

Where to Find Young Men

By Jessica Pearson and Paul Legler

Introduction

Child support agencies struggle to find ways to reach young men ages -30 and communicate with them about paternity and child support—before they become embroiled in the child support system. The outreach efforts conducted to date at hospitals and birthing centers, prenatal programs, and WIC programs, are typically sparsely attended by men (See companion article, “Outreaching to Expectant and New Parents about Paternity and Child Support: Opportunities and Challenges.”) As a result, it remains a challenge to figure out where and how to reach young men and communicate with them.

As part of its Getting Men Involved in Pregnancy Planning and Prevention Project, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy¹ retained the Center

¹ The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy was established in 1996 to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of parenting. Its specific strategy is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults. In 2005, the National Campaign met its 1996 goal of reducing the teen pregnancy rate by one-third over ten years and in 2006 it set a second goal of achieving the same rate reduction by 2015. It will soon announce a goal regarding reductions of unplanned pregnancy among young adults. The National Campaign conducts research, educates policymakers, develops and disseminates a wide range of materials, works with the press and partners with the entertainment media to include prevention messages into the content of their work in key media outlets in television, print, and the internet. For further information about the National

for Policy Research to conduct a thorough examination of potential avenues and approaches to reaching young men ages 18-30 to message about pregnancy prevention (Pearson and Legler, 2008). This article uses that research to explore the opportunities and challenges that child support agencies might encounter if they try to reach a similar population of young men and deliver messages about paternity and child support.

The bullets throughout the article suggest some strategies that appear to be most promising.

Responsible Fatherhood

Child support agencies have already had considerable experience messaging to men about paternity and child support through responsible fatherhood programs, of which there are an estimated 2,500. While the programs have the potential to reach the target audience, particularly the growing segment of disadvantaged men who have had children by more than one partner, there are challenging barriers to using them for effective outreach. One is the lack of consistent and long-term funding for many such programs. The second is the absence of a single umbrella organization charged with coordinating, training, or supporting such programs making it challenging to

Campaign and its extensive list of publications and materials consult www.thenationalcampaign.org.

disseminate material to the field at large and provide technical assistance and training.

Promising Strategies

- Create user-friendly curricula and informational materials on paternity and child support
- Coordinate distribution with national fatherhood organizations that focus on low-income fathers, specifically the National Partnership for Community Leadership (NPCL) and the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) which have considerable reach in the responsible fatherhood community.

Workforce Programs

Funded primarily by the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) through the U.S. Department of Labor, the WIA program serves 1.8 million people per year, primarily through locally based One-Stop Career Centers. All One Stop Centers contain a Resource Room with terminals for computerized job searches. Some offer a full range of services pertaining to employment, training and education, employer assistance and guidance for obtaining other help. Still others are co-located with other social and human services agencies, including child support in some demonstration projects. A key barrier to utilizing One-Stops and Youth Services programs funded by the Department of Labor for child support outreach is the decentralized nature of the programming which is administered by state and local

Workforce Investment Boards which contract with providers for sets of services. Another problem is that many workforce programs take a narrow view of workforce development and do not venture beyond their core mission of employment.

Promising Strategies

- Develop simple materials on the costs of raising children, child support orders and modifications for One-Stop Career Centers
- Coordinate with Department of Labor and Job Corps to incorporate messages on costs and consequences of having children in youth employment programs they sponsor
- Coordinate with One Stop Career Centers to incorporate messages about order modifications in their programs for unemployed parents.

Men's Health Services

To the extent that there is health care funding for young men, it tends to involve funding from Centers for Disease



Control (CDC) on sexually transmitted diseases (STD). The major thrust of the STD prevention message is "Get tested and use condoms!" While this is compatible and consistent with preventing an unplanned pregnancy and avoiding the child support system, it is not clear whether the same message and method of message delivery works with all men. One successful program, Family Planning at Denver Metro Health Clinic,

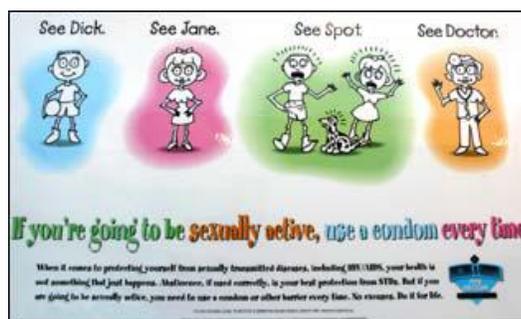
integrated family planning within its STD clinic using brief interactive counseling interventions and found this approach to be highly effective.

