



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



## NRFC State Profiles: Washington 2009

### Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

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

Several programs aimed at responsible fathering currently operate in the state. One example is Conscious Fathering, hospital-based program that provides new fathers with infant-care skills and information about the importance of father involvement in children's lives.<sup>i</sup> The Parent Trust for Washington Children also sponsors a number of other parenting programs, which provide parent educational services, in-home visits, and support groups.<sup>ii</sup> An additional fatherhood initiative is now under way in the form of PTA Men: Partners in Making a Difference, a program launched by the Washington State Parent Teacher Association to involve men more fully in children's academic lives.<sup>iii</sup> Several local community organizations also operate father programs in Washington State.<sup>iv</sup> Finally, the First A.M.E. Child and Family Center currently uses federal funding to support its Fatherhood, Responsibility, Engagement and Services in Head Start (FRESH Start) program, which serves low-income fathers of Head Start children in the Seattle area. Services include goal-setting, workshops, support groups, and father-child social activities, which aim to involve fathers in their children's education; improve parenting skills; develop fathers' advocacy, financial, and leadership skills; and encourage fathers to participate in education and training opportunities.<sup>v</sup>

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

Washington uses state TANF funds to support programs designed to prevent out-of-wedlock and teen childbearing. The state is developing an interagency task force to develop and implement a statewide strategy to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies, especially among adolescents. Through a federal waiver called TAKE CHARGE, family planning services have been extended to women and men whose incomes are up to 200 percent of the federal poverty line. Local Community Service Offices have been established across the state to provide family planning clinics, birth control access, and an information hotline. A statewide educational campaign is also under way to increase public awareness about available methods of birth control, and the state is conducting ongoing evaluations of the campaign's effectiveness.<sup>vi</sup>

#### *The Family and Medical Leave Act*

In addition to abiding by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Washington has implemented a state Family Care Act and a state Family Leave Act. The Family Leave Act was amended in 2006 to expand the provisions offered under the federal FMLA. Specifically, the state legislation amends the previous state policy so that it is identical to that incorporated into the federal FMLA. The amended state act also provides additional leave time to women who experience disability due to pregnancy or childbearing.<sup>vii</sup> The current state Family Care Act became effective in 2006. It allows all employees with paid-leave benefits to use earned sick leave or other paid time off (e.g., vacation time and personal days) to care for: 1) a minor child (biological, adopted, foster, stepchild, or legal ward) with either a routine or serious health condition; 2) a legal spouse, parent, parent-in-law, or grandparent with a serious health condition; or 3) an adult child (biological, adopted, foster, stepchild, or legal ward) with a chronic or temporary disability or a serious health condition. The state leave policy extends the federal FMLA to include all employees with leave benefits, to allow for care of additional family members, and to allow for the use of earned paid-leave time. It also removes the federal requirement that illnesses must endure for a minimum of three consecutive days to be eligible. Employers who fail to comply with the federal FMLA or the state policies can be fined up to \$1,000 per violation.<sup>viii</sup>

### *Take Time to Be a Dad Today*

### *Domestic Violence Services*

Washington's Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) operates a state Domestic Violence Program that supports emergency counseling, legal advocacy services, a statewide hotline, and community-based shelters serving victims of domestic violence. Moreover, rehabilitation services are provided through contracts made between DSHS and local agencies, who abide by minimum DSHS-defined standards for programs and providers serving domestic violence perpetrators. Programs and agencies must meet DSHS certification standards before they are allowed to provide direct services.<sup>ix</sup> Statewide standards and tools have been established to screen, identify, and provide referrals for families at risk for domestic violence. Pilot sites have been established at local Community Service offices that have on-site domestic violence counselors. Finally, Washington state law enables families who have been victimized by domestic violence to receive waivers of certain welfare requirements, such as work requirements or time limits, if it is decided that these requirements would make it more difficult to escape the family violence.<sup>x</sup>

### *Child Custody Policy*

Under Washington state law, decisions regarding child custody are made by the courts when parents are not in agreement. Courts base custody decisions on what they determine to be in the child's best interest, which state law defines as the parenting arrangement that "best maintains a child's emotional growth, health and stability, and physical care ... which is ordinarily served when the existing pattern of interaction between a parent and child is altered only to the extent necessitated by the changed relationship of the parents or as required to protect the child from physical, mental, or emotional harm."<sup>xi</sup>

