



Fostering Fatherhood

BY JESSICA VAUGHN

Fathers' Support Center in St. Louis promotes responsible parenting



Photo courtesy of Fathers' Support Center.

Sometimes the most extraordinary stories are about the most ordinary moments. A father spends a Sunday afternoon with his son; they watch football, root for the same team, share a bag of chips and work on homework together until they doze off side by side on the couch. There are smiles, laughs, and shared feelings of love and security.

But through modern society's looking glass, it's too often seen that non-custodial fathers don't experience these kinds of Sundays. They are expected to provide support for their children through one specific means: cash. These fathers, who are separated from their children for various reasons, are taught that money or expensive gifts are the keys to good parenting. While it's true that being financially responsible is indeed an important aspect of fatherhood, another vital facet is physical presence. It's gifts of time and love that foster meaningful relationships with children.

Fathers' Support Center (FSC), an organization based in St.

Louis, is working toward giving those Sunday afternoons back to dads and their kids. The center's goal is to establish relationships that are more than monetary; FSC strives to educate these men to support their children financially, emotionally and developmentally. The courses (descriptions on pages 2&3) can be rigorous and challenging, but have the potential to be life changing.

Daughter of Charity Carol Schumer teaches the parenting portion of the six-week core program at FSC called Family Formation. Men enrolled in this demanding "boot camp" program have committed themselves to a six-week, "full immersion" experience. They arrive at the center at 7:45am each weekday and spend the mornings in classroom and roundtable settings. Participants learn the skills necessary for parenting, for personal, spiritual and emotional development, and for the prevention of both child and substance abuse. At the end of the program, graduates possess the foundation and

FSC Program Descriptions

provided by FSC

Family Formation

Family Formation is the core program of Fathers' Support Center. Men enrolled in this rigorous and demanding "boot camp" have committed themselves to a six-week, "full immersion" experience. They arrive at the center at 7:45am each weekday and spend the mornings in classroom and roundtable settings. Participants learn the skills necessary for parenting, for personal, spiritual and emotional development, and for the prevention of both child and substance abuse. At the end of a rigorous six-week program, graduates possess the foundation and start-up tools necessary to become responsible fathers and functioning members of their communities. Graduates of the program continue to receive follow-up services and support for at least one year in order to ensure their questions are answered and their needs are met.

Family Formation – Women's Project

This program started in 2015 as a pilot program. This is a setting where women develop the skills and behaviors necessary to cooperate with the fathers in the rearing of their children, regardless of the character of their personal relationship. Their services include: Parenting, Childhood Trauma, Domestic Violence Communication, Healthy Marriage and more. The Project is three hours for three days a week (Tuesday – Friday) for six weeks.

Employment/Mentoring

These are two services that can be utilized once clients have graduated from The Family Formation Program or have attended at least four Father's Rap sessions. Unemployed participants meet with a job developer weekly and receive professional mentoring. Areas of focus include job readiness and retention skills, culminating in job placement. Participants are paired with trained mentors who provide support and guidance in finding employment as



A father helps his son during a family bonding event at Home Depot. children in different ways. Photo courtesy of Fathers' Support Center.

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To some onlookers, Sr. Carol might seem like the least likely candidate to teach a parenting class; after all, she has no experience raising children of her own. But within a few moments of hearing her speak to her class at Fathers' Support Center, it's vividly apparent why she's here. She has a way of communicating that is hard to surpass, playing the role of parent by shepherding estranged fathers into a life of responsible parenthood.

She begins by creating a comfortable space for the fathers, quickly acknowledging her lack of parenting experience, her apparent whiteness and woman-ness, all things that drastically differentiate her from the men in the room. But she promises that despite these differences, if they stick with the program they're bound to learn something. This could be a life changer, she says. When she asks the



These events help fathers learn how to support and encourage their

fathers to share their feelings about working with her, most of them say they are optimistic, excited about the partnership; others admit their skepticism. And that's okay with Sr. Carol. She's not interested in fake responses. This class is real. The problems are real. And the solutions are real. There's no getting things done under false light. "I love what I do," she says. "I love being able to walk with you."

All participants (including visitors such as myself and MCC Executive Director Mike Hoey) introduce themselves and give a glimpse into their lives; they share their birthplace, names of their children, and concerns about their parenting strategies. It is a familial environment. No one is judged; there is no hierarchy—the setting nurtures learning, first and foremost. Over the next six weeks, these men will learn important lessons in unconventional ways. Sr. Carol uses old comic strips and anecdotes to relay important information in a way the fathers can understand on a deeper level, rather than rattling off instructions or handing out bullet-pointed informational materials.

well as teaching family life skills.

Training to Work

This program is a collaboration between FSC and the Missouri Department of Corrections, the Bureau of Prisons and Federal Probation and Parole. Participants attend the Family Formation classes. Additional classes include professional mentoring classes and "Within My Reach". They also have the opportunity to earn an industry recognized credential.

