

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

Prepared By:



**National  
Fatherhood  
Initiative®**

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

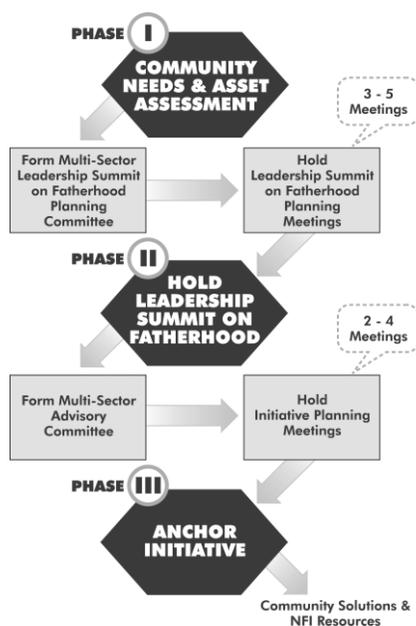
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## Introduction

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood (OCF) has partnered with National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) in 2011 to assist 12 Ohio counties mobilize around responsible fatherhood. Guernsey 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 Guernsey 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 Guernsey County ranks about even with the state average at 26.5%. Guernsey County's largest city, Cambridge, is significantly higher at 53%.<sup>4</sup> Of the 403 children enrolled in the Guernsey County Head Start Program, 201 or 50% are living in single parent homes with the father absent. Of the 246 children age birth to 3 years enrolled in the Guernsey County Help Me Grow Program, 113 or 46% live in father absent homes. Both of these programs are income-based which supports the state and national statistic regarding children in father absent homes being more likely to live in poverty.

<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

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 % percent of children in female-householder families.<sup>5</sup> 27% of all children in Guernsey County in 2005 were living in poverty compared to 19% statewide. Guernsey County lost 1,743 jobs from 2000-2009 compared to 1,743 statewide and unemployment rate is 12% which is 2% higher than the state of Ohio. The decrease in employment was 12% in 2009 compared to 9% statewide. Guernsey County per capita income in 2009 was \$26,901 compared to \$35,889 statewide.

Guernsey County's teen birth rate (age 15-19) of 50 births per 1000<sup>6</sup> is 9 higher than the state and national average of 41 per 1000.<sup>7</sup> Data from a snapshot in time from Alcohol & Drug Services of Guernsey County indicate 10% of those individuals receiving services are adolescents. They currently have 15 active adolescent clients receiving services from the Agency, 11 or 73% are from homes with no father present. 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>8</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>9</sup>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Father Absence</b></p> <p>National: 33% Ohio: 26% Guernsey County: 26.5% Cambridge: 53%</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Teen Birth Rate (per 1000)</b></p> <p>National: 41 State: 41 Guernsey County: 50</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Children Abused or Neglected (per 1000)</b></p> <p>Ohio: 10 Guernsey County: 14</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Adolescents Adjudicated for Felonies (per 1000)</b></p> <p>Ohio: 14 Guernsey County: 11</p>
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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>10</sup> There were 549 new allegations of child abuse/neglect in Guernsey County in 2007.<sup>11</sup> There were 14 children per 1,000 who were abused or neglected in Guernsey County in 2006. That is 4 more children higher per 1,000 than the state rate. In 2010, Guernsey County Children Services investigated 400 reports of child abuse and

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

<sup>7</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>8</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>9</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>10</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>11</sup> Ohio PCSAO Factbook, 2007.

neglect. While Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) does not allow for the opportunity to collect data regarding fathers, a moment in time count indicated 3 out of every 4 children involved with Children Services on 3/15/11 are from father absent homes.

There were also 11 adolescents per 1,000 in Guernsey County who were adjudicated for felonies in 2006.<sup>12</sup> 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, minority group status, and the mother’s education (as a proxy for income).<sup>13</sup> In 2010, Guernsey County Juvenile Court filed unruly charges on 101 youth and delinquent charges on 300 youth. As of 3/15/11, 171 youth are currently on probation with Juvenile Court. 21% of these youth are living with both parents, 57.3% are living in father absent homes, and 12.8% are living with single fathers. Less than ½ of 1% of the 171 youth on probation have any father involvement.