### *Paternity Establishment*

There are three ways to establish legal paternity in the state. The first option is through marriage. If parents marry prior to the birth of a child, the husband is assumed to be the child's legal father unless another man or interested party challenges that presumption. Second, unmarried parents can voluntarily establish legal paternity through the state's Paternity Affidavit Program, which requires that both parents sign a paternity affidavit form naming the child's father, which must be signed and notarized by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. The third option, usually reserved for cases in which paternity is contested, is to establish paternity through the courts, which may require genetic testing of the father, mother, and child to establish paternity. Establishing legal paternity awards children rights to services and rights, including child support, Social Security benefits, health insurance, and inheritance rights. Paternity may be established any time before a child's 18th birthday.<sup>xii</sup>

### *Child Support Assistance*

Child support in the state is overseen by the Division of Child Support (DCS), whose mission is to "improve the lives of children and benefit families and taxpayers by providing quality Child Support Services in a fair and fiscally responsible manner."<sup>xiii</sup> Parents are eligible to receive support if they have custody or are the custodial parent of a minor child, or if they were previously a minor child's custodial parent and are owed back support. DCS is responsible for establishing, reviewing, and modifying child support obligations and for collecting and processing child support payments. If a noncustodial parent demonstrates in court that he or she has good cause for not making support payments, any actions against the parent are dismissed and no further efforts to enforce or establish a support order are made. No other services are offered to parents who are unable to pay child support.<sup>xiv</sup>

### *Child Support Enforcement*

In the event that a noncustodial parent fails to pay child support, DCS may withhold wages or other income, withhold an IRS tax refund, seize personal property, or charge the noncompliant parent with contempt or federally criminal nonsupport. In the event that a custodial parent is unable to locate the absent parent, DCS provides locator services that work across states to find the noncustodial parent and enforce the child support order.<sup>xv</sup> Noncustodial parents whose

children or the mothers of those children receive welfare may be eligible to receive some state welfare services if they are unable to pay child support; this possibility is dependent on state approval and available funds.<sup>xvi</sup>

## Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

### *State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities*

Washington does not use state funds to support activities directly aimed at marriage preparation. The state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) state plan includes marriage promotion and the formation and maintenance of two-parent families as state goals. To date, however, the state has not moved to fund marriage preparation programs per se.<sup>xvii</sup>

### *Other Marriage Initiatives*

Federal funds support the Northwest Marriage Institute, which provides marriage education, preparation, and counseling services to couples in Washington regardless of their ability to pay and the Marriage Friendly Community program, which offers a public advertising campaign, relationship skills trainings to high school students and expectant parents, marriage education classes, and a marriage mentoring program.<sup>xviii</sup> The Children's Home Society of Washington also offers programs aimed at strengthening marriage, such as the Strong Partners and Relationships for Kids (SPARK) program, which teaches low-income couples relationship-building skills.<sup>xix</sup>

## Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

### *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits*

Washington's welfare program, titled WorkFirst, consists of a network of 32 partnerships encompassing government agencies, tribes, community organizations, community colleges, workforce and development agencies, and individual citizens. The goal of the program is to reduce poverty and promote financial self-sufficiency by moving low-income families from welfare to work. Full welfare benefits in Washington are offered only to low-income parents who reside with and are the primary caregivers for a minor child, though select services may be extended to nonresident, noncustodial parents who fail to make their child support payments.<sup>xx</sup>

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

The state has the option to extend workforce services or to make other referrals to service programs for noncustodial parents who are unable to make their child support payments. A noncustodial father is only eligible for such services if his child or the child's mother is a current WorkFirst participant, if funds are available, and if the state deems the services appropriate. No other services are specifically geared toward low-income noncustodial parents.<sup>xxi</sup>

### *Job Training and Employment Services*

Fathers who are eligible to participate in state WorkFirst activities have access to a number of job training and employment services including community service work, job-search and placement services, work-based experiential learning opportunities, tuition assistance, and employment training.<sup>xxii</sup> Non-TANF recipients can also access job search, job training, apprenticeship, educational, and other employment-related services through the state government.<sup>xxiii</sup>