Promising Strategies

- Develop user friendly materials on the cost of raising children, paternity, and child support
- Coordinate distribution with the major providers of health care to young men: school-based health clinics, sexually transmitted disease clinics of public health departments, and college health centers.

Schools

There are about 17 million students enrolled in post-secondary education programs, 35 percent of whom (6.2 million) are enrolled in one of the nation's 1,045 rapidly growing, community colleges (Provasnik and Planty, 2008). With their open-admissions policies, community colleges serve larger percentages of nontraditional, low-income and minority students than do 4-year institutions and many of their students are single (15%) or married (20%) parents who are at risk for child support involvement (Horn and Nevill, 2006). Peer-to-peer education is one approach that is being used to discourage college students from engaging in alcohol abuse and risky sexual behavior that might be applied to outreach about paternity and child support. Another approach



would be to add information about the cost of raising children to sexuality and/or alcohol education programs that are included in many freshman orientations.

Promising Strategies

- Develop quality web-based and print materials on the costs of raising children, paternity, and child support
- Coordinate distribution with key advocacy organizations for community colleges and college health centers, such as the American Association of Community Colleges and the American College Health Association
- Coordinate distribution with college alcohol campaigns like BACCHUS, the Interfraternity Institute, and local chapters of Advocates for National Greek Leadership and Education (ANGLE).

Military

As of 2007, about 1.4 million people were on active duty in the military with an additional 1.4 million people in the seven reserve components. About 85% of those on active duty are men with 60% of these men in the 18-30 year age group. To date, there has been little direct contact between child support and the military. Under a new OCSE 1115 demonstration grant, the Texas OAG will conduct legal clinics at Ft. Hood military base to deal with paternity establishment, order modification and visitation issues. Another component of the grant involves establishing a military specialist in regional child support offices to handle issues for active duty parents.

Promising Strategies

- Develop user-friendly materials for military

audiences on paternity, child support, and order modification

- Out-post workers at major bases to provide convenient and customized services
- Coordinate with top leaders in the military and the military academies to incorporate information on paternity and child support in orientation programs and other training opportunities.

Media, Advertising, and Pop Culture

A recent survey found that men between the ages of 18-31 spend approximately 41 hours per week, or nearly a quarter of their lives, with different forms of media including watching TV, and videos on websites, playing video games and online fantasy sports leagues, using social networking websites, viewing pornography online, and listening to the radio. Media is clearly a powerful way to reach men about issues such as pregnancy prevention and child support. Using the media to present socially desirable messages however, is tricky and expensive. Media and



advertising experts counsel organizations seeking to influence men to 1) determine

their audience and segment their target population as finely as possible; 2) clarify their objectives and whether they are trying to change attitudes or behavior; 3) identify the norms and values of the audience they seek to reach and the messages that might resonate with them; and 4) determine their budget, geographical scope and time frames. Once they have determined all of the above, they will be ready to pick a medium for the most efficient avenues for delivering the messages.

Promising Strategies

- Commission articles and pitch story ideas to try to get paternity and child support issues in existing media that men enjoy – magazines and TV programs
- Produce quality information on paternity and child support and provide this to educational websites dealing with men's health and lifestyle issues.
- Sponsor a contest for a 90-second internet video encouraging men to establish paternity and get it right with the child support agency and try to create enough "buzz" around the contest so that it becomes viral.
- With appropriate resources, child support might develop a regional or comprehensive social marketing campaign that uses multiple forms of media, including public service announcements, full-length programming, messages integrated into existing television programs, radio announcements, billboards, a toll-free hotline, informational website, and events around the country.
- Explore support from the Ad Council to provide the necessary resources and visibility.

Criminal Justice

Approximately 800,000 men between the ages of 18-30 are in jails and prisons at any given time and approximately 650,000 people are released from prison every year. According to one study, 86% of men released from prison engage in unprotected sexual activity within a week of being released. Through a variety of demonstration projects, child support has participated in programs for inmates, soon-to-be released inmates and ex-offenders. Most projects for incarcerated obligors have focused on assisting inmates with order modification to avoid the build-up of arrears. Programs for released offenders aim to educate them about their child support obligations, ensure that their orders match their ability to pay, and promote payment. Some programs offer ex-offenders the opportunity to reduce their child support arrears and/or lift some enforcement activities in exchange for paying support over a period of time.

