

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

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**National
Fatherhood
Initiative®**

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An Initiative of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood

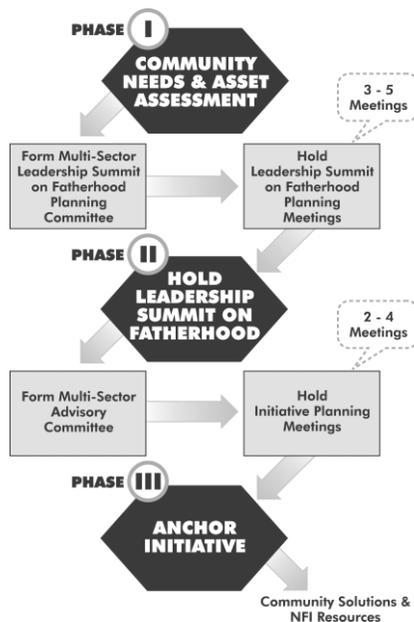
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Introduction

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

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.²

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.³

In Ohio, father absence is at 25.7% or 7.3% lower than the national average and Lorain County ranks .2% higher than the state average at 25.9%. Lorain County's largest city, Lorain, is significantly higher at 43.5%.⁴

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

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

² National Fatherhood Initiative, 2007. *Father Facts Fifth Edition*.

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

⁴ 2005-2009 American Community Survey

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.⁵ In 2009, Lorain County had 17.8% of its children living in poverty.⁶

Lorain 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 2,712 new allegations

of child abuse/neglect in Lorain County in 2009.¹² There were 13 children per 1,000 who were abused or neglected in Lorain County in 2006. That is 3 children higher per 1,000 than the state rate.¹³

<p style="text-align: center;">Father Absence</p> <p>National: 33% Ohio: 26% Lorain County: 25.9% Lorain City: 43.5%</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Teen Birth Rate (per 1000)</p> <p>National: 41 State: 41 Lorain County: 38</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Children Abused or Neglected (per 1000)</p> <p>Ohio: 10 Lorain County: 13</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Adolescents Adjudicated for Felonies (per 1000)</p> <p>Ohio: 14 Lorain County: 20</p>
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There were also 20 adolescents per 1,000 in Lorain County who were adjudicated for felonies in 2005.¹⁴ 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).¹⁵ A local

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

⁶ 2009 Job & Family Services County Profile

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 Job & Family Services County Profile, 2009.

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

¹⁴ Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. County Fact Sheet Data, 2007.

¹⁵ 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.

research study of juvenile adjudicated youth with prior children services involvement found that 61.4% live with the biological mother, 71.5% live in one parent homes, and 70% are below poverty guidelines. Moreover, 59.5% of neglect cases, 36% of physical abuse cases, and 35% of sexual abuse cases are cited in situations where the father is absent.¹⁶

Another issue negatively impacting our youth in Lorain County is drug and alcohol use. 76.1% of all 12th graders drank alcohol (22% drank in the last 30 days). 10.5% of 12th graders used marijuana in the last 30 days.¹⁷ Father involvement plays an important role in reducing drug and alcohol use among youth. Researchers at Columbia University found that children living in two-parent households with a poor relationship with their father are 68% more likely to smoke, drink, or use drugs compared to all teens in two-parent households. Moreover, teen in single-mother households fared much worse. They had a 30% higher risk than those in all two-parent households.¹⁸

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.¹⁹ 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. To further compound the issue, data from Lorain City

Schools reveals that youth do not have adequate access to adult male role models particularly in elementary and middle school years. Only 8% of elementary teachers and 25% of middle school teachers are male in Lorain City Schools. This is also reflected in the State of Ohio's record of teacher's licenses which shows only 10% of all elementary teachers are male and only 25% of all middle school teachers are male. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lorain County shows a similar male mentoring gap with boys needing "bigs" outnumber girls needing "bigs" by 3 to 1. Making matters worse, women volunteering to be mentors outnumber men 3 to 1.

Lorain County Leader Focus Group Results

Thirteen community leaders participated in the fatherhood focus group in Lorain County. A broad cross section of the community was represented which resulted in rich discussion about the need to address father absence and how to best promote responsible fatherhood throughout the county. The following community sectors/organizations within the county were represented (note: some individuals represented more than one sector/organization):

- Children Family Council
- Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services Board
- Lorain County Prosecutor's Office
- Lorain County Sheriff's Office
- Lorain City Schools
- El Centro
- Lorain County Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services (LCADA)
- Lorain City Health Department
- Healthy Fathering Collaborative
- Interfaith Ministries
- Urban Minority Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Outreach Programs (UMADAOP)
- Lorain County Children Services
- Head Start

The Lorain County focus group participants immediately acknowledged the need to address father absence in the county. A representative from the Health Department

¹⁶ Mallet, C. 2005.