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>14</sup> Guernsey County experiences an average of 14% school dropout rate as compared to the state average of 17%. Between the school years

2003 to 2006, 1477 youth in Cambridge High School were reported truant, which resulted in an in-school suspension (an average of 492 children each year). Even though data indicates Guernsey County has a significantly lower high school graduation rate (82%) than the states average (87%), 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.

**Less than ½ of 1% of the 171 youth on probation in Guernsey County have any father involvement.**

The national figures for suicide is an average of 11.5, per every 100,000 persons, Ohio suicide rate is 11.5 per every 100,000 persons while Guernsey County’s rate is 14.8. Guernsey County has a suicide rate higher than the state and national averages. Guernsey County ranks number 13 out of 88 Ohio counties with 1 being the county with the highest suicide rate. Since 2004, Guernsey County has experienced two confirmed suicides to adolescents, both were female and both involved children from fatherless homes.

### **Guernsey County Leader Focus Group Results**

There were 14 focus group participants in addition to the 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 individuals represented more than one sector of the community):

- Village of Byesville (city of Byesville)
- Cambridge Developmental Center
- Chaplin for the state

<sup>12</sup> Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio. County Fact Sheet Data, 2008.

<sup>13</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>14</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.

- Department of Job and Family Services
- Child Support
- Juvenile Court
- Cambridge attorneys
- Mayor of Cambridge
- Thompkins Child and Adolescent Services
- AVC Communications
- Chamber of Commerce
- Guernsey County Commissioner
- Firefighter
- Paramedic
- Foster/adoptive parent
- Fatherhood program facilitator
- Law enforcement

All focus group attendees agreed that there is a need to address father absence in Guernsey County. Some participants were knowledgeable about statistics related to fatherhood and child well being. However, the majority was more familiar with the issues they observe first-hand in their line of work and/or in the community at large (i.e. challenges with mothers playing the role of mother and father, children being in the middle of parental conflict, etc.). Participants indicated that father absence occurs with non-custodial fathers as well as with fathers who have full or partial custody of their children. The focus group attendees discussed the need to engage all types of fathers. A number of pressing needs were identified related to father absence including:

- Access to information for fathers that want to be involved with their children but don't know how
- Increased awareness (for mothers and community in general) about the importance of father involvement
- Education for fathers (including education about legal rights for visitation, etc.)
- A general lack of responsibility/commitment/intentions of being a family and keeping relationships in tact (for both men and women)
- Lack of mentors in the community or "social dads"
- Community organizations and general systems are not always

father-friendly which can be discouraging for fathers

- Overall change in culture viewing mothers as "all knowing caretakers" and recognizing fathers as integral parts of children's well being

After discussing a variety of needs related to father absence, the focus group attendees agreed that the most pressing needs were helping fathers gain access to information (particularly through the courts) about how to become more involved as well as creating awareness in the community 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 fathers could be reached through the following avenues:

- Court system and letters to attorneys
- Child support agencies
- Sports associations/arenas
- Schools
- Churches
- Mental health agencies (specifically youth counseling centers)

Although participants agreed that father absence needs to be addressed in Guernsey County, they indicated that there are no broad initiatives that focus on responsible fatherhood. There are, however, programs, services, and special activities in the community for fathers. These include:

- An elementary school sponsored "Donuts with Dad" activity
- Head Start fathers' services every other month
- Children Services' "Boot Camp for New Dads" and "On My Shoulders" programs

- Special Father’s Day services and gifts provided by local churches

In addition to programs and services specific to fathers, the focus group participants also identified other community services/activities that could be expanded to be more “father friendly” and/or engage more fathers. These include:

- Family Matters program: enhanced to include programming specific to responsible fathering during and after divorce (similar to Parenting Beyond the Drama program)
- Collaborating with the Youth Commission to coordinate events for youth and dads during the month of June
- Working with schools and sports leagues to sponsor father focused events
- Engaging new fathers before and at the birth of their child (i.e. hospital programs, special new dads groups, father-focused gifts, etc.)

While a variety of services and activities were identified as having the potential to expand to serve fathers, the focus group attendees agreed that for Guernsey County, it would be most beneficial to focus on expanding programming related to fathering during and after divorce. Parental conflict and frequent decrease in father involvement following divorce appear to be of major concern in the county.

