Early Childhood Resource Center
- Fatherhood program facilitator
- Faith Based Ministry
- Middle School Principal
- Sisters of Charity
- Stark County Commissioner
- Stark County Jobs and Family Services/Child Support Enforcement Agency
- Stark County Department of Jobs and Family Services/Children's Services
- Stark Metro Narcotics Agent
- Stark Social Workers Network

Most participants agreed that there is a need to address father absence in Stark County. Some were knowledgeable of the interplay of father presence or absence and outcomes related to child well being. The majority had personal experience working with children from father absent homes or with fathers who were facing considerable challenges to being actively present in their children's lives. As with other counties, it was acknowledged that some dads were acting in irresponsible ways but that there was much that could be done to assist men who want to be involved in their children's lives. Participants expressed discouragement over the small number of men who took advantage of existing services available, but were optimistic that collaborative efforts structured around a county-wide plan would have meaningful impacts. The following needs were identified as pressing in relation to father absence:

- For many men and women father absence is a generational issue. Young parents who grew up without a dad have little modeling, experience or expectation that the father will be an intimate part of his child's life
- Family services across sectors need to be more father-friendly
- Communities are lacking mentors or "social fathers"
- High unemployment is a significant reason some men are not involved
- Services for and community acceptance of ex-offenders needs to improve

- Despite existing policies and positive efforts to the contrary, Child Support is often seen as punitive and from the parent's perspective tied to visitation issues
- Overall men don't trust the system that is in place to help them. Those who do seek assistance have difficulty navigating the system
- There is a lack of legal aid
- There is a dearth of public housing opportunities for men
- Child Support Enforcement employment assistance program (1115 waiver)
- Kid's Summits
- Multiple Church-based programs
- Walk to School Day
- Donuts with Dads
- Family Court programs of non-custodial parents
- Pro Football Hall of Fame Father's Day activities
- Fishing Rodeo

After discussing a variety of needs related to father absence, the participants agreed that the most pressing were related to helping men establish and maintain healthy relationships with the mother(s) of their children. Secondly, that there is a need to create a more father-friendly culture across service providers and third, there is a need for greater community awareness about the importance of father involvement.

The participants felt that the fathers most in need were those that want to be involved. These fathers may be denied access to their children by the child's mother or the parents of the mother; they may have access to their children but are not as actively involved as they could be; or they could be incarcerated and/or facing re-entry and need assistance re-engaging with their children. Focus group attendees mentioned that these needs could be addressed through the following avenues:

- Legal assistance for non-custodial parents
- Father-friendly training for professionals working with families
- Expunction services to help men with a criminal record get a new start

Participants recognized the concerted efforts of the Stark County Community Action Agency's Fatherhood Program to address issues county-wide but that much more could be done to enhance their work and the efforts of other organizations across the county. Some of the existing programs and services that engage dads include:

- 24/7 Dad™ classes

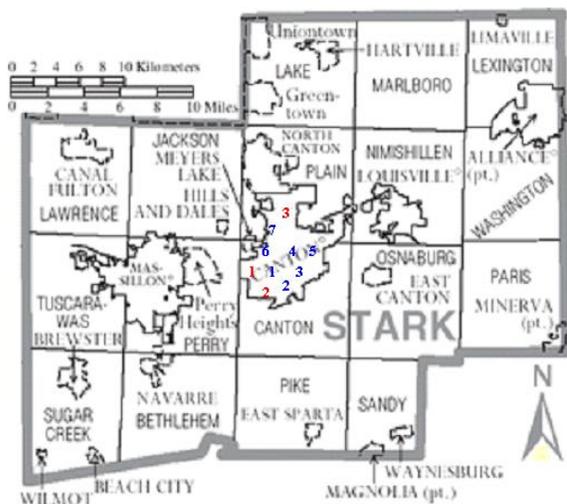
Participants also identified a number of existing assets/resources in the community that could be mobilized to promote responsible fatherhood. Among those were programs that focus on youth and young adults. There was a consensus that efforts need to be focused not only on fathers and mothers but also on providing children with positive role models and education on healthy relationships through after-school programming, Boys and Girls Club and Community Centers.

Potential funders and funding opportunities were also discussed, although this is an area where focus group participants felt that additional work needs to be done. Participants highlighted the following funding opportunities in Stark County:

- Hospitals & Health Foundations
- Sisters of Charity Foundation
- Kent State and/or University of Akron – evaluation
- Ohio's Children's Trust Fund
- Financial Institutions

The focus group participants expressed interest in continuing to work with the Ohio Commission on Responsible Fatherhood and its efforts to improve father involvement across the state.

County Assets Map



Red Numbers = Father/Male-Specific Programs and Services

1. Stark County Child Support Enforcement Agency
2. Employment Source
3. Stark County Community Action Agency

Blue Numbers = Programs for mothers and children that could be expanded to include fathers

1. Faith House Program
2. Belden School
3. Boys/Girls Club
4. Children's Services
5. Sisters of Charity
6. Goodwill
7. American Rescue Workers

Stark County has three father or male-specific programs and services provided by Stark County Child Support Enforcement Agency, Employment Source, and Stark County Community Action Agency. The Assets Map shows that each of these programs are located in Canton, so a gap exists in geographically accessible programs and services in other areas of the county. It is recommended that some services be offered in locations throughout the county and/or transportation options be provided.

Another area of opportunity is in the kinds of dads served. Programs that target new dads, incarcerated dads, military dads, and dads with special needs are some areas that should be considered.

It is also recommended that Stark County leaders explore the interest of those organizations on the map that can expand their services to create father-specific programs.

Conclusions

This report brings to light many specific needs within Stark County. It identifies some key issues that increasing involved, responsible, and committed fatherhood can help remedy and some gaps in the geographic locations of programs and services. There are opportunities to target specific kinds of dads who aren't currently being reached.

This report also reveals many assets that have not been fully utilized that can be of great assistance as Stark County anchors a County Fatherhood Initiative that mobilizes all sectors around fatherhood. We have a unique opportunity now to enrich fathers, families, and communities in Stark County.