Promising Strategies

- Develop simple and engaging materials about paternity and child support
- Collaborate with the National Institute of Corrections to include child support messages in Thinking for a Change, a curriculum that the NIC developed in 1997 for use in prison transition programs
- Continue to collaborate with reentry programs, an effort that OCSE sought to jumpstart when it released a grant solicitation in 2009 that encouraged child support agencies to partner with prisoner reentry programs funded by the Department of Corrections and the Department of Labor.

Substance Abuse Programs

Approximately 18% of all 18-30 year olds are current illicit drug users and 66% of men between the ages of 18 and 25 are current drinkers. About 4 million individuals sought substance abuse treatment in 2006 most commonly through a self-help group. The decentralized nature of these programs (AA, NA, etc.), with each group having freedom to conduct its affairs in a way that best serves its members, makes it an unpromising opportunity for collaboration. On the other hand, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) offers toolkits, informational materials, and grant money to community-based substance abuse providers to help them talk to their clients about risky sexual behavior, which can clearly lead to child support involvement. In 2007, SAMHSA awarded \$159 million to 67 organizations to offer services that combined substance abuse treatment in conjunction with HIV/STD counseling, health education, case management, referrals and STD testing.

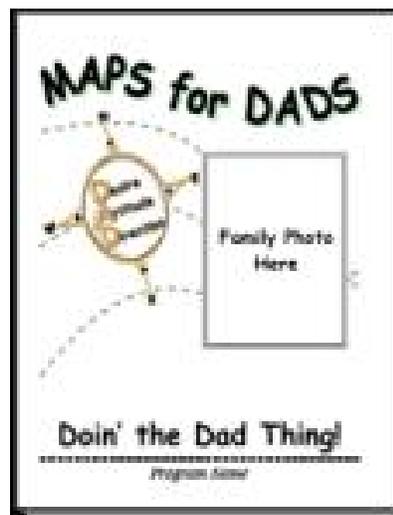
Promising Strategies

- Develop engaging and simple materials on paternity and child support.
- Coordinate with SAMSHA to integrate messages about paternity and child support into grants for organizations serving high-risk populations and into the toolkits for substance abuse treatment providers.

Home Visitation Programs

Approximately 400,000 children between the ages of 0-5 receive the benefits of home visitation programs per year. The two major home visitation

programs are Nurse Family Partnership, which currently serves 15,000 families at 330 sites throughout the U.S. and Healthy Families America which operates in 450 communities across 35 states and had more than 47,400 families enrolled in 2003. Nurse Family Partnership uses nurses who visit according to a recommended schedule and provide information to parents on child development, safety, health, family planning and community support using a structured curriculum. Healthy Families America uses a home visitation model that uses community volunteers and



paraprofessionals rather than nurses. It is extremely decentralized and the program varies from site to site. Although some programs, such as Health Families in San Angelo, Texas, put a concerted effort into involving fathers in the home visits and has a father-specific curriculum "Maps for Dads," that addresses paternity and child support issues, most programs do not routinely involve fathers. Nurse Family Partnership recently received a grant to incorporate outreach to fathers in a more systematic way during home visits. The project holds potential for child support since

the health care reform bill recently enacted by the House of Representatives included grants to states for home visitation programs that would greatly expand their reach.

Promising Strategies

- Prepare an off-the-shelf module about paternity and child support that could be added to existing home visitation curriculum
- Coordinate with the administrators of the Nurse Family Partnership and Health Families America on their distribution to local programs.

Early Childhood Programs

Head Start served 976,000 families in 2006-2007. Early Head Start served over 85,000 children under age 3 and over 10,000 pregnant women. Both programs have home visitation components. These programs do not currently address paternity and child support, although as a result of federal leadership, the Head Start program has succeeded in getting more fathers involved in the program over the past two decade. Indeed, by 2006-2007, about 2,300 Head Start programs (86%) reported regularly scheduled programs to involve fathers and over 225,000 children's fathers participated (21% of those participating). Two national organizations play a key role in training Head Start staff and improving programs: the National Head Start Association and Zero to Three. Both have initiatives dealing with male and father involvement. The Head Start Performance Standards currently require home visitors with Head Start to develop "family partnership agreements" which "describe family goals, responsibilities, timetables and strategies for

achieving these goals as well as progress in reaching them.”

Promising Strategies

- Prepare materials on paternity and child support for the National Head Start Association and Zero to Three, organizations that provide training for Head Start trainers and practitioners
- Work with the Head Start Bureau to modify the Head Start Performance Standards to include explicit mention of paternity and child support issues in the “family partnership agreements” that are developed with parents in home visits and group activities.

