

How Father Involvement Impacts a Child's Life



Public Policy Institute
of Marion County, Inc.

Acknowledgements

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	7
According to United Way’s 2017 Florida ALICE® Report for Marion County:	7
Recommendations of this Study	9
Scope of Study	10
Conduct of Study	14
Initial Meetings:	14
Formation of Subcommittees:	15
Three Subcommittees:	15
Systems Subcommittee Topics:	16
Education Subcommittee Topics:	16
Best Practices & Data Subcommittee:	16
Influencers: Father Contributions	17
Outcomes: Successes & Impediments.....	17
Correlations & Underlying Causes – Data Driven	17
Study Observations	17
Key Points and Questions for a Co-parent Court Consortium:.....	18
Subcommittee Focus Areas & Recommendations:	18
Systems Committee Finding:	19
Education Subcommittee:	19
Education Subcommittee Recommendations:	19
Best Practices & Data Subcommittee:	20
Best Practices & Data Subcommittee Recommendations:	20
Data	22
Marion County Data & Surveys	22
Local Surveys	24
Survey Results:	28
Final Notes on Survey Results:	30
Fatherhood Involvement Data Overview	30
National Data & Evidence-Based Research	34
Father Impacts on Poverty	34

Father Impacts on Child Development & Behavior	34
Father Impacts on Educational Outcomes	36
Father Impacts on Children’s Health.....	37
Father Impacts on Criminal Activity	39
Father Impacts in Teen Pregnancy & Sexual Activity.....	39
Father Impacts on Child Abuse & Neglect.....	40
Father Impacts on Drug and Alcohol Abuse	41
Father Impacts on Childhood Obesity	42
Bibliography.....	42
Appendix.....	51

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PPI Purpose, Mission, Vision, Objectives

The Public Policy Institute of Marion County

The Public Policy Institute of Marion County, Inc., (PPI) is a 501(c)3, not-for-profit, non-partisan organization established in 1999 to provide a careful analysis of the issues and trends that shape and affect public policy in Marion County. Housed at the College of Central Florida, PPI is dedicated to advancing the public interest and improving quality of life by providing an opportunity for local citizens to come together in a structured and thoughtful manner to address recognized local concerns. To this end, the PPI Board of Directors, with the help of local leaders and decision makers, annually selects a timely study issue. Over the ensuing 4-6 month period a non-partisan study committee of interested citizens carefully and thoughtfully researches the study topic. Recommendations identified by the study committee during the process are brought to the public upon the completion of the project.

Mission:

To give the community a sense of hope and optimism by creating a broad base of community involvement in identifying, researching, and establishing dialogue on community-wide issues, and then in recommending and helping to implement timely solutions.

Vision:

By 2015 the Public Policy Institute will be recognized regionally as a significant leadership organization that continually helps to improve our community by identifying and researching the major issues that are negatively impacting our quality of life, and by identifying and supporting the implementation of viable solutions to address those issues.

Objectives:

To provide formal and informal networks within which individuals may come together to share their knowledge, resources and experiences.

To periodically identify a short-term community project that can be accomplished in a 12-18 month period with meaningful results.

To provide a process where community leaders can work through problems, and participate in open discussions (conferences and seminars).

To involve a broad range of individuals in the study process in order to generate dynamic, synergistic, creative and catalytic leadership in addressing each critical issue, and to provide "stay-in-place" solutions.

To create a shared sense of community, in that any issue must be addressed, discussed, and debated in an atmosphere of mutual fairness, respect, civility and sincerity with all others - where the highest aspiration is to serve the common good.

Executive Summary

This study began with the fundamental question “*How does father involvement impact a child’s life?*”, to determine if child outcomes in Marion County can be improved through increased father involvement. The workgroups, workgroup chairs and study chair delved deeply into research that analyzed facets of father involvement and its impact on child outcomes (such as education, poverty, behavioral/mental health, criminal activity, teenage pregnancies, physical health, and abuse and neglect).

This research from local, state and national data indicated a strong correlation between father involvement and child outcomes; however, most data sources only provided information on the *lack of father involvement*. Therefore, this study concluded that, in general, **a lack of father involvement leads to negative child outcomes**. This conclusion does not imply that single mothers cannot rear healthy, successful children, and it does not infer that all father involvement leads to positive outcomes.