Fathers' Rap

Father's Rap meets after usual work hours and uses the Family Formation Curriculum format. Topics include personal responsibility, manhood and fatherhood, parenting skills, child support issues, and employment, custody and visitation topics and communications skills.

Youth Leadership

Not all programs delivered by Fathers' Support Center are for men and fathers. Our Youth Leadership & Development program mentors and teaches both young men and young women, most of whom don't have an active father in their lives, how to become responsible teens within their communities. The program focuses on teaching youth how to avoid high risk situations and behaviors such as gang involvement, drug/alcohol use and unhealthy relationships. We help prepare them for college and careers and how to make healthy decisions for themselves, their families and their communities. Youth involved in the program learn from group and one-on-one mentoring as well as through experiential training offered by local business owners, schools, and the community.

Legal Clinic

The Fathers' Support Center Legal Clinic offers high quality affordable legal services in family law. The men receive much-needed legal services in the areas of child support payment modifications, legal visitation, child custody (if a child is at risk of being placed in foster care) and more.

Fathers Matter!

Fatherless children face a number of challenges that those with two-parent families don't. Studies show they are

Kendrick Belk bonds with his father, Keith, during family bonding day at Home Depot. Fathers' Support Center is working toward ending the cycle of fatherless children. Photo by FSC staff.



5X

MORE LIKELY TO COMMIT SUICIDE

32X

MORE LIKELY TO RUN AWAY

20X

MORE LIKELY TO HAVE BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS

9X

MORE LIKELY TO DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL

20X

MORE LIKELY TO END UP IN PRISON

10X

MORE LIKELY TO ABUSE CHEMICAL SUBSTANCES

14X

MORE LIKELY TO COMMIT RAPE

20X

MORE LIKELY TO GET PREGNANT



Photo by FSC staff.

FSC class 113 graduate Jamie Faulkner (left) knows what it's like to grow up in a broken home. He was raised by his grandparents until he was a teenager, and then shuffled back and forth between relatives homes. After spending time in jail, Jamie realized he was on a path to providing the same dreary childhood for his son. FSC has helped him turn his life around and be there for his children. At the end of his speech at graduation, he proposed to his girlfriend, Candice, who graduated from the women's program. This was a first at FSC. Best wishes to the happy couple and their children!

WATCH Jamie's story here!



The first class is rounded out with a quick story about a father and son.

After a lengthy shift, a tired man returns home to his young son, who bombards him with a question at the door: Daddy, how much do you make an hour? Exhausted and frustrated, the father sharply questions his son, wondering why he is prodding in his business. He realizes his harshness, and answers his son's inquiry. Ten dollars an hour, he says. His son then asks for five dollars. Again, out of frustration, the father asks him why he needs the money and, assuming he'll use it for selfish reasons, he sends the boy to his room. After a few moments the father realizes his misplaced frustrations and goes to give his son the money he asked for. Elated, the boy reaches under his pillow and pulls out another five dollar bill. He hands the ten dollars back to his father. Confused, the father asks why he is returning his money. With a hopeful smile, the son says: I'd like to buy an hour of your time, Daddy.

Through stories, family bonding days, structure and other elements, FSC works its magic, transforming fathers into the best versions of themselves. Some men may struggle, but Sr. Carol says the outcome is worth the hard times. "It's not how you fall," she says. "It's how you get yourself back up."

As long as fathers need a hand, FSC will be there to help them stand with pride. It's the staff and founders of FSC, some of whom have gone through the programs themselves, that make these positive changes happen. Halbert Sullivan,

CEO of FSC, comes from a background that many of these fathers can relate to. He, too, grew up without a steady father figure in his life, and before beginning his work at FSC, he struggled with serious substance abuse and spent time in prison on multiple occasions. At 41, he woke up on a bus stop bench after a two-week cocaine binge. This was the moment he realized the path he was walking was a dead end.

Three years after this pivotal moment, Sullivan was on his way to earning his Masters of Social Work from the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, which he completed in the late 1990s. It was during this time that he was approached by Doris Stoechner and Sue Breslauer, who wanted him to help start up the Fathers' Support Center. Sullivan was hesitant to leave his salaried job, but Stoechner and Breslauer eventually convinced him to come aboard. Sullivan quickly found nonprofit work enriching; seeing the impact FSC had on fathers from the very beginning was enriching. For the last 18 years, Sullivan and his counterparts have continued to help mend broken families through FSC. Since its doors opened in 1998, FSC has reached over 13,000 fathers and 32,500 children. Success has been seen in most cases. Of those 13,000 fathers, 75 percent financially support their children, and 80 percent interact with their children.

