

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

Prepared By:



**National  
Fatherhood  
Initiative®**

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**An Initiative of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood**

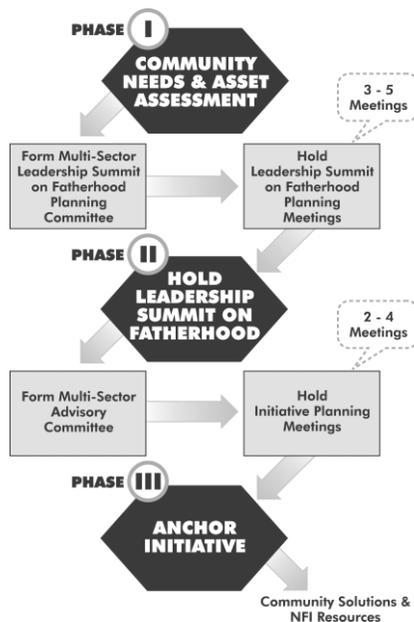
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## Introduction

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood (OCF) has partnered with National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) in 2011 to assist 12 Ohio counties mobilize around responsible fatherhood. Fairfield 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 Fairfield 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

In Ohio, father absence is at 25.7% or 7.3% lower than the national average and Fairfield County ranks 6% lower than the state average at 19.7%. Fairfield County's largest city, Lancaster; however, ranks higher than the state average at 28.2%.<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> National Fatherhood Initiative, 2007, *Father Facts Fifth Edition*.

<sup>2</sup> National Fatherhood Initiative, 2007. *Father Facts Fifth Edition*.

<sup>3</sup> Nock, Steven L., and Einolf, Christopher J. 2008. "The One Hundred Billion Dollar Man."

<sup>4</sup> 2005-2009 American Community Survey

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 % percent of children in female-householder families.<sup>5</sup> In Fairfield County, 11.2% of children were living in poverty in 2008. That is up 1.2% since 2003. In 2009, 13.1% of Fairfield County residents or 18,826 people lived at or below the Federal Poverty Line (which, for a family of 4, was \$27,563 annually).<sup>6</sup> Unemployment rates have jumped from 5% in 2004 to 8.5% in 2009 with numbers jumping from 3,800 to 6,500.<sup>7</sup>

Fairfield County's teen birth rate (age 15-19) increased 2.2 births per 1000<sup>8</sup> from 2003 to 2008 from 52 to 54.2.<sup>9</sup> 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 pregnancy<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup> In Fairfield County in 2010, there were 215 substantiated cases of physical abuse of a child<sup>13</sup>, 153 substantiated cases of sexual abuse of a child, 112 substantiated cases of emotional abuse of a child, 353 substantiated cases of child neglect, 3620 referrals for child abuse, child neglect, or child maltreatment.<sup>14</sup>

**Father Absence**

National: 33%  
Ohio: 26%  
Fairfield County: 19.7%  
Lancaster: 28.2%

**Fairfield County's  
Teen Birth Rate (per 1000)**

2003: 52  
2008: 54.2

**Number of Fairfield County  
Substantiated Cases  
(in 2010)**

Physical Abuse of Children: 215  
Sexual Abuse of Children: 153  
Emotional Abuse of a Child: 112  
Child Neglect: 353  
Referrals for Child Abuse: 3,620

**Illicit Substance Abuse**

71.2% of Fairfield County high school seniors reported using an illicit substance in 2010

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Children's Living Arrangements and Characteristics: March 2002, P200-547, Table C8. Washington D.C.: GPO, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> "2009 Fairfield County Profile, Statistical and Demographic Data," County Department of Job and Family Services (2009). Numbers were based on 2009 population estimates (found in the Fairfield County Emergency Operations Plan, EOP, Adopted October 1, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Children's Defense Fund-Ohio, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Source URL:

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

<sup>9</sup> Ohio Department of Health, Center for Public Health Statistics and Informatics, 2009

<sup>10</sup> Teachman, Jay D. "The Childhood Living Arrangements of Children and the Characteristics of Their Marriages." Journal of Family Issues 25 (January 2004):86-111.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being. Table SPECIAL1. Washington D.C.: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Based on numbers from the Family, Adult, and Children First Council (Jan. 2011). Other data from other sources to be added as it becomes available.

<sup>14</sup> "2009 Fairfield County Profile, Statistical and Demographic Data," County Department of Job and Family Services (2009).

