

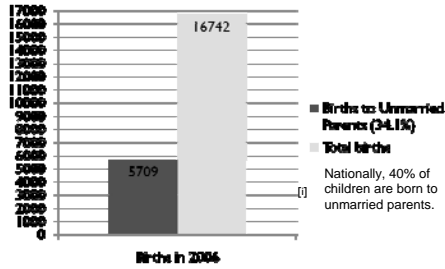
Co-Parent Court: A Problem-Solving Court for Children and Families



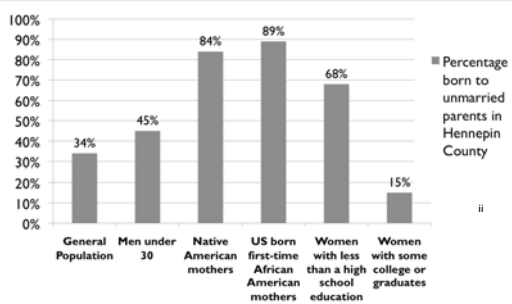
Minnesota Family Support and
Recovery Council Conference
St. Cloud MN
September 21, 2010

Christa Anders – Advance Consulting
LLC
Paul Legler – Innovative Social Policy
LLC

Each year in Hennepin County about
one in three children is born to an
unmarried parent.



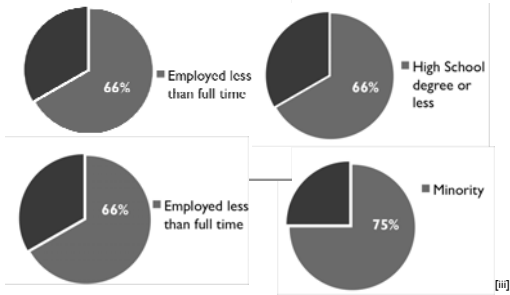
The percentage of children born to
unmarried parents varies
significantly for certain groups.



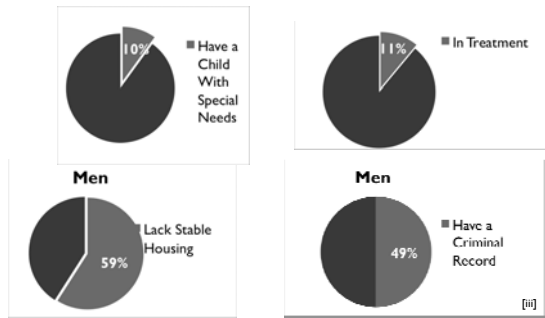
Genesis of Co-Parent Court Project

- Family Court Bench leaders recognized that the Hennepin County Family Court was doing many innovations for divorcing families but had not kept up with large demographic changes in families
- Minnesota Supreme Court required parenting classes for divorcing parents in contested cases and all 87 counties were providing classes (the majority through the U of MN Extension "Parents Forever" program)
- Paternity calendar disproportionately comprised of families of color
- Hennepin County Child Support was doing good work at establishing paternity
- No one was specifically serving the parenting needs of families going through paternity establishment

Unmarried Parents in Hennepin County Family Court



Unmarried Parents in Hennepin County Family Court



Research Establishes Four Realities

1. Children who live away from a biological parent are at increased risk for a wide range of negative outcomes. [iv, v]
2. High-quality involvement by the non-residential parent can provide important benefits. [vi, vii, viii]
3. Intensive involvement by non-residential fathers near birth falls off over time. [ix, x]
4. Cooperative co-parenting increases involvement of the non-residential parent. [xi, xii]



Risks to Children: Quitting School and Teenage Pregnancy

Parents	Percentage of Children Who Drop out of High School by Parent Status	Percentage of Daughters Experiencing Teenage Pregnancy by Parent Status
Married Parents	13%	11%
Divorced Parents	31%	33%
Never Married Parents	37%	37%

[xiii]

Reasons for Risks of Single Parenting

- Financial disadvantages
- Harder to provide quality parenting
 - Less supervision
 - More conflict
 - Harsher discipline
 - Fewer rules
 - Less emotional support
- More stress
 - Conflict
 - Moving
 - Re-partnering



[xiv]

Relationship Stability:

Unmarried Parent Contact as a Function of a Child's Age

Child's Age	Married	Cohabiting	Romantically involved	Friends	No Contact
Birth	0%	50%	32%	8%	10%
Age 5	17%	19%	3%	20%	42%

[xv]

Child Connection: Contact With Children by Non-Resident Fathers

	Regular Contact	Limited Contact	No Contact by Father
Age 1	62%	26%	13%
Age 3	47%	24%	29%
Age 5	43%	20%	37%

[xvi]

Why Co-Parenting is Beneficial

- Parents agree on the rules and support each other's decisions
- Children learn parental authority is not arbitrary
- Children are not subjected to inconsistent discipline
- Children internalize social norms and moral values
- Children observe the modeling of interpersonal skills like communication, respect, and compromise
- Co-Parenting fosters non-resident fathers' involvement



[xviii]

Two Key Research Issues

•Researchers suggest that programs aimed at improving parents' ability to communicate and work together in their parenting may have benefits for children irrespective of whether the parents' romantic relationship remains intact.