The center's budget is funded by several different entities, both private and public. FSC receives federal and state funding and hosts an annual fundraiser, which raised over 100 thousand dollars last year. In the fall of 2015, FSC received a grant from the Administration for Children

and Families, part of the Department of Health and Human Services, for 10 million dollars, to be dispersed over the next five years. The money has been proven to go right back into the community. In 2015 FSC returned \$11,872,541 to the St. Louis community on an investment of \$4,132,448 (FSC 2015 expenses).

FSC is the only agency of its kind in Missouri, and one of just a few in the nation. Recognizing the value of fatherhood responsibility programs, the MCC last year persuaded legislators to amend welfare reform legislation to include funding for such programs. This year, the Missouri General Assembly appropriated 1.5 million dollars for marriage and parental responsibility programs. The hope is that with this initial funding and additional funding in coming years, more non-profit agencies like FSC will spring up around the state of Missouri to serve more fathers in need.

Fathers' Support Center is tirelessly working to improve the quality of life for children and families in our state. It is incredibly important to sustain funding for programs like FSC so that future generations can continue understand the true value of family life.

Jessica Vaughn in MCC's communications director



Sister Carol Schumer has been teaching the Strengthening Families class since class three at FSC. The 113th class graduated on April 20th.



[Click here to visit the FSC website!](#)

Fatherhood Initiatives in Missouri

BY JOHN GINWRIGHT

To improve the lives of children in single-parent families, the Missouri Family Support Division (FSD), with other government agencies and private organizations, supports programs and activities to promote the financial and personal responsibility of noncustodial parents to their children and to increase the participation of fathers in the lives of their children.

The FSD provides child support services to families, including paternity establishment for children born outside of marriage, assistance with getting orders for child support and medical support, and monitoring and enforcing orders to collect unpaid child support.

The Family Support Division also supports Responsible Fatherhood Initiative programs to encourage noncustodial parents to participate in the lives of their children. The programs connect noncustodial parents with resources to help parents financially support their children, to help establish legal paternity, and to help those parents actively participate in care-giving tasks. "Fatherhood" programs may also serve mothers.

Under federal law, Responsible Fatherhood Initiative programs involve activities that promote or sustain marriage, encourage responsible parenting, foster economic stability,

and support responsible fatherhood. Programs may include:

- Healthy marriage and co-parenting skills training;
- General fatherhood competency for all income levels;
- Support for fathers involved with the child welfare and criminal justice systems;
- A focus on children's education and literacy;
- Awareness of the needs of fathers who have children with special needs, and
- Attention to issues of domestic violence.

The Family Support Division currently partners with the Missouri Department of Corrections to educate and inform incarcerated parents about the Missouri Child Support Program and their child support case. FSD's goal is to reduce the number of offenders who reenter the correctional facilities due to child support issues by educating incarcerated noncustodial parents about the Missouri Child Support Program and available resources, and by providing case specific child support information prior to their release.

The FSD also partners with community agencies to educate parents about the Missouri Child Support program.



FSC youth during a video shoot about the program. Photos by FSC staff.

FSD is currently collaborating with Connections to Success and the Randolph County Caring Community Partnership – Focus on Fatherhood Network in Fatherhood Initiative programs to reach out to both custodial and noncustodial parents about their child support concerns. FSD also has two active programs with The Fathers’ Support Center of St. Louis. The first program, New Pathways for Fathers and Families Program, helps parents become self-sufficient so they are better able to meet their children’s emotional and financial needs. The second program, the Partnership in Parenting Program, engages custodial mothers in co-parenting with noncustodial fathers.

Federal initiatives offer grants to organizations providing services for fathers that support responsible parenting, healthy marriage, and economic stability. Grant sources include the Healthy Marriage and Responsibility Fatherhood Grants, the National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration Grants, Strengthening Working Families Initiative Grants, and Second Chance Act. Find more information about [grants here](#). Fatherhood Initiative programs are funded through a combination of state and federal funding.

In August 2015, Missouri Senate Bill 24 set aside funding from the TANF block grant “to fund healthy marriage promotion activities and activities promoting responsible fatherhood.” Governor Nixon’s Fiscal Year 2017 budget

recommendations include 1.5 million dollars of TANF funds for these activities (H.B. 2011). If this recommendation is in the final budget passed by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor, funds would become available July 1, 2016.



John Ginwright has been with the Missouri Department of Social Services (DSS) since 1992, and has worked with all aspects of the child support program (paternity, establishment, enforcement, modification, and foster care). Beginning in 2000, Mr. Ginwright worked in Central Office as the DSS legislative

liaison for child support issues and managed the Customer Relations Unit, Parents Fair Share program, and various outreach initiatives. He has also managed multiple state contracts including the Child Support Customer Service call center. Mr. Ginwright currently serves as the Family Support Division Deputy Director. In this role he manages the Child Support program for the state of Missouri. Mr. Ginwright also serves as a member of various boards and committees, including the Missouri Reentry Program Steering Team and the Government Contact Center Council.