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.<sup>15</sup> As of 2007, 4% of high school seniors in Fairfield County had dropped out of school before graduating (66 of 1661).<sup>16</sup> According to the Youth Behavior Survey, 96.1% of high school seniors, 1084 of 1128, had some plans following high school graduation (84.7% or 955 of 1128 for college, 7.4% or 84 of 1128 to get a job, and 4% or 45 of 1128 to go to technical school).<sup>17</sup>

Drug and alcohol use has a negative impact on our youth in Fairfield County. In 2010, 28.8% of high school seniors, 325 of 1128, reported having never used illicit substances or prescription drugs for non-medical purposes. That means 71.2% had used illicit substances at some point! According to the Fairfield County Youth Behavior Survey, in 2010 2.5% of high school seniors, 28 of 1128, were using another person's prescription drugs monthly for non-medical purposes.<sup>18</sup>

### **Fairfield County Leader Focus Group Results**

Thirty community leaders from Fairfield County convened for a focus group discussion to identify the most pressing needs and available assets related to promoting responsible fatherhood within the county. These thirty leaders represented diverse sectors and organizations within the county. The following community sectors

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<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> Profile for Fairfield (County)-Ohio KIDS COUNT Data Center, <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/stateprofile.aspx?state=OH&group=Grantee&loc=5200&dt=1%2c3%2c2%2c4>

<sup>17</sup> Fairfield County, Ohio Youth Behavior Survey, Senior 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Fairfield County, Ohio Youth Behavior Survey, Senior 2010.

and organizations were present during the focus group:

- Fairfield Department of Health
- Family, Adult & Children First Council
- Fairfield County 211
- Fairfield Medical Center
- Fairfield County District Library
- Business System Solutions, Inc.
- Family YMCA
- United Way
- Fairfield County Job and Family Services
- Lancaster Police Department
- Domestic Relations Court
- Fairfield County Visitation Center
- Multi County Juvenile Detention Center
- Fairfield County Commissioner
- Community Action Head Start/Early Head Start
- Fairfield County Sheriff's Office
- Fairfield Metropolitan Housing Authority
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction – Southeastern Correctional Institution

The diverse community sectors represented at the Fairfield County focus group provided a well rounded discussion about the need to address father absence throughout the county. The participants identified some of the impacts on children when fathers are not actively involved (i.e. children seeking out unhealthy male role models, lack of financial supports, children's aggressive behavior, potential for abuse when other partners are brought into the home, etc.). The attendees agreed that there is a great need to address father absence and promote responsible fatherhood throughout Fairfield County. As a first step, the group identified a number of pressing needs around this issue including a need for:

- More stability in the home
- Jobs for fathers who cannot provide financial support
- Positive male role models
- Support systems for fathers- including those who are contributing financially but may not be actively engaged

- Substance abuse services
- Awareness that it is sometimes best for parents to live apart, and if so, support systems for both parents are necessary for child well-being
- Support systems for parents who want to be involved in their child's lives, such as visitation or access services and parenting classes

Of the needs discussed, the participants indicated that the current lack of stability of two parent homes as well as support services for fathers who desire to be actively involved with their children but who may not have had a positive role model themselves are most pressing throughout Fairfield County. The group was also intentional about specifying that the "support services" needed should be targeted towards fathers versus more general family-oriented programs/services.

The focus group participants also identified characteristics of fathers in the county that would be most in need of support services around responsible fatherhood. Those mentioned by the group included:

- Incarcerated fathers
- Drug addicted fathers
- Teen fathers
- First time fathers
- Single fathers (particularly single fathers of teen daughters)
- Fathers of special needs children
- All types of fathers (all are in need of support at some point in time)

These fathers are found in various places throughout the community including prisons, schools, court systems, hospitals, organizations working with children, churches, child care centers, and social media/networking sites.

The attendees were in agreement that there is general concern across the county among social service providers as well as within the health and education sectors about father absence and the impacts this can have on children and families. However, it was mentioned that it may not be understood by the general public. The participants were not aware of any current or past county or

community-wide initiatives that had focused on this issue and mentioned that broad communication about fatherhood has not been a focus in the county. However, a number of programs were mentioned as providing services for fathers within a particular organization. These included:

- InsideOut Dad™ – prisons
- Dynamic Dads – Head Start
- Food, disability assistance
- Cash assistance for single fathers
- Visitation programs for first time dads
- Donuts with Dad – schools
- Father/daughter dance – Fairfield Christian Church
- GRADS (Graduation, Reality and Dual Roles) program working with teen moms and dads – schools
- Wings Program for the holidays – prisons
- Eagles Fathers Day Lunch
- Girl Scouts programming

In addition to the services that already target fathers; the following programs were identified as having the potential to expand their focus to target fathers:

- Story Time at the library for dads and children
- General recreational activities at parks
- Father/child sports leagues
- Parenting programming for single fathers (due to growth in women's drug addiction in the county)
- Legal assistance/rights education
- Church programming
- Sustaining existing parenting programs where fathers participate

The most pressing issues throughout Fairfield County are the current lack of stability of two parent homes as well as support services for fathers who desire to be actively involved with their children but who may not have had a positive role model themselves.

In addition to existing services that could be expanded to have a more father-focus, services that are not available in the county were identified that could be beneficial to fathers. These included:

- Affordable substance abuse treatment services
- Male mentors for youth and single fathers
- Job training / scholarships for continued education
- Education with youth on personal responsibility, character building and healthy choices
- Life skills classes
- Second chance programs for formerly incarcerated fathers
- Education for fathers of special needs children

Although there are programs that the group felt could be expanded and that are needed in county, concern was expressed as to whether or not fathers in the county would participate. There was also discussion about whether the focus of potential programming should target fathers who are actively involved and looking for additional supports or on fathers who are not involved and need help connecting with their children.

