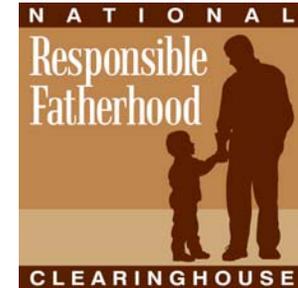




U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance

# Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Missouri

July 2008



[www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov)

## Missouri

### Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

#### *State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities*

Missouri does not directly use state funds for marriage promotion programs. However, pilot marriage programs funded by the federal government and nongovernmental sponsors are available in the state. For example, as a result of federal legislation allocating funding for healthy marriage activities, a number of organizations in Missouri have received funds to provide premarital education, marriage skills training, counseling, and other services to engaged couples and to couples who are interested in marriage.<sup>i</sup>

#### *Other Marriage Initiatives*

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services currently funds eight programs in Missouri designed to strengthen marital relationships between parents. The programs are Healthy Relationship Skills for Fragile Families, Healthy Marriage and Family Formation, Refugee Healthy Marriage Program, Tender Beginning Plus, The Connecting for Baby Project, Healthy Marriage Project of Southwest Missouri, Healthy Families St. Louis, and the St. Louis Healthy Families Initiative.<sup>ii</sup>

### Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

#### *State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs*

The Children's Trust Fund, Missouri's Foundation for Child Abuse Prevention, funds the BraveHearts Program for Dads run by the Healthy Families Counseling and Support organization. The program serves at-risk fathers of children ages zero to six in Clay and Platte counties with parenting and child development education, fatherhood development, case management services, father-to-father mentoring, vocational/job training referrals, and referrals for other services. At-risk fathers include fathers who are absent, teenagers, not married, of low-income, unemployed or underemployed, and incarcerated, as well as those who lack a high school diploma, who grew up with no or poor father involvement themselves, and/or who have limited coping skills.<sup>iii</sup>

#### *State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood*

Youth committed to the Division of Youth Services may participate in the Rites of Passage program. This program emphasizes responsibility and accountability, including responsible parenting.<sup>iv</sup>

*Take Time to Be a Dad Today*



### *The Family and Medical Leave Act*

Missouri's family and medical leave policy allows fathers and mothers working in the public sector to take sick or accrued leave in connection with the adoption of a child.<sup>v</sup> There are no other provisions for paid or unpaid family and medical leave for private- or public-sector employees in Missouri that go beyond those proscribed by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993.<sup>vi</sup>

### *Domestic Violence Services*

Missouri provides domestic violence services through the nonprofit Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (MOCADSV). This agency runs 24-hour shelters throughout Missouri to provide victims of domestic violence with safe havens. It also provides hotlines, therapy, support groups, legal advocacy, and case management.<sup>vii</sup>

### *Child Custody Policy*

In a divorce, legal separation, or paternity case, each parent must file a parenting plan that the court will use to make decisions about child support, custody, and visitation.<sup>viii</sup> A person may file a family access motion if rights to custody are withheld for no good cause.<sup>ix</sup> Parents seeking an end to their union may be ordered to take a course on the effects of divorce on children.<sup>x</sup>

### *Paternity Establishment*

Paternity establishment ensures a child's right to a range of public benefits, including survivor's insurance, education, health care, and workers' compensation; and establishing paternity gives a child born outside of marriage the same legal rights as a child born to married parents. In Missouri, the husband of a married mother is considered the legal father of the child. When an unmarried mother gives birth, hospital staff members offer the parents an Affidavit Acknowledging Paternity, which declares that the man is the legal father. This affidavit can also be signed at a later time. When paternity is in question, the mother or alleged father may request a genetic test through the Family Support Division – Child Support Enforcement (FSD–CSE) that will be paid for by the state. Under Missouri law, the man is presumed to be the father if the results of a genetic test show at least a 98 percent probability that this is the case.<sup>xi</sup>

### *Child Support Assistance*

The Missouri Child Support Enforcement (CSE) unit, run by the Family Services Division of the Department of Social Services, offers the Parent's Fair Share Program for noncustodial parents seeking assistance to improve their education and employment, make their child support payments, and improve their parenting skills. To be eligible, parents must have a case with the CSE and an order to pay child support, must be unemployed or underemployed, and must be at least 18 years old and live in Missouri. Parent's Fair Share offers GED and vocational programs; help with searching for, interviewing for and finding a job; parenting education; case management services; peer support; and assistance in overcoming substance abuse.<sup>xii</sup>

### *Child Support Enforcement*

Missouri CSE locates parents whose whereabouts are unknown, establishes paternity, establishes and reviews support orders, and enforces support payment. Support payments can be collected from the noncustodial parent's federal or state tax refund, paycheck, lottery winnings, or unemployment benefits, and liens can be placed on the parent's property and/or bank accounts. Missouri may restrict the nonpaying parent's



driver's, professional, business, or recreational license, ask the prosecuting attorney to file civil contempt or criminal nonsupport charges, and work with other states to collect support from parents living outside the state.<sup>xiii</sup>

## Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

### *Welfare Benefits*

Missouri offers welfare benefits to two-parent families on the same basis as to single-parent families. The state imposes a lifetime limit of 60 months on the receipt of benefits. Parents in two-parent families receiving cash assistance must participate in work activities immediately upon receiving benefits; parents in one-parent families must begin participating in work activities 24 months after receiving benefits. Education and training, however, can fulfill this work requirement for an unlimited amount of time.<sup>xiv</sup>

### *Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers*

The BraveHearts Program for Dads, run by the Healthy Families Counseling and Support organization, offers a variety of services for low-income noncustodial fathers as part of its ongoing work to assist at-risk fathers. Details of this program have been described previously in this brief.

### *Job Training and Employment Services*

The Missouri Department of Economic Development, Division of Workforce Development, offers several work preparation programs to persons 18 or older who have limited income, are unemployed, or are not self-sufficient. These programs offer counseling, training, skills assessment, job-search assistance, job placement, and assistance with the acquisition of a GED and basic educational skills.<sup>xv</sup>

## Incarceration and Reentry

### *Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers*

The University of Missouri Outreach and Extension provides the Living Interactive Family Education Program (LIFE) in Potosi Correctional Center. The program has two components: enhanced visitation in which incarcerated fathers and children work together on 4-H projects, and parenting skills classes for incarcerated fathers.<sup>xvi</sup>

## Resources

- **Parents' Fair Share.** This Web site provides general information about the Child Support Enforcement unit's program for noncustodial parents; available at <http://www.dss.mo.gov/cse/pfs/index.htm>.

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