•Some research (although mixed) suggests that increased father-child contact is positively associated with increased payment of child support.

Barriers to Co-Parenting

- Multiple Partner Fertility
 - 32%-37% among unmarried parents (well over half with more than one child)
 - 12%-14% among married parents
 - 59% of Couples
 - Bigger problem for father than mothers
- Mental health problems
- Father's prior incarceration



[xvii]

Mission of Co-Parent Court

- The mission of the Hennepin County Co-Parent Court is to create a model for paternity establishment that supports co-parenting to improve the social, emotional, and financial outcomes for children, families, and communities.



Goals and Objectives

- Target unwed parents needing paternity established and who can benefit from social services in order to offer appropriate services to them;
- Improve parenting skills, parental relationships, and paternal participation in the lives of their children;
- Increase child support payments from non-custodial parents by providing them information on how the child support system works and providing them services they need to better provide financial support.
- Promote agreed upon child support orders and custody and parenting time orders for unwed parents.
- Improve outcomes for children by helping unmarried parents work together to parent their children.



Hennepin County Family Court Paternity Calendar: an opportunity

- About 35 cases each Week
 - 18 of those are adjudicated
 - Over 60% with both parties present



The Status Quo:

- “Mass Calendar”
- Focus on child support
- Support services limited to employment
- No education (unlike divorce)
- Orders typically provide for “reasonable parenting time”

Hennepin County Family Court Paternity Calendar: The Status Quo

- Individuals return to family court for child support enforcement, parenting time, and custody disputes.
- How many end up in other county programs???
 - Child protection
 - Foster care
 - Public assistance
 - Juvenile Justice



Project Elements

- Intake assessment and domestic violence screening conducted in court by Co-Parent Court Navigators.
- Referral to the "Together We Can" education program for single parents designed by the University of Minnesota Extension Service and taught at NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center.
- Couples with domestic abuse issues referred for appropriate Co-Parent Education and counseling to the Domestic Abuse Project and other area providers.



Project Elements

- Mothers with social services needs referred for case management to the Gateway Project at NorthPoint.
- Fathers with social service needs referred for case management to the FATHER Project (a division of Goodwill/Easter Seals).
- Following completion of the classes, mediation and family group conferencing services by the Legal Rights Center provided for couples unable to agree on a parenting plan.



Case Selection

- In order to be accepted the case must meet the following criteria:
 - All parents live in the greater Twin Cities metro area and one or more of them reside in North Minneapolis or the surrounding suburbs (Using zip codes to determine).
 - There are no interpreters necessary.
 - There are no active CHIPS cases.
 - There is no Order for Protection or criminal No Contact Order between the parties.
 - Neither parent is a minor.

Scope of Project

- Services to 300 parents each year for 3 years (up to 100 parents may be discretionary Referee referral cases).
- Control group of 300 additional parents.
- Grant funding: \$450,000 per year (a combination of an 1115 grant from ACF coupled with local foundation funding.)



Planning Process

- Formation of a large Advisory Group and smaller working groups.
- McKnight Foundation planning grant used to hire Advance Consulting.
- Research survey of unmarried parents in Family Court.
- Focus groups with mothers and fathers.
- University of Minnesota Extension Service provides specialized curriculum.



Planning Process

- Project Team selected from county-wide Solicitation of Interest
- Planning meeting with Katherine Edin, national expert and author
- Briefings with Senior County Administration and Board
- Meetings with Domestic Abuse Advocates and Anne Menard, national expert
- Fundraising
- Multiple Planning Meetings



Implementation

- Hired two Co-Parent Navigators in May of 2010
- June 2010: Began with discretionary Referee referrals
- September 2, 2010: Began with regular Co-Parent Court at Hennepin County Government Center



Evaluation

- Evaluation is a random assignment pre-post follow up design
- Process and Impact evaluation being conducted by the University of Minnesota
- Evaluation software and management information system is Efforts to Outcomes by Social Solutions
- Parents will be given Target gift cards to participate in the evaluation and must sign consent forms
- Outcome evaluation will look at conflict reduction, child support outcomes, parental contact, employment, parent awareness of importance of father involvement and healthy co-parenting
- Additional research to look at cost-avoidance with other governmental agencies

