

Through Counseling and Personal Development,

Men Learn to Be Fathers

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Through Counseling and Personal Development, Men Learn to Be Fathers; Supporting Low-Income Dads is Key to Reducing Long-term Poverty, says Catholic Charities USA

Alexandria, VA-Many children in our country grow up not just in income poverty, but also in the poverty of absent fathers. With numerous studies showing how important fathers are to their child's development and sense of self-worth, many local Catholic Charities nationwide are offering programs to help low-income fathers become and stay engaged in the lives of their children.

"There's no question that children are better off when both parents are involved in their lives, but this is too often not the case, as nearly 14 million children under age 15 live with a single mother. And sadly, millions of these children have fallen into poverty as a result," said Rev. Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA. "By helping low-income dads, these local Catholic Charities programs are reducing many of the challenges that cause families to fall apart and children to fall into poverty."

One example of a local program that strives to improve the economic stability of fathers and promote the positive involvement of fathers with their children is the ***Catholic Family Services' Fatherhood Initiative in St. Louis***. The program provides group counseling and education sessions to help fathers develop personally and socially so that they can positively affect the lives of their children.

The St. Louis program's six-week intensive course, which meets for several hours daily, helps men learn how to engage with their children in positive ways and take on the responsibilities of fatherhood. The program also provides education on job search and interviewing skills, healthy behaviors and lifestyles, anger management, life skills, money management, substance abuse, parenting, and violence prevention. In addition, the men are able to get a physical exam and routine health care, an important support since many of the men have been using drugs and eating poorly for many years.

The program also helps men understand how to interact with the legal system and the child support enforcement agency, get their names on their children's birth certificates, and develop a co-parenting plan with their children's mother. Upon graduation, participants receive a \$300 stipend to be applied to child support.

Other Fatherhood Programs

****Idaho Dads Matter** is a statewide fatherhood initiative of Catholic Charities of Idaho (CCI). Through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, CCI and its partners serve dads who do not have custody of their children, but need and want to be part of nurturing them into healthy and happy adulthood. Services include counseling and parenting education as well as job development and readiness activities.

****Teen fathers** are the focus of Maryville Academy's Fatherhood Initiative. Held three times a year, this program is a 12-week seminar that teaches teen dads practical child care tips and also provides information on the development of job skills, finding jobs, treatment of substance abuse, domestic violence, child support obligations and fathers' rights. The majority of the sessions are for males, although some sessions address co-parenting issues for men and women.

****The FatherLink** program of Catholic Social Services of the Miami Valley in Dayton, OH, has served over 200 fathers between the ages of 15 and 25 since 2000. The program helps teen fathers be supportive of the mother of their children and actively participate in their child's life. It also provides the young fathers information about self-sufficiency, education, employment and paternity.

Just one Piece of the Puzzle of Strengthening Families and Reducing Poverty

Innovative fatherhood programs by Catholic Charities agencies are just one piece to a puzzle in supporting low-income dads and cutting U.S. poverty. Better federal policies that help low-income fathers become more active and engaged in the lives of their children are also needed.

As part of its Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America, Catholic Charities USA plans to leverage Father's Day to reignite a national dialogue about the importance fathers play in helping their children grow up in safe and supportive families. This effort will include advocating government leaders to develop policies and strategies to help low-income fathers become more active and engaged in the lives of their children.

"Our nation's public policies and programs have often left fathers out of the resources that have been made available to children," Snyder said. "This undermines the central role that both parents play in the stability and well being of the family, community and society. It is important for policymakers to embrace the family as a complete unit and develop policies that support, strengthen, and encourage men and women to remain connected to their children and families."

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