

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

Prepared By:



**National  
Fatherhood  
Initiative®**

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

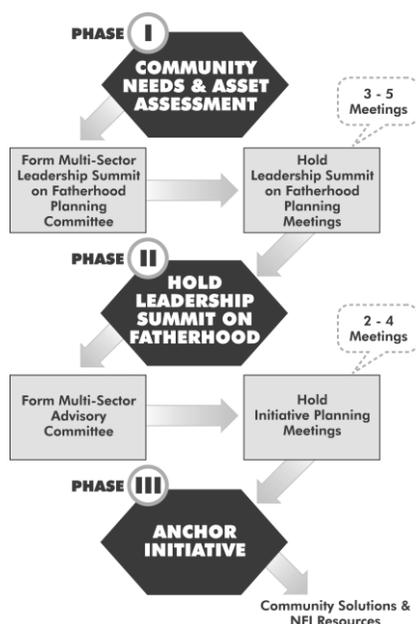
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## Introduction

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood (OCF) has partnered with National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) in 2011 to assist 12 Ohio counties mobilize around responsible fatherhood. Franklin 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 Franklin 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 Franklin County ranks 3.2% higher than the state average at 28.9%. Franklin County's largest city, Columbus, is significantly higher at 35.2%.<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> After being adjusted for inflation, the median household income decreased for Franklin County and for all racial/ethnic groups from 2000-2005. The decrease was larger for Asians and whites than for African American and Hispanics. The unemployment rate for Franklin County was 7% in 2005, an increase of almost 3% compared to 2000. Poverty rates for all African Americans, as well as those under age 18 and age 65 and over, were about twice the Franklin County rates in 2005. Almost half of African American female-headed households were living in poverty, compared to one-quarter of white female-headed households.<sup>6</sup>

Franklin County's teen birth rate (age 15-19) of 47 births per 1000<sup>7</sup> is 6 higher than the state and national average of 41 per 1000.<sup>8</sup> The teen birth rates in Franklin County are highest for Hispanics, followed by blacks, then lowest for whites.<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>

<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> United Way of Central Ohio Racial Disparities Report, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Source URL:

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

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

<sup>9</sup> Franklin County Child Support Office

<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

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> There were 12,883 new allegations of child abuse/neglect in Franklin County in 2007.<sup>13</sup> There were 9 children per 1,000 who were abused or neglected in Franklin County in 2006. That rate is consistent with the state rate.<sup>14</sup>

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| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Father Absence</b></p> <p>National: 33%<br/>Ohio: 26%<br/>Franklin County: 28.9%<br/>Columbus: 35.2%</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Teen Birth Rate (per 1000)</b></p> <p>National: 41<br/>State: 41<br/>Franklin County: 47</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Children Abused or Neglected (per 1000)</b></p> <p>Ohio: 10<br/>Franklin County: 9</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Adolescents Adjudicated for Felonies (per 1000)</b></p> <p>Ohio: 14<br/>Franklin County: 15</p> |
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There were also 15 adolescents per 1,000 in Franklin County who were adjudicated for felonies in 2006.<sup>15</sup> Almost two-thirds of the admissions to the Franklin County Juvenile Detention Facility in 2005 were black youth, who represent only about one-fourth of the Franklin County youth population. <sup>16</sup>Often, the "story behind the story" of a violent crime

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> Ohio PCSAO Factbook, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. County Fact Sheet Data, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. County Fact Sheet Data, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> United Way of Central Ohio Racial Disparities Report, 2007.

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, minority group status, and the mother’s education (as a proxy for income).<sup>17</sup>

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>18</sup> In 2005, 11.8% of Franklin County’s population over age 25 had less than a high school education. The percentage of Hispanic adults with less than a high school diploma was more than three times the county rate. The average high school graduation rate for African Americans was below that of whites or Asians.<sup>19</sup>

### **Franklin County Leader Focus Group Results**

The Franklin County focus group consisted of twenty-six individuals representing diverse organizations, agencies and sectors of the community. The experience and perspectives from such a broad group provided for a rich discussion of the needs within the county as well as existing assets and resources that could be utilized moving forward. The following community sectors and organizations were represented during the focus group:

- Columbus Urban League
- Franklin County Children Services
- Domestic and Juvenile Court
- Action for Children - Father Factor
- Franklin County Regional Planning