¹⁷ Communities That Care Survey, 2009.

¹⁸ "Survey Links Teen Drug Use, Relationship With Father." *Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Weekly* 6 September 1999:5.

¹⁹ 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.

indicated that 80% of births in the county are to single mothers. While the other attendees suspected the percentage was high, this statistic was alarming. The focus group participants also mentioned that they observe very few males accessing family-related social services and that there has been a steady increase in men falling into the criminal justice system. All of these indicate a lack of father involvement in the lives of children.

The attendees also discussed a number of pressing needs in the county related to father absence and some of the underlying attitudes about family formation and the role of fathers. Several participants mentioned the need to increase teen and young adults' access to birth control to help decrease the number of unplanned pregnancies. However, it was also noted that many young women see childbirth as a vehicle for leaving their parents' home and "moving up" by accessing public assistance. There was also discussion about the need to understand the culture of young people, particularly the Hip-Hop culture in order to effectively reach this population.

The participants also identified systematic disincentives for father involvement (i.e. Section 8 housing rules, Medicaid eligibility, etc.) and mentioned that many fathers don't know what resources are available and may be unaware of their rights as fathers. Attendees discussed the need to determine a process for identifying fathers willing to be more actively involved and work to create more jobs and recreational activities throughout the county to help encourage involvement.

When thinking about the fathers of Lorain County, the focus group attendees identified a number of "types" of fathers that would be most in need of supports. The fathers identified, as well as where they might be found within the county, included:

- Teen fathers (schools, basketball courts, various government systems, faith community)
- Fathers without a father figure (in various places throughout the county)
- Fathers who are struggling

financially (in homes of family members, incarcerated)

- Fathers who have been denied access to their children by the mother (courts, workforce, child support offices)
- Fathers who have made mistakes (i.e. substance abuse, incarceration, etc.) and are not involved with their children due to shame (treatment programs, jails, bars)

There has been activity throughout Lorain County related to promoting responsible fatherhood, and the focus group participants identified several broad initiatives that have focused on fathers. The county and/or community-wide efforts mentioned include:

- Healthy Fathering Collaborative – a grassroots effort made up of community- and faith-based organizations to create a comprehensive resource network for men/fathers.
- Holy Day of Atonement – sponsored by 100 Men, UMADAOP, YWCA
- Child Support Enforcement Agency – although the perceived mission/goals are different from other father-focused initiatives

Other services and programs were identified although they may not reach the entire county. These included:

- Pregnant and Parenting Women (PPW) Program – father outreach component
- Indian Guides – sponsored by the YMCA
- Head Start Fathers and Literacy programs (and other monthly groups/activities)
- Donuts with Dad – sponsored by schools across the county
- Save Our Sons – Urban League
- Annual "Ghetto Fair"
- 100 Men of Lorain

In addition to programs within the county that already have a specific father focus a number of services/programs were identified as having the potential to expand to include more fathers. These included:

- Pre-natal programs
- Pre-school and early childhood programs
- Legal assistance services
- Big Brothers Big Sisters – engaging more male mentors
- Increase in adult male mentoring through 100 Men
- Parent mentoring programs through Catholic Charities
- Boys and Girls Club’s “Passport to Manhood” program
- Family strengthening programs (UMADAOP, LCADA, Catholic Charities)
- Couples counseling services – to include more of a father-focus versus only the couple relationship

While several programs and services were identified as either having a focus on fathers or having the potential to expand to include a focus on fathers, the attendees acknowledged that there were gaps in services throughout Lorain County. These included:

- Programming in jails (i.e. InsideOut Dad™)
- Programs that provide incentives for fathers to participate
- Mentoring program for children of incarcerated parents

Furthermore, the group discussed the need for more recreational activities and facilities for families throughout the county. Concern was expressed that there are not enough opportunities for children and parents to engage in healthy activities which may discourage father involvement and contribute to children and young people engaging in risky behaviors. The focus group attendees mentioned that in addition to exploring new recreational activities/facilities, existing resources such as schools and other services should be maximized to offer programming to fathers and children.

The focus group attendees were able to identify other assets and resources in the county that they could mobilize around responsible fatherhood as the initiative progresses. These included: a diverse

community, schools, social service agencies, local foundations, Lorain County Community College, Oberlin College, and experienced fathers.

The focus group participants from Lorain County were knowledgeable about the need to address father involvement within the county and the hard work ahead. However, the attendees appeared encouraged about the momentum created by the discussion. The attendees spent time identifying potential funding sources as well as others to engage as next steps and strategies are developed.