Healthy Marriage Programs

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has funded more than 300 healthy marriage programs since 2002 in an attempt to fight the rising rates of non-marital births and divorce. A number of healthy marriage programs are being assessed through one of three large-scale, multisite, multiyear evaluation projects designed to test the impact of marriage education programs for low-income married (The Supporting Health Marriage Project) and unmarried (Building Strong Families) couples. Some major curricula used are: (1) Becoming Parents; (2) Loving Couples, Loving Children; and (3) PREP, none of which address paternity or child support issues. On the other hand, healthy relationship projects funded by OCSE do. One example is the Massachusetts Building Healthy Marriages and Family Relationships Project, known locally as Relationships for Real Life (RRL). Conducted by Father Friendly Initiative, which

is a program of the Boston Public Health Commission and evaluated by the Center for Policy Research, RRL targeted low-income single parents for an eight-session curriculum on healthy relationships and parenting that included one session devoted to paternity and child support. Over the four year life of the project, 135 women and 108 men enrolled in RRL (Pearson and Davis, 2009).

Promising Strategies

- Advocate at the federal level to include paternity and child support as a component of future healthy marriage or healthy relationship programs
- Develop a model “off-the-shelf” module on these topics that could be added to existing and future healthy marriage curricula
- Coordinate with curriculum developers and the Healthy Marriage Resource Center to distribute the module.

Financial Literacy Programs

Financial literacy programs may be widespread but there is no model curriculum, the programs are extremely decentralized, and tracking these programs is difficult because their funding and sponsor organizations are so varied. They currently do not include information on the cost of having a child or child support. The Financial Literacy and Education Commission which was established by Congress in 2003 may offer some opportunity for coordination. Headed by Secretary of the Treasury, it includes 19 federal agencies and bureaus and coordinates the financial education efforts throughout the federal government.

Promising Strategies

- Develop user friendly materials on the cost of raising children, child support guidelines and the child support system
- Coordinate with the Department of Treasury and the Financial and Education Commission to include this information in financial education programs wherever they are offered.

Family Planning Programs

The Title X Family Planning program is the federal grant program enacted in 1970 that is dedicated to assisting individuals in determining the number and spacing of their children through the provision of education, counseling and medical services. Administered by the Office of Population Affairs (OPA), the program has a budget of approximately \$283 million, 90 percent of which goes directly to clinical services delivered through a network of more than 4,400 community-based clinics that include State and local health departments, community health centers, faith based organizations and public and private nonprofit agencies. OPA estimates that only about 6 percent of clients currently served in the Title X clinical service delivery system are males with only about 20 percent of clinics offering programs that target men or try to recruit more men. In 1997, OPA began an initiative to develop and test approaches for delivering reproductive health education and services to men. By 2003, OFP was funding a total of 15 male programs, six of which are currently the subject of a cross-site evaluation by the Urban Institute, and in 2004, OFP established the Family Planning

Male Reproductive Health Training Center at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, to provide training to Title X projects that serve men. In addition to an annual training conference, the Training Center sponsors an intensive week-long Male Health Educator Training Institute designed to increase participants' capacity to work effectively with men.

In addition to Title X family planning programs, Virginia and California have developed statewide programs aimed at reducing the incidence of unplanned pregnancy that reach substantial numbers of men. There are also a number of local programs that succeed in involving males in family planning through the development of male-friendly clinic environments and targeted community outreach and education. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, an independent nonprofit that seeks to prevent teen pregnancy, recently expanded

its focus to include reductions in unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults.

Promising Strategies

- Develop user friendly materials on the cost of raising children, child support guidelines and the child support system.
- Coordinate with the Office of Population Affairs, state programs in Virginia and California and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy to include this information in male outreach efforts that they sponsor.

Conclusions

There are no magic bullets to reaching men between the ages of 18 to 30 and communicating with them about paternity and child support. All of these strategies have benefits and limitations. Taken together, however, they promise to make paternity and child support issues more visible to men before they get involved with child support in a negative way.

The combination of strategies that child support agencies choose to adopt will depend upon their resources, time, budget and staff.

OCSE can assist the effort by developing quality materials that can be easily adapted for use by various state and local CSE offices. It can also assist by pursuing relevant collaborations at the federal level with the entities mentioned in this article, including but not limited to: National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, Centers for Disease Control, Office of Population Affairs, Department of Labor, Department of Treasury, Head Start, American College Health Association, National Institute of Corrections, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Nurse Family Partnership, Healthy Families America, Health Marriage Resource Center, American Association of Community Colleges and the military branches and academies.

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