



NEWS

Periodic Newsletter of the
Worcester County
Fathers & Family Network
Winter 2007—Volume 3, Issue 1

NETWORK

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For More
Event Photos!

To Our FATHERS FEST 2006
Sponsors, Patrons, & Friends:

Thank You For Your Continued Support

FIVE YEARS AND STILL GOING STRONG!

On June 17, 2006, the Worcester County Fathers & Family Network successfully hosted its fifth annual FATHERS FEST event at Institute Park in Worcester. Once again this year, rain showers visited the park just before and shortly after the event, but the rain held off the whole afternoon while an estimated crowd of 2000 visitors enjoyed the many and varied activities offered for children and parents alike.



The Mayor's Office kicked off the festivities again this year by reading the annual Worcester proclamation naming June as "Responsible Fatherhood" month. The very popular Toe Jam Puppet Band, a staple at the event for all of its five years, provided the musical entertainment and were later joined by a visit from the Miracle Fish Puppets. Our own Worcester County Wildcats professional football team set up at the event and Finz, the mascot for Worcester's newest sports team, the Sharks, stopped by to visit while the Worcester Firefighters and Police Departments delighted the crowd with tours of their official vehicles and Junior Police and Firefighter badges for the children (young and old alike!). Always a crowd pleaser, Estrellita the Clown enchanted everyone with her exquisite face painting. More than 36 provider agencies from Worcester County set up resource tables to share important information about their programs and services. The "Dunk Your Dad Tank" was a highlight of the event again this year, as were the many interactive games and activities ongoing throughout the site all afternoon. The robotic lawnmower demonstration and giveaway sponsored by WSRS and its advertisers was also a great hit as folks voted for their favorite picture in the 'laziest dad' contest!

We extend our very sincere thanks to to FATHERS FEST each year make our helps the Network achieve its mission to responsible parenting and foster under-fathers play



the many whose contributions success possible. Your support promote public awareness for standing of the important role in the lives of their children.

~ SAVE THE DATE ~

Mark your calendar now for FATHERS FEST 2007
JUNE 16TH, Institute Park, Salisbury Street, Worcester, MA

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The Worcester County Fathers & Family Network is made up of community organizations, professionals, and fathers who promote responsible fatherhood, with an emphasis on improving parenting, self awareness, and expanding opportunities for training and employment necessary to carry out financial responsibilities of caring for children.



For more information or to become involved with the Network, please visit our web site at www.worcestercountyfathersandfamilynetwork.org or contact Jack Bonina at Family Services of Central Massachusetts: 508.756-4646



WE'RE BACK!!!

It's been a couple of years since you saw the last issue of *Network News*, but we invite you to read and enjoy our "home grown" attempt at reinstating a newsletter for the Worcester County Fathers & Family Network. Sometimes you just can't let a lack of funds get in the way, so Karen Waters and Liz Sheldon are giving it the old college try!

We're aiming to produce the Newsletter quarterly dated for delivery by e-mail transmission and available on our web site for the first of January, April, July, and October. We can't do it without you, however, to fill the pages. Please submit your articles, announcements, calendar entries, and any other newsworthy items you may have to offer for each quarter by e-mailing them to the (small but ambitious) Newsletter Committee via sheldon@dor.state.ma.us at least six weeks prior to the Newsletter's scheduled delivery date. If you'd like to volunteer to work on the Newsletter Committee, we'd love to have you. To learn more, feel free to contact committee co-chairs Karen Waters at watersk@worc.k12.ma.us or Liz Sheldon at sheldon@dor.state.ma.us.



CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

By Chris Nelson, Network Chairperson

The Speakers Bureau was formed and has been working on developing a standardized curriculum for the Worcester County Fathers & Family Network to use for community presentations to potential providers and potential funders.

The Public Awareness Committee has been meeting regularly to increase the visibility of the Network and its ability to fulfill its mission through a variety of avenues. A Network website and the reappearance of the quarterly newsletter will help the Network become more visible. The sixth annual Fathers Fest and other community activities are in the early planning stages for the coming year.

The Steering Committee, comprised of the officers of the Network, has met regularly to oversee the ongoing function of the Network and ensure that the goals identified in the strategic plan are being carried out.