One major challenge for this study relates to obtaining father-specific data, so the focus became finding readily available statistics (e.g., relating to single mother head(s) of households). Unlike other recent PPI study topics, Marion County does not have a comprehensive system for father involvement and commensurate data to evaluate wide-ranging, father-specific information. For example, for previous studies in criminal justice and education Marion County has well-established systems for operations and data collection.

Once evidence-based research from national studies was identified, the committee chairs reviewed each group’s analyses and recommendations, then compared those recommendations to national research. This process allowed the use of information derived from study group discussions, while identifying evidence to support or refute group analyses and recommendations. The following is key local data used for this study:

According to United Way’s 2017 Florida ALICE[®] Report for Marion County:

- o Married couple households with children – 14% live in poverty, and 38% are at high risk of financial crisis
- o **Single female head(s) of households with children – 74% live in poverty, and 97% are in poverty or in high risk of financial crisis**
- o Single male head(s) of households with children – 30% live in poverty, and 75% are in poverty or in high risk of financial crisis

In addition to United Way's ALICE Report data, Marion County-specific data that impacts father involvement and child success was collected:

- **1,904 births to unwed mothers (55% of total births) in 2016¹**
- 253 children born to teenage mothers in 2016²
- 737 children under 18 were affected by divorce in 2015³
- 421 divorces in 2015 involved minor children⁴
- Female head(s) of households with minor children comprise 8,619 of Marion County households -- 6.3% of total households⁵
- 2,707 people were incarcerated in Marion County in 2016⁶
- Children and adolescents who experienced divorce, separation, or an unmarried birth have higher levels of behavioral problems in school than do youths who consistently lived with both biological parents.⁷

Parental conflict due to divorce and separation was one of the most negatively impactful and common impediments to positive father involvement found. Divorce and separation often lead to mother-father disagreements regarding custody, child support, visitation, finances and new relationships. Family dynamics become more complex as the parents enter new relationships, remarry and integrate additional children into their lives. All of these factors can lead to challenges with co-parenting and father involvement. This research revealed that single mothers in Marion County have a 44% greater incidence of living in poverty than single fathers, and a 60% greater incidence of living in poverty than married couples with children. These poverty statistics also apply to a large population of children born to unwed and teen mothers.

Although the study identified several impediments to adequate father involvement in Marion County, the most prevalent impediments included: divorce/separation, births among unwed mothers, births among teen mothers, and incarceration (fathers). The following recommendations are proposed within the body of this study:

¹ Florida Vital Stats Annual Reports <http://www.flpublichealth.com/VSBOOK/VSBOOK.aspx>

² State of Florida, Department of Health <http://www.floridahealth.gov/>

³ State of Florida, Department of Health <http://www.floridahealth.gov/>

⁴ State of Florida, Department of Health <http://www.floridahealth.gov/>

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census

⁶ State of Florida, Department of Corrections, Bureau of Research and Data Analysis 2 <http://www.dc.state.fl.us/>

⁷ Tillman, K. H. (2007). Family structure pathways and academic disadvantage among adolescents in stepfamilies. *Sociological Inquiry*, 77, 383-424.

Recommendations of this Study

- Develop a Co-parent Court like the one administered in Hennepin County, Minnesota. Co-Parent Court is an innovative diversion court that helps unmarried parents learn about their parenting roles, and develop a co-parenting plan while establishing paternity through the court system.
- Create a supervised drop-off center in Marion County, to reduce mother/father conflict after divorce or disillusion of marriage,. Responsible partners may include the Department of Children and Families, Kids Central, Inc., The Centers, the City of Ocala, the Marion County Board of County Commissioners, the Marion County Sheriff's Office, and the Ocala Police Department. The closest drop-off center is in Hernando County.
- Provide Evidence-Based Curricula and Training to Stakeholders
 - Provide training opportunities and disseminate father-involvement information to new and expectant mothers and fathers, in cooperation with Florida Hospital Ocala, Healthy Start, the Department of Health in Marion County, and local obstetrician's offices. The Marion County Children's Alliance should be the repository for such evidence-based material and should also be utilized to disseminate such father-involvement material. This helps ensure that local agencies use evidence-based material for fatherhood programs, and provides standardization and consistency of information that agencies and community groups utilize throughout Marion County.
 - Utilize evidence-based research from national studies to determine the best use of community resources before expanding or replicating existing father-involvement programs in Marion County. Research revealed that many well-known fatherhood programs do not result in positive outcomes for participants, leading to wasted funding and community resources. (contained within this study).
 - Encourage local social service agencies to make their environments and practices more father-friendly. This entails training and policies to ensure that staff routinely includes fathers in communications and activities that involve their children.
 - Expand the *InsideOut Dad Curriculum*. The study chair identified evidence-based research that revealed positive outcomes from the *InsideOut Dad Curriculum* for incarcerated fathers. This program's goal is to reduce recidivism and reinforce father-child relationships for imprisoned/released fathers.
- Develop more family and father-specific events and activities at our local parks, since the study surveys indicated that fathers frequently visit local County and City parks with their children. Research contained within this study indicated that successful fatherhood programs strive to meet fathers where they naturally congregate (opposed to attempting to setup traditional father groups and meetings).