The possibility of expanding existing services prompted enthusiasm among focus group participants however, there are still gaps and services that do not currently exist that are needed. Participants mentioned that legislation and policies can inhibit agencies from providing optimal services to fathers. Employment and the need to create more jobs and job training programs were also discussed as major gaps in Guernsey County. Attendees were also firm in stating that programming for mothers related to the importance of father involvement is needed as many in the county (including judges and other leaders) regard mothers as having a more important role in children’s development. Teen pregnancy prevention programming was also mentioned as a

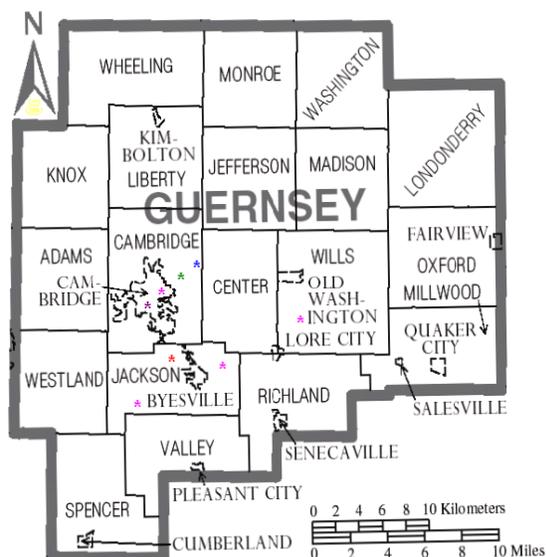
needed service to teach young men and women about the role of fathers.

Focus group participants identified a number of existing assets/resources in the community that could be mobilized to promote responsible fatherhood. Committed individuals in the community were mentioned as being of substantial importance. Additionally, entities such as schools, employment and social service agencies, county jails, attorney offices, and local businesses could also add to efforts to promote responsible fatherhood. 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. The Cambridge Mayor discussed the possibility of focusing staff resources to identifying funding opportunities once a focused strategy to promote responsible fatherhood has been developed. Some funding suggestions included:

- Kiwanis Club
- Zane State—Paul Brown
- Shriners International
- Wal-Mart
- Eagles, Elks, and Moose Clubs
- Muskingum University—evaluation
- Guernsey County Foundation—Dave Wilson
- Muskingum County—Forever Dads
- Kevin Ritz – Philanthropist
- Deerassic Park
- Churches

The focus group participants expressed interest in continuing to work with the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood and its efforts to improve father involvement across the state. Most focus group participants plan to attend the Leadership Summit on Fatherhood. All attendees agreed that county judges and magistrates need to be represented at the Leadership Summit on Fatherhood and concerted efforts will be made to include them.

## County Assets Map



\*Donuts with Dad

\*Fatherhood Programs Boot Camp for New Dads

\*On My Shoulders

\*Dating and Emotions

\*Head Start Fathers

Guernsey County is fortunate to have 5 currently active father-specific programs. **Boot Camp for New Dads** is a monthly program sponsored by Guernsey County Children Services and held in northern Cambridge Township. **On My Shoulders** is sponsored by Guernsey County Children Services & held in downtown Cambridge City. **Play Group for Head Start Fathers** is sponsored by GMN Tri County and offered in Cambridge, Lore City, Byesville, south of Cambridge and held every other month. **Donuts with Dad** is sponsored by Cambridge City Schools. **Dating and Emotions** is being piloted in Rolling Hills School District.

With the exception of the **Play Group for Head Start Fathers**, which is limited to a small percentage of dads, all of the other programs are located in Cambridge City. The map shows some geographic gaps in easily accessible fatherhood programs and services in most areas of the county.

Another area of opportunity is in the kinds of dads served. Programs that target non-

custodial dads, incarcerated dads, military dads, and dads with special needs are some areas that should be considered. It is also recommended that Guernsey County leaders create a comprehensive list of organizations that serve moms and children and explore the possibility of helping those organizations create father-specific programs. An initial list of specific organizations is bulleted on page 5 of this report.

## Conclusions

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