- Franklin County Board of Commissioners
- R.E.A.C.H. Communications, Inc.
- Workforce Development
- Office of Child Support Enforcement
- Mentoring Moms/Parents – Stepping Stones for Success
- Columbus City Schools
- United Way of Central Ohio
- Ohio Commission on Fatherhood
- D.A.D.D.S., Inc.
- Medical Mutual

The focus group participants began by discussing why there is a need to address father absence in Franklin County. The attendees indicated that there appears to be a culture of acceptance within the county around fathers not being actively engaged in the lives of their children, and that this attitude is something that needs to change. Throughout the discussion, participants referred to the need to change the image of men and fathers as being a primary need in the county. The group was also aware of some of the specific needs in Franklin County related to father absence. These included:

- Prevalent violence
- Benefits to children when both parents are active
- Social problems more likely for children when father is absent
- Single mothers need supports
- Employment/training for men
- Supports within court system for fathers who want to be involved
- Parenting education for never married parents
- Lack of awareness in the community about the importance of fathers
- More intentional approach toward engaging fathers – general community and service providers
- Need to generate awareness about the existing services/resources available for fathers
- Support for fathers in the system (corrections and those paying child support)
- Accountability for mothers to respect orders for visitation and parenting time
- Need for information about fathers’ rights within schools
- No cost/sliding scale supervised visitation and exchange

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Nord, Christine Winqvist, 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>19</sup> United Way of Central Ohio Racial Disparities Report, 2007.

- Need for preventative services for young men before they become fathers and during early pregnancy

Of the needs identified, the focus group participants indicated that the most pressing included: awareness about fathers' legal rights, employment/training services, and prevention services.

The attendees spent time discussing the fathers in Franklin County and which are in greatest need for supports around responsible fatherhood. Those identified as needing supports and services the most included:

- Low-income fathers
- Un- and Under-employed fathers
- Young fathers (minors)
- Fathers without a father figure of their own
- Unmarried fathers
- Ex-offenders / Incarcerated fathers
- Potential fathers
- Uneducated
- Fathers in gangs
- Fathers who want to be involved

These fathers are found in a variety of places throughout the county, and the focus group participants spent time brainstorming the specific locations where the fathers mentioned above could be located. Some of the ideas included:

- Churches
- Child support offices
- Health care organizations
- Community centers
- Gyms
- Courts
- Correctional facilities
- Shelters
- Barbershops
- On the streets
- Schools
- Night clubs / bars
- Recreation centers

Franklin County has supported some broad initiatives to address fatherhood. The participants were knowledgeable about several specific programs/services that reach across the county. Those discussed during the focus group included:

- Father 2 Father – a collaborative between churches

- Father Factor – fatherhood program funded by Ohio Commission on Fatherhood
- Urban League
- Mentoring Moms and Parents Program – serving Franklin and Trumbull counties
- Pathfinder Program
- No Kidding Ohio
- Fatherhood Summit
- Center for Healthy Families

In addition to the programs and services mentioned with the specific objective of supporting fathers, participants discussed another broad-reaching initiative that isn't necessarily designed for the purpose of encouraging responsible fatherhood. Attendees mentioned that McDonald's restaurants frequently provide fathers with opportunities to have successful interactions with their children. Focus group participants indicated that non-custodial fathers may be encouraged to use McDonald's restaurants as meeting locations to share a meal with their children and to spend time engaged in recreational activities using the playground equipment.

In addition to the broad-reaching initiatives mentioned, participants were also aware of a number of agency-specific programs that have either a father-focus or a component targeting fathers. These included:

- Franklin County Mediation Program
- Father Factor
- National Center for Urban Solution
- Father 2 Father
- Shaken Baby Program
- All Pro Dad's Day – held at a different school each month
- Million Fathers March
- Family Empowerment Day
- Children's Hospital New Parents' Program
- Parent Resource Center
- Father/Son Mentorship – sponsored by one school
- Celebration of Fatherhood at Center of Science and Industry (COSI)
- Men's Fraternity

Although the focus group attendees were able to identify a number of existing programs and resources for fathers across Franklin County, they also recognized the need to expand other services to engage fathers and/or have more of a focus on promoting responsible fatherhood. The

programs/services that could be expanded included:

- Co-parenting programs
- Divorce programs
- Homes on the Hill
- School programs
- Housing programs
- National Center for Urban Solutions
- Sex education in schools – to include fatherhood and parenting
- Pre-natal programs
- Birthing centers
- Workforce Development

Furthermore, the participants discussed the need for community organizations to be