## Incarceration and Reentry

### *Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers*

The Washington Department of Corrections offers several programs and services designed to help incarcerated inmates develop and maintain strong family relationships, including parenting classes, reunification assistance, referrals to other resources, and support and mentoring groups for family members.<sup>xxiv</sup> Several individual facilities also offer programs that specifically target fathers, like the Nurturing Fathers program at the Airway Heights Corrections Center and the Read to Me Daddy program at the Cedar Creek Corrections Center. Fathers can also participate in educational, employment, life skills, and counseling programs.<sup>xxv</sup>

## Resources

- **The Parent Trust for Washington Children.** This Web site provides information about Washington's Conscious Fathering program, including resources to support Washington fathers; available at <http://consciousfathering.org/index.html>.
- **The Fathers Network.** This Web site provides information about the 16 Washington State Fathers Network programs that offer services and resources to fathers in the state; available at <http://www.fathersnetwork.org>.
- **The Washington State Parent Teacher Association.** This Web site provides information about the PTA Men: Partners Making a Difference Program, which is aimed at involving fathers in children's education; available at [http://www.wastatepta.org/programs/PTA\\_mens/](http://www.wastatepta.org/programs/PTA_mens/).

## References

- <sup>i</sup> Parent Trust for Washington Children. (2008). *Conscious Fathering*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://consciousfathering.org/index.html>.
- <sup>ii</sup> Parent Trust for Washington Children. (2008). *Education and Support*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.parenttrust.org/for-families/education-support/>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Washington State Parent Teacher Association. (2009). *PTA Men: Partners in making a difference*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from [http://www.wastatepta.org/programs/PTA\\_mens/index.html](http://www.wastatepta.org/programs/PTA_mens/index.html).
- <sup>iv</sup> The Fathers Network. (n.d.). *Fathers' programs in Washington state*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.fathersnetwork.org/671.html>.
- <sup>v</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2008). *Region 10 abstracts – Fatherhood*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/hmabstracts/region10fr.htm>.
- <sup>vi</sup> Washington State Government. (2008). *Washington's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) state plan*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/about/tanf/planbody.pdf>.
- <sup>vii</sup> Washington State Department of Labor and Industries. (2007). *Washington State Family Leave Act Q&A*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.lni.wa.gov/WorkplaceRights/files/FamilyLeaveFAQs.pdf>.
- <sup>viii</sup> Washington State Department of Labor and Industries. (2006). *Frequently asked questions about number ES.C.10: The family care rules*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.lni.wa.gov/WorkplaceRights/files/policies/esc10.pdf>.
- <sup>ix</sup> Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Children's Administration. (2006). *Domestic violence*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/dvservices/index.asp>.
- <sup>x</sup> Washington State Government. (2008). *Washington's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) state plan*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/about/tanf/planbody.pdf>.
- <sup>xi</sup> Washington State Legislature. (n.d.). *Title 26 Revised Code of Washington: Domestic relations*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?Cite=26>.
- <sup>xii</sup> Washington State Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Support. (2006). *Paternity establishment*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/services/paternity.asp>.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Child Support. Division of Child Support. *Home Page*. (2009). Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/>.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Washington State Government. (2008). *Washington's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) state plan*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/about/tanf/planbody.pdf>.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xviii</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2008). *Region 10 abstracts – Healthy Marriage*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/hmabstracts/region10hm.htm>.
- <sup>xix</sup> Children's Home Society of Washington. (2009). *Family support*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from [http://www.childrenshomesociety.org/services\\_familySupport.html](http://www.childrenshomesociety.org/services_familySupport.html).
- <sup>xx</sup> Washington State Government. (2008). *Washington's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) state plan*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/about/tanf/planbody.pdf>.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Washington State Government. (2008). *Washington's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) state plan*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/about/tanf/planbody.pdf>.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Washington State Government. (2008). *Washington's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) state plan*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/about/tanf/planbody.pdf>.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Access Washington. (2009). *Employment*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://access.wa.gov/employment/index.aspx>.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Washington State Department of Corrections. (n.d.). *Family and Friends Services*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.doc.wa.gov/family/default.asp>.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Washington State Department of Corrections. (n.d.). *Airway Heights Correction Center*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.doc.wa.gov/facilities/prison/ahcc/default.asp>; Washington State Department of Corrections. (n.d.). *Cedar Creek Corrections Center*. Accessed online 08/04/09 from <http://www.doc.wa.gov/facilities/prison/cccc/default.asp>.