Reflecting on the abundant volume of data collected and the research conducted by this study group, it was important to identify a common thread between this study and previous PPI studies. Social determinates, such as income and education, have a direct influence on the overall health of the

community - impacting poverty rates, physical health, mental health, divorce rates, teen pregnancies, crime, education and father involvement. The PPI's 2013 Early Education Study concluded, "This study's overarching recommendation calls for a community collaboration of the business community, local government, schools and faith-based communities **to address the social determinants** that are holding back many children academically in Marion County." At the conclusion of this study, it is recommended that the study chair form a Community Improvement Planning Committee to enhance social determinates in high-poverty zip codes throughout Marion County.

Scope of Study

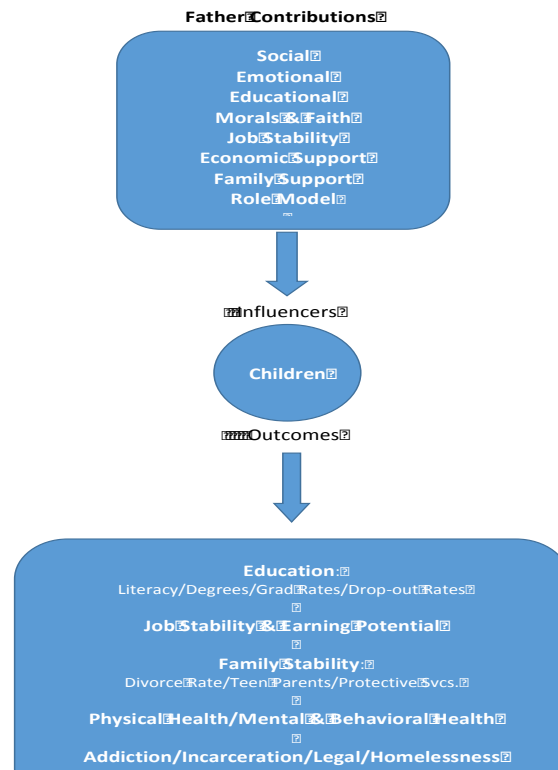
At the outset of this study, the evaluation teams started with a fundamental question that defined its primary focus: "*Does father involvement have an impact on a child's success?*"

To answer this question, one must evaluate the definition of "father," as it carries a wide range of characteristics and implied roles that differ by family dynamics, personal beliefs and societal norms. For instance, is a father simply defined by paternity (e.g., known as the biological father)? If a child's parents divorce and the mother remarry, does the child now have two fathers (one resident and one non-resident father)? Can another male role model act effectively as a father figure (e.g., uncle, grandfather, family friend, pastor, etc.)?

The key to the "father" definition lies within the complex and varied responsibilities associated with fatherly figures. In essence, key facets and roles of the "father figure" needed to be determined. After evaluating copious studies on father involvement (see citations page), it is surmised that a biological father is not necessarily a father figure. If a biological father has a child out of wedlock, and that parent chooses to have no association or interaction with his child, the father figure role does not form between child and biological father. Therefore, impacts from father figures require *interaction and influencers* to guide and form a child's life.