We invite you to become involved in the Worcester County Fathers & Family Network! Monthly meetings for providers are held at 9:00 a.m. on the fourth Tuesday of each month at various community locations. We hope you'll attend...and bring a colleague or two with you! Share information about your program, learn what's new with others, and participate in promoting responsible fatherhood and healthy parenting. For location of the meetings, please e-mail Liz Sheldon (sheldon@dor.state.ma.us) to be added to the Network notice distribution list. **Anyone interested in participating in a Network committee should contact the appropriate chairperson to find out when and where the next meeting will be held. (Please see Network Committee Contacts listed on page three.)**

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Strategic Planning Committee Report By Jack Bonina, Network Coordinator



In November, 2005, as the Worcester County Fathers and Family Network entered its sixth year, the *Steering Committee* felt the need to seek a clearer direction that will allow the coalition to play an expanded role in promoting responsible fatherhood throughout the Worcester area. As a result, a *Strategic Planning Committee* was established in January, 2006 to identify key issues that will establish a vision for the future of the Worcester County Fathers and Family Network.

Several individuals with extensive knowledge of our community and the issues that impact families and children in the Worcester area, were asked to attend a series of meetings to establish and implement a process for identifying the most critical issues that affect fathers and families. Key community stakeholders, as well as fathers and mothers, responded to surveys designed by the Strategic Planning Committee. The information collected yielded important insight that eventually resulted in the establishment of three Strategic Goals, and several objectives for the Fathers and Family Network to achieve in the next one to two years, including:

- Sustain on-going activity of the Worcester County Fathers and Family Network.
- Keep the focus on Responsible Fatherhood Program Development.
- Raise public awareness of the importance of fathers in the healthy development of children.

Fundraising Committee Report By Deb Kott, Committee Chairperson



The Fundraising Committee members, Jack Bonina, Chris Nelson, Deb Kott, Dianne Bruce, Jodi Koravos, Rosemarie Franchi, Craig Lindberg, and Jenn Reid are working within the Network's strategic plan framework to try to secure ongoing funding for Network business such as community workshops, trainings, agency collaborations, the development of brochures, maintenance of the Network website, recreational activities, and administrative support. The Network must raise a *minimum* of \$18,000 this fiscal year to meet our budget. To date, we have applied for, and received a \$2,000 grant for each of the next three years from the Children's Trust Fund. We have \$1,000 in grant money in collaboration with Pernet Family Health Service and the Incarcerated Father's Program. Additional federal, state and local grants are being investigated as possible revenue sources. The Fundraising Committee is in the process of scheduling meetings with community leaders in hopes of identifying businesses that would not only be a source of funding for the Network, but would also benefit from collaborating with us. Ideas for other possible fundraisers including raffles, awards dinners, and family movie nights are also being discussed. Please share any suggestions, or connections you may have, with the Fundraising Committee members.

Network Committee Contacts

Jack Bonina, Network Coordinator
Strategic Planning Chairperson
508.756-4646
jbonina@fscm.org

Chris Nelson, Network Chairperson
FATHERS FEST Chairperson
508.755-1228
cnelson@pernetfamilyhealth.org

Jodi Koravos, Public Awareness Committee, Chairperson
508.791-4976, Extension 217

jkoravos@southbaymentalhealth.com

Deb Kott, Fundraising Committee, Chairperson
508.753-1260

dkott@cfs.org

Karen Waters & Liz Sheldon, Co-Chairpersons
Newsletter Committee ~ See Article Page 2



Pernet Family Health Service ~ Father's Parenting/Support Groups

- ◆ Weekly group for custodial and non-custodial fathers 20 years old and older meets Tuesday night from 5:45 to 7:15 PM at Pernet Family Health Service, 237 Millbury Street, Worcester. No insurance or fee required. For more information call Chris Nelson at (508) 755-1228.

Central Massachusetts Mens Resource Center

- ◆ TIME OUT is a free, drop-in discussion group for men of all ages held on Monday evenings from 7:00 to 9:00 PM at 61 Harvard Street, Worcester. Further information is available from facilitators Bill Patten at (508) 753-0808 or (508) 753-1251 or Chuck Stuart at (508) 410-8112 or (508) 755-6611.

Worcester Family Ties Network

- ◆ Peter and Ellen Allard, Family Concert at Worcester Public Library January 24, 2007, 6:00 PM, No Charge to Attend
- ◆ Playgroups: Open to all Worcester residents with children birth to age four. The groups meet weekly for approximately one and one half hours at a variety of times and locations. The groups provide parents and children an opportunity to socialize with other young families and to learn new activities. For more information, please call (508) 799-3136 or visit www.worcesterfamilyties.org. Family Ties Network offers adult education classes (G.E.D., ESOL) to Worcester families with children ages 0-3. Child care and transportation available. For more information, contact (508) 799-3136.