### **Most Pressing Needs in Franklin County**

Change the image of men and fathers as being a primary need in the county

Raise awareness about fathers' legal rights, employment/training services, and prevention services

Time was also spent during the focus group discussion identifying services that don't currently exist in Franklin County that would be beneficial to fathers and to furthering father involvement. Those services identified by the focus group attendees included:

- Education about fathers' legal and paternity rights
- Substance abuse rehabilitation services
- Career men's wear program – similar to "Dress for Success"
- Ideas for positive interaction during visitation
- Grandfathers mentoring fathers programs
- Long-term counseling / skills education
- Free supervised visitation services
- Comprehensive resource page/hotline with father-focused services
- More father-friendly systems (i.e. courts, businesses, etc.)
- Advocacy services for fathers

more intentional about engaging fathers. The group mentioned using male staff to connect with fathers and shifting current outreach strategies to appeal more to men. Additionally, several programs that are traditionally accessed by women in the county were mentioned as having the potential to expand to educate women about the importance of fathers in the lives of their children. These programs included:

- Mentoring Moms and Parents Program
- Welcome Home / Help Me Grow
- Nutrition programs
- Immunization programs (i.e. Project L.O.V.E, COAT)
- Services to educate mothers about the importance of fathers
- Services for fathers who have access to children but may not know how to engage
- A "one stop" facility for fathers (i.e. paternity, child support, visitation, legal, parenting, etc.)

Of the services that do not currently exist, the attendees mentioned that being able to offer various father-focused services from one location would be ideal. The participants mentioned that many times fathers who try to obtain services become frustrated by having to visit various agencies which may not be located near one another.

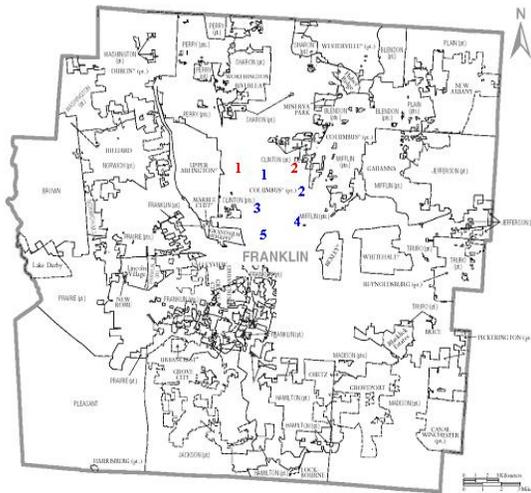
The majority of the twenty-six focus group participants were from the Columbus area, however they were knowledgeable about the needs and assets across Franklin County. The participants discussed the county's assets in terms of potential funders and also identified other community leaders that need to be included in future discussions to continue the momentum created during the focus group.

Participants highlighted the following funding opportunities in Franklin County:

- United Way
- Columbus Foundation
- Faith Based Initiative
- City Philanthropists
- Federal Office of Child Support
- Limited and Nationwide
- Dispatch Charities
- Mothers & grandmothers
- OCAM
- Corporate Donations
- Fatherhood Summit

- Children’s Hospital
- Children’s Defense
- Boys/Girls Scouts
- Civic organizations
- Ohio Commission on Fatherhood
- Administration for Children and Families
- AEP

### County Assets Map



Red Numbers = Father/Male-Specific Programs and Services

1. Father 2 Father
2. Father Factor

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

1. Center for Healthy Families
2. Directions for Youth and Families
3. Huckleberry House
4. The Mentoring Center of Central Ohio
5. Central Ohio Youth for Christ

adding programs in those areas or by providing transportation options from those outlying areas of the county. It is recommended that Franklin County leaders follow up with programs that don’t currently serve men or fathers specifically to develop male-specific programming, particularly groups that can address the gaps in the kinds of dads that need served referenced earlier. This map should be expanded at some point to include Franklin County organizations outside of Columbus that could offer fatherhood services.

### Conclusions

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

Franklin County has 2 father-specific programs. **Father 2 Father** is a collaborative between churches and **Father Factor** sessions combine mentoring, shared experiences, and class instruction. This map reveals some gaps in services to specific kinds of dads such as teen fathers, incarcerated fathers, new dads, dads of children with special needs, and father-specific/comprehensive parenting programs for non-custodial fathers.

The map shows that all programs are located in Columbus leaving gaps in easily accessible fatherhood programs and services in other parts of the county. These geographic gaps in fatherhood programs and services should be addressed either by