Participants highlighted the following funding opportunities in Lorain County:

- United Way
- Stocker Foundation
- Nordson Corporation Foundation
- Children and Families First Council
- Local, state, and federal grants
- Nord Family Foundation
- Community Foundation of Lorain County
- Board of Mental Health
- Judges/prosecutor’s offices

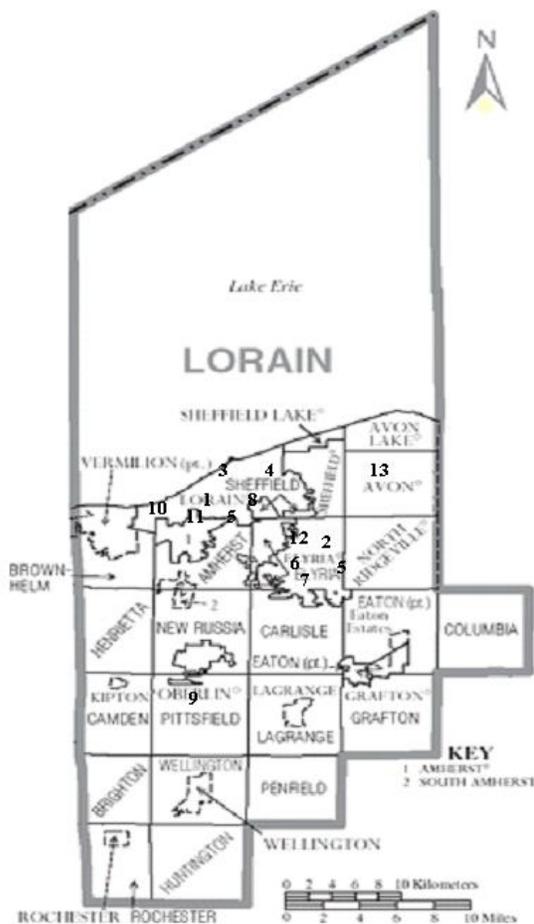
Most Pressing Needs in Lorain County

Address underlying attitudes that contribute to father absence

Address systematic disincentives for father involvement (i.e. Section 8 housing rules, Medicaid eligibility, etc.)

Increase number of recreational activities and facilities for families throughout the county

County Assets Map



Father/Male-Specific Programs and Services

1. Big Brothers Big Sisters
2. Urban League
3. ADAS Board
4. Lorain County Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services (LCADA)
5. Lorain County Jobs and Family Services
6. Cornerstones
7. Family First Council
8. Urban Minority Alcohol and Drug Abuse Outreach
9. Common Ground
10. 100 Men
11. Head Start
12. Just Like Us
13. French Creek YMCA

Lorain County is fortunate to have 13 male- or father-specific programs. Big Brothers Big Sisters offers the **Amachi Program** which provides mentors for youth whose fathers are incarcerated. The Urban League provides men's diabetes prevention through their **Save Our Sons** program. The **JOBS Project** offered by the ADAS Board provides employment readiness. Lorain County Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services provides the **Men's Program** which is gender specific

drug treatment. The Lorain County Jobs and Family Services **Father Program** provides assistance for child support issues. Cornerstones provides 2, faith-based fatherhood support programs called **Daddy Boot Camp** and **Parenting for Men**. The Family First Council's **Help Me Grow** program has some fathering support within the program. **Circle for Recovery** is a program offered by Urban Minority Alcohol and Drug Abuse Outreach (UMADAOP) that provides reentry support for men returning to the community from institutions. UMADAOP also offers **Rites of Passage**, a culturally aware mentorship program for young men. Common Ground's **Men's Circle** is a spiritual retreat. **100 Men of Lorain County** is a mentoring program. Head Start offers monthly activities with dads at multiple sites. **Just Like Us** is a reentry support program for men returning to the community from institutions. The French Creek YMCA has the **Adventure Guides** program which strengthens parent/child relationships.

These programs represent the following categories:

- 3 mentoring programs
- 3 faith-based programs
- 2 reentry programs
- 2 programs with dad/child activities
- 1 program for employment services
- 1 program around men's health
- 1 child support program
- 1 drug treatment program

While this addresses many of the critical issues fathers face, this list also reveals some gaps in services to specific kinds of dads such as teen fathers, incarcerated fathers, dads of children with special needs, and father-specific/comprehensive parenting programs for non-custodial fathers.

The map shows that all but 2 programs are located in either Lorain or Elyria. These geographic gaps in easily accessible fatherhood programs and services should be addressed either by adding programs in those areas or by providing transportation options from those outlying areas of the county. It is recommended that Lorain County leaders create an assets map that also includes programs that don't currently

serve men or fathers specifically, but could expand to do so. Then, leaders can prioritize based on the kinds of dads needing served and the geographic locations to put together the best strategy to fill the gaps referenced above.

Conclusions

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