What Have We Learned So Far

- The involvement of multiple systems – State, County, Judicial, community, makes the project comprehensive but also complicated
- Child support management and staff in Hennepin County very willing to see if Co-Parent Court can make a difference
- Parents are multiply challenged but eager to help their children
- Once the Navigators reach parents and start to build a relationship, parents participate

What Parents Are Saying

■ "I attended 6 sessions of co-parent class and it is an excellent and very practical class for parents who are undecided of what the future holds. I have learned throughout this course the importance of communication and co-parenting. This class is well organized and provides parents with a wide range of information regarding co-parenting. I recommend any parent to experience a co-parenting class because it helps you open up and communicate with the other parent." ~Marvin Chestnut

■ The experiences I have had here are very personal, open and enlightening. Co-parent court is very necessary to help one come and understand themselves, their ex and their child/children on a much deeper level. This level I have reached was not one I thought a program through court would teach. Others will enjoy and learn, I am sure, because I have." ~Davida Henry

■ "I encourage all parents who are experiencing the end of their relationship or just having trouble communicating to attend Co-Parenting classes. Your children will always be the most precious parts of your entire life experience, to be cherished, nourished with love and protected. This experience has helped me to embrace a new and more meaningful life as a better parent, it has helped me bond, resolve conflict, and most of all communicate for the sake of my child. If you are looking for a helpful, informative, and encouraging way to settle any differences, Co-Parenting would be very ideal! I am very impressed with the outcome and knowledge I have received in this class and would strongly recommend parents to experience Collaborative Co-Parenting!" ~Anonymous"

References

- i. From the Hennepin County Assessment Unit. Found online at: <http://www.co.hennepin.mn.us/portal/site/HCI/Internet/Menuitem:3f94db538749b6f68e1e10b1466498/np?contentId=0118491d72c4610d90c11020000094689C3D>. Hamilton, Brady, Martin, Joyce, Ventura, Stephanie. *Births: Preliminary Data for 2007*. National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 57, No. 12, 3 (March 2009). Found online at: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr57/nvsr57_12.pdf
- ii. Data from the Minnesota Center for Health Statistics, and the Hennepin County Assessment Unit, courtesy of Urban Landmark.
- iii. Eckberg, D. . *Report on Single Parent Survey*, (April 2007). Found online at: http://www.mncourts.gov/documents/4/Public/Family_Court/Report_on_Single_Parent_Survey.pdf
- iv. Edin, K. & Kefalas, M. *Promises I Can Keep: why poor women put motherhood before marriage*, University of California Press, 2005.
- v. Coley R. L., Medeiros, B. L. *Reciprocal Longitudinal Relations Between Nonresident Father Involvement and Adolescent Delinquency*, *Child Development*, Vol. 78, No. 1, 132-147 (2007)
- vi. Sobolewski, J. M., King, V. . *Nonresident Fathers' Contributions to Adolescent Well-Being*, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68, 537-557 (August 2006).
- vii. Amato P., Gilbreth J., *Nonresident Fathers and Children's Well-Being: A Meta-Analysis*, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 61, 557-573 (August 1999).
- viii. Carlson, M. J. *Family Structure, Father Involvement, and Adolescent Behavioral Outcomes*, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68, 137-154 (February 2006).
- ix. Kathryn Edin, et al. *Claiming Fatherhood: Race and the Dynamics of Father Involvement Among Unmarried Men*, 2007. Found online at: <http://conference.aapss.org/presentations/Edin.ppt>
- x. Carlson, M.J. *supra*, 472-474.

References

- xi. Carlson M. J., McLanahan S. S., Brooks-Gunn J., *The Importance of the Coparental Relationship for Nonresident Fathers' Ties to Children*, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67, 1196-1212 (December 2005).
- xii. Allen S. et al. *The Effects of Father Involvement: A Summary of the Research Evidence*, Newsletter of the Father Involvement Initiative, Vol. 1 (2002).
- xiii. Amato P., *The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation*, *The Future of Children*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 78 (2005).
- xiv. Amato, *supra*, at 82-84.
- xv. Carlson, M.J. & Hognas, R.S., *Coparenting in Fragile Families*, 10 (September 2009). Found online at: <http://ideas.repec.org/p/pr/crcw/1188.html>.
- xvi. Carlson & Hognas, *supra*, at 14; Carlson and McLanahan, *supra*, at 473.
- xvii. Carlson & Hognas, *supra*, at 7,15-16,19.
- xviii. Amato, *supra*, at 83-84.