National Initiatives for 2007

- ◆ January- National Eye Care month—Encourage Dads to speak with their health care providers about the importance of Vision Screenings. There are several Health Clinics throughout the city who also do vision screenings if there are issues regarding insurance.
- ◆ February: National Children's Dental Month and American Heart Month.
- ◆ March: Parenting Awareness Month.



Children's Friend's Carriage House Program Is Expanding

Two years ago Children's Friend, Inc., the oldest children's agency in central Massachusetts, opened The Carriage House, a center for grieving children and families. Since then, the Carriage House has provided free grief support groups to young people up to the age of 18 who have gone through the deaths of parents and siblings. While the kids are in their support groups, which meet every other week from September to June, their surviving parents and caregivers are offered adult grief support in their own groups. To date, the program has served more than 80 children, teens and caregivers. It is the only grief support center for kids and families in central Massachusetts. Groups are facilitated by intensively trained volunteers, adults who want to donate their time to helping grieving young people.

As of November 1, 2006, three groups were running: two for children 6 to 12 years old and one for late pre-teens and teens. Children's Friend has just announced the start of two new groups. The first is what The Carriage House calls a "Littles" group – a support group designed specifically for children 3 to 5 years old. This group will meet for an hour and a quarter every other week.

The second new group is different from anything The Carriage House has done before. Over the last two years, grieving parents and caregivers whose children did not want to enroll in The Carriage House program have called and asked if the adults could join anyway. Up until now, that hasn't been possible. But Children's Friend has just announced that an "adults only" grief support group is being formed. To join, an adult must be seeking a grief support group and must be the parent or caregiver of a child who is eligible for Carriage House services, but who is choosing not to participate in The Carriage House.

Anyone who is interested in a grief support group for children, teens or parents/caregivers, or who would like to sign up to be trained as a grief support facilitator, should call Dr. Johanna Sagarin at Children's Friend, 508.753-5425.

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DOR Seeks Help in Recording Paternity Establishments

By Marilyn Ray Smith, Deputy Commissioner
Massachusetts Department of Revenue ~ Child Support Enforcement Division

Background

The Child Support Enforcement Division of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) is responsible for establishing paternity as well as for establishing and enforcing child support orders.

When a child is born to an unmarried mother, establishment of paternity gives the child rights that he or she would not otherwise have. These rights include financial support to help meet the child's needs, access to the father's medical history in case of illness or disease, and access to the father's benefits such as Social Security, pension, health insurance, and inheritance. Because of the importance of two parents to children's well-being, Congress has imposed high expectations on states to ensure that paternity is established for every child born out of wedlock. States must make steady improvement, until the rate attains and stays at 90 percent. States that do well receive incentives; states that do not continue to improve may be penalized.

Voluntary Acknowledgment of Parentage

To simplify the paternity establishment process, federal and state laws authorize the use of binding voluntary paternity acknowledgments when both parents of a child born out of wedlock are in agreement regarding parentage. Both parents may sign the voluntary acknowledgment of parentage form at the hospital when the child is born, as part of the birth registration process. Or after the child's birth, both parents may sign the acknowledgment form at the city or town clerk's office or at the Registry of Vital Records and Statistics (RVRS) at the Department of Public Health in Boston.

Federal Performance Standards

Since 1990, paternity has been established for more than 240,000 children born out of wedlock in Massachusetts, the result of an outstanding collaboration between DOR's Child Support Enforcement Division, RVRS, the Department of Transitional Assistance, the courts, the birthing hospitals, and the city and town clerks. To meet our federal performance standard each year, the Commonwealth must establish paternity through either voluntary acknowledgment by the parents or through adjudication by the courts for more than 20,000 children born out of wedlock.

The federal government pays incentives to state child support enforcement programs to encourage improved collections through efficient establishment and enforcement techniques. Incentive payments are linked to performance in several areas, including paternity establishment. The federal government also imposes a penalty on states which do not improve performance as required. Recognizing that successful paternity establishment requires collaboration among many state agencies, the federal government assesses the penalty against the state's welfare grant.

Impact of Federal Penalties

If the Commonwealth fails to meet its annual target, we run the risk of losing several million dollars from our state's federal welfare grant. Such a loss will affect low-income citizens of the Commonwealth and their communities. These welfare funds are used not just for cash assistance to low-income families, but also for a wide variety of income support supports, such as subsidies for transportation, heating costs, child care, and job training.