A number of existing assets were identified throughout Fairfield County that could be mobilized around a county-wide fatherhood initiative. The resources mentioned by focus group participants included:

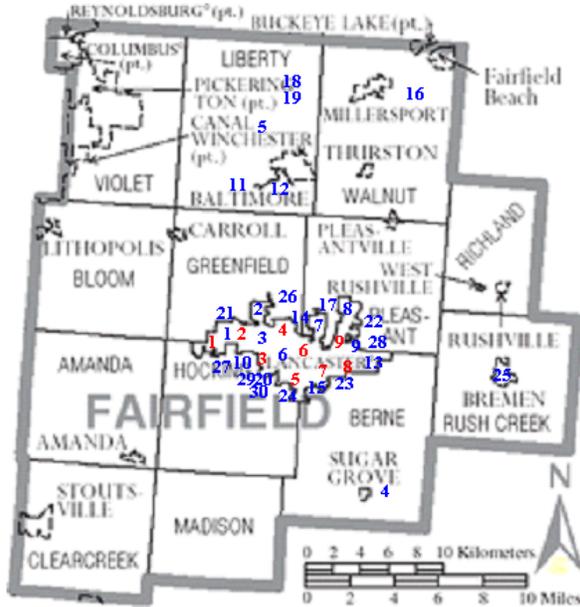
- United Way's "Community Impact" community collaborative
- Early Head Start / Help Me Grow home visitors
- Families and Children First Council
- Ohio Benefit Bank
- Big Brothers / Big Sisters
- Fairfield County Job and Family Services
- A general collaborative and communicative approach between social service providers
- Re-entry Coalition

- Civic organizations
- Media – Eagle Gazette, radio stations
- Fairfield Medical Center
- Chamber of Commerce
- No Kidding Ohio (NKO) program for teens
- Churches
- Universities – OSU, OU, Ohio Christian, Extension offices

The thirty Fairfield County focus group participants represented a wide range of organizations and programs throughout the county. The attendees appeared to be aware of the services provided by each organization and had a sense for what other programs would be beneficial for fathers. It was mentioned that among the organizations represented there is a general attitude of cooperation and collaboration that would be helpful as the initiative progresses. In thinking about next steps in the process, the group identified the following potential funding sources:

- Fairfield Foundation
- United Way
- Columbus Foundation
- Women's Fund of Central Ohio
- Target
- Westerman's
- Fox Foundation
- Family and Children First Council
- Civic Organizations
- Honda
- Kohl's
- Wal-Mart

## County Assets Map



### Red Numbers = Father/Male-Specific Programs and Services

1. Business Systems Solutions, Inc.
2. Community Action-Head Start/Help Me Grow
3. Domestic Relations Court/Visitation Services
4. Donuts for Dads @ FCC
5. Help Me Grow-Teens with Tots
6. Lighthouse-Anger Management
7. Men's Retreat @ FCC (both sites)
8. No Kidding Ohio
9. Parent Education Classes

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

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. 211 Info & Referral Serv. For FC | 16. Millersport High School                |
| 2. ADAMH Board                      | 17. Multi County Juvenile Detention Center |
| 3. AHA Museum                       | 18. Pickerington N. High School            |
| 4. Berne Union High School          | 19. Pickerington Jr. High School           |
| 5. Canal Winchester High School     | 20. Protective Services                    |
| 6. CSEA                             | 21. Re-Entry Coalition                     |
| 7. FC Education Service Center      | 22. River Valley Counseling                |
| 8. FC Housing Authority             | 23. Salvation Army                         |
| 9. FCJFS                            | 24. SOCIL                                  |
| 10. General Sherman Jr. High        | 25. Southeastern Ohio Legal                |
| 11. Liberty Union High School       | 26. Steve Rauch-90.9 (minister)            |
| 12. Liberty Union Middle School     | 27. Teen Works                             |
| 13. Lutheran Social Services        | 28. The Recovery Center                    |
| 14. Maywood Mission                 | 29. United Way-Tax Preparation             |
| 15. Mid Ohio Parents Group          | 30. YMCA                                   |

Fairfield County is fortunate to have 9 currently active father- or male-specific programs. All of these programs are located in Lancaster so the map shows some geographic gaps in easily accessible fatherhood programs and services in most areas of the county. It is recommended that some services be offered in locations

throughout the county and/or transportation options be provided. The vast majority of the programs that could be expanded to serve fathers that are in areas outside of Lancaster are schools. Efforts should be made to engage the schools around responsible fatherhood first and then to diversify sectors in other areas of the county. Schools are in a unique position to reach future dads (today's teen boys) with preventative strategies.

Another area of opportunity is in the kinds of dads served. Programs that target non-custodial dads, dads with substance abuse issues, new dads, military dads, and dads with special needs are some areas that should be considered and are further detailed in the **Focus Group Results** section above.

## Conclusions

This report brings to light many specific needs within Fairfield 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 Fairfield 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 Fairfield County.