

NEWS RELEASE

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Study sheds new light on the needs of low-income fathers

Every June in the United States, we pause to honor and reflect on those men who guided us through childhood, and provided love, support, and wisdom. However, for many low-income fathers in Texas, becoming a supportive parent can often involve a personal struggle to both develop the skills necessary to raise a child and to overcome the stereotype that they are not involved with their families.

A report released today explores how local community-based organizations are helping young low-income fathers stay involved in the lives of their children, particularly in “fragile families.” Fragile families—defined as young, low-income never-married parents and their children—are an increasingly large segment of American families, providing for almost one-third of all births nationally and two-thirds of African-American births. Research suggests that while fragile families are generally connected at child-birth, there is a tendency for these families to dissolve over time.

The Texas Fragile Families report is the final product of a three year demonstration project designed to support young non-custodial low-income fathers in their children’s lives. The report helps fill in information on the lives of Texas fragile families and outlines a set of policy and community responses that can aid fathers in becoming more involved with their children.

The report found that, among the young unmarried low-income fathers participating in the pilot projects:

- ☆ 55 percent are cohabiting with the mothers of their children;
- ☆ Two-thirds of young couples are still romantically involved;
- ☆ Almost 60 percent of participating fathers saw their children on a daily basis.

Researchers say that these findings help debunk a popular stereotype that all young low-income dads are ‘deadbeat’ fathers.

“This report clearly shows that the majority of young low-income fathers are trying to support their children,” said Carlos Romo, coordinator for the Texas Fragile Families Initiative and lead author of the report released today by the Center for Public Policy Priorities, a policy research organization that focuses on issues that affect low-income Texans. “However,” Romo continued, “many low-income fathers face serious barriers to their long-term involvement with their families due to high rates of incarceration, under-education, under-employment, and poor relationship skills.”

There is growing consensus nationally, and in Texas, that public assistance programs designed to support mothers and children in low-income families could be doing more to support fragile families, and specifically low-income fathers. Romo notes that “We have yet to see many agencies take a proactive approach to helping fathers. This report should help agencies realize that many low-income fathers need services just as much as poor mothers.”

Romo noted that one agency making new efforts to support fragile families is the Office of Attorney General’s Child Support Division. The agency has recognized that 70 percent of its caseload is children in low-income families. As a result, the division has stepped up its efforts to encourage low-income fathers to pay more support to their families by partnering with community agencies helping to support fragile families and low-income fathers.

Still, Romo suggests that there is a need for more common sense policies like those initiated by the OAG. He says the study documents the pronounced employment needs of low-income fathers, but he notes that even though “low-income minority men face substantial barriers to employment, and payment of child support is strongly linked with employment....there are no state coordinated employment programs targeting low-income fathers for support.”

“If we truly value fathers and the role they play in helping to raise our children, we would be wise to honor and support fathers struggling to be involved in their families not just on fathers day, but everyday,” concluded Romo.

The full report can be seen at www.texasfragilefamilies.org

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A list of contacts for local fatherhood programs in Texas is attached.

Contacts for Local Community Programs Working with Low-Income Fathers

Area	Contact	Phone Number and E-Mail	Organization and Address
Houston	Dr. Peggy Smith, Director Ruth S. Buzi, Program Coordinator	713-873-3601 or 713 873 3602 Fax 713-873-3608 peggys@bcm.tmc.edu rbuzi@hotmail.com,	Teen Health Clinic Baylor College of Medicine 1504 Taub Loop Houston, Texas 77030
El Paso	David Sanchez, Fatherhood Educator,915-562-7955 x 224 Alfredo Rodriguez, YWCA Case Manager, 915-584-4007 x39	Rick Chafino 915-562- 7955, 915-562-2524 fax dsanchez@childcrisiselp.org	Child Crisis Center 2100 North Stephens El Paso, TX 79930
San Angelo	Ms. Carolyn Wiseheart, Executive Director Mr. Gardner Wiseheart, Program Director	915-658-2771 Fax: 915-658-6438 Hfsa@gte.net ; gardner.wiseheart@hfsatx.com ;	Healthy Families San Angelo 200 S. Magdalen Street San Angelo, Texas 76903
Huntsville	Ms. Linda Bone, Advisor Greg Willis, Case Manager Cheryl Eisenfelder, Director	936-293-2626,ext. 57 Greg 936-294-7613 Fax936-293-2989 lbone@huntsville-isd.org; gwillis@huntsville-isd.org	Fragile Families Huntsville Independent School District 441 FM 2821 East Huntsville, Texas 77320
Austin	Ms. Robin Rosell, TANDEM Program Director	512-708-3130 Fax512-320-0702 robinr@austinpcc.com;	TANDEM Prenatal and Parenting Program People's Community Clinic 2909 North IH 35 Austin, Texas 78722
Dallas	Mrs. Elizabeth Duncan, Program Director	214-954-0655 ext1 Liz cell 214 663 0876/Liz office 972 560 3892 Fax214-9691933 lizd@ymcadallas.org	Community Services YMCA Dallas Fragile Families 601 North Akard Dallas, Texas 75201