We Need Your Help

Every child deserves the love, care, and support of two parents. Establishing legal paternity is the first step to ensuring that support. It is also the responsibility of every parent. By working together, we can accomplish these objectives and also maximize our performance on the federal paternity establishment measure, thereby ensuring that low-income residents in each city and town in the Commonwealth continue to receive the assistance that they need.

DOR stands ready to work with parents and providers to assist in establishing paternity for every child. For more information, brochures and printed materials, outreach services, or to obtain an application for DOR Child Support Enforcement services, we invite you to visit our website at www.mass.gov/cse. DOR will provide assistance in establishing paternity to fathers as well as mothers, including arranging for DNA tests where appropriate.





WCAC's Community Mediation Center

484 Main Street, 2nd Floor, Worcester, MA
508-754-1176 ext. 138, 167

The Community Mediation Center (CMC), a program of Worcester Community Action Council, Inc., provides mediation services to the community. Mediation is a form of conflict resolution and can also be used to prevent possible conflicts.

Mediation is:

- **Voluntary**- all parties need to agree to participate, the Mediation Center contacts the parties, explains the process, invites parties to mediate and schedules the mediation.
- **Confidential**- the dispute and the negotiations are private.
- **Neutral**- the mediators are impartial third parties; they do not make judgments or offer advice.
- **Self-determined**- the parties determine and control the outcome and terms of the agreement.
- **Cost efficient**- sliding fee scale based on income and household members, many services provided at no cost.
- **Time efficient**- daytime and evening mediations are available.

CMC mediates different types of cases including:

- **Family Issues**
 - child support, visitation, parent plan, parent-teen issues, sibling issues
- **Divorce/ Post Divorce**
 - division of assets, debt, parent plan, modifications of child support, visitations
- **Consumer Issues**
- **Landlord/Tenant, Tenant/Tenant, Roommate Issues**
- **Peer Mediation in Schools**

Process:

- Usually one party contacts CMC or is referred to CMC.
- CMC contacts the parties, screens and does an intake, explains the process, invites them to mediate and schedules a mediation session.
- Parties meet with mediators jointly, at first, then may meet individually.
- The mediators will help facilitate the communication and help the parties reach their own mutually acceptable agreement.
- CMC remains involved in the case after an agreement is reached and is available to schedule future mediations if the original agreement needs to be revised.
- Agreements for court-referred cases are often considered legally binding documents, agreements for non-court cases may be considered by the court as a private contract between the parties.
- Parties always have the option to seek a legal course of action.

Eligibility:

- Anyone who is interested in mediation as a way to prevent or resolve conflict.

**For more information please contact:
Carol Balderelli, 508-754-1176, ext. 138
Marien Mendez, 508-764-1176 ext. 167**

For more information or to become involved with the Network, please visit our web site at www.worcestercountyfathersandfamilynetwork.org or contact Jack Bonina at Family Services of Central Massachusetts: 508.756-4646

Photo Gallery

FATHERS FEST - June 17, 2006
Institute Park, Worcester, MA





SUPPORT YOUR NETWORK!

Donate by 12-31-2006 for 'charitable deduction' in Tax Year 2006

The *Worcester County Fathers & Family Network* is here because we believe that children suffer when fathers are not involved in an active, consistent, or healthy way. Research clearly shows that children do better in many ways when fathers are involved. They will get better grades in school, have increased self-esteem, have better mental health, and are less likely to commit crimes as juveniles. Teenage girls are at a significantly lower risk for pregnancy. We know that it's not always possible for fathers to be involved, but the Network believes that by working together as a community, we can improve our support systems for families. When both fathers and mothers are involved and working together for their children, we will all benefit. **We hope that you will help the Worcester County Fathers & Family Network carry out its mission by pledging your financial support now for tax year ending December 31, 2006.** The donation coupon below is provided for your convenience.



Enclosed is my tax-deductible, charitable contribution for \$25 \$50 \$100 Other \$ _____ in a check made payable to the *Worcester County Fathers & Family Network*, c/o Family Services of Central Massachusetts, and mailed to 31 Harvard Street, Worcester, MA 01609.

My name is: _____
(First Name - Middle Initial - Last Name)

My address is: _____
(Street, City/Town, State, Zip Code)

E-mail address: _____ Telephone No.: (____) ____ - _____



Worcester County Fathers & Family Network
 c/o Family Services of Central Massachusetts
 31 Harvard Street
 Worcester, Massachusetts 01609