Father Contributions, Influencers and Outcomes: (Figure 1)

How Father Involvement Impacts a Child's Life



As illustrated in this figure, interactions between a father and his children influence and impact child behaviors and outcomes. In this illustration, father contributions form the basis of the definition of a father figure. An important factor not readily evident is that father contributions (interactions) can be either positive, negative or nonexistent. For instance, under the category of father contributions related to emotion, a father may provide positive emotional support, such as providing encouragement after a tough day at school. Conversely, a father may display negative emotional interactions by chastising his child in public. In this context, a nonexistent contribution relates to a child that does not experience her/his father's interaction due to absence, apathy, fathering style, and other factors. The study teams collected and reviewed available data in Marion County relating to major categories (causes) of absentee fathers, which helped to identify data sets affected by the lack of father involvement.

One major challenge for this study related to obtaining father-specific data, such as: single father head(s) of households, divorce, separation, active military duty status, non-custodial children in the household, adopted children in the household, non-resident father status, resident father status, etc. Such data would have provided a more comprehensive view of fatherhood and familial dynamics in Marion County; therefore, the study focused on readily available data that indicated evidence-based factors relating to the absence of fathers, including single mother head(s) of households, divorce status of mothers, births by unwed mothers, and teen pregnancies. In addition, study teams analyzed and

correlated data from local, state and national sources that provided information on the affects of father absence on child outcomes.

Other questions that formed the scope of this study included:

- What community resources existed to support fatherhood involvement?
- What fatherhood activities and traits lead to a child's success?
- What factors inhibit fathers in Marion County from participating in their children's lives?
- How do we create sustainable systems to help fathers?

The question "What community resources existed to support fatherhood involvement?" required an analysis of evidence-based research to determine the efficacy of fatherhood involvement programs. It required a review of more than what fatherhood programs already exist. It was important to: (1). Analyze the core issues that impede father involvement (2). Assess solution options with proven track records (3). Identify the most effective use of available resources and the potential impact of such resources. Ample evidence exists on the impact and outcomes of grant-funded fatherhood initiative programs (particularly through the federal Department of Health and Human Services). Many communities allocate significant resources to improve father involvement in children's lives, and it was prudent to evaluate program effectiveness before distributing resources for fatherhood initiative programs. Though it seems intuitive that fathers, families and children would benefit from father involvement activities, evidence suggested that numerous fatherhood programs resulted in varying degrees of success, and lacked appropriate methods to measure outcomes.

Two large-scale fatherhood initiatives through the Administration of Children and Families (ACF), included around-the-clock Dads and the Nurturing Fathers Program. These programs measured outcomes based on survey responses from participants, and the efficacy of the programs were a measure of those responses. Using subjective data may or may not have been a useful measure of the efficacy of such programs, which is a common problem this study's committees encountered during the study. What fatherhood programs used valid measures and/or third-party, independent reviews of their outcomes? Many fatherhood programs used self-reported outcomes and anecdotal data to support claims of efficacy, so program reviews from organizations like Mathematica Policy Research were utilized for third-party assessments. Within the scope of this study, the likelihood of fatherhood program efficacy was identified, in addition to available resources to support fatherhood involvement in Marion County.

The question "What fatherhood activities and traits lead to a child's success?" focused primarily on the specific, beneficial activities (influencers/contributions) for which a father engages with his children. The study evaluated father involvement in the context of both quantity and quality of time spent with children. Is it enough for the father to hang-out watching television, or by playing video games... simply being present in a child's life? What is quality time? If a father has extended work hours, or travels

frequently, is it possible for that father to make a positive, lasting impact on his children? Through a review of evidence-based research, the study team attempted to dispel myths and provide resources and toolkits that promote positive father engagement. An interesting set of findings related to this topic indicated that *one size does not fit all* regarding beneficial fatherhood activities. Several factors impacted the efficacy of father engagement techniques, including:

- The child's age
- The individual child's maturity-level and emotional stability
- The father and mother's relationship (gatekeeper activities may inhibit father involvement activities)
- Boys and girls benefit from different forms of father involvement activities

Evaluating beneficial fatherhood activities required a narrow view (father-specific activities and actions), as well as a broader view (family dynamic activities). Results of this study indicated that the relationship between the mother and father may be the most important factor that impacts father involvement in a child's life. Therefore, it was crucial for this study to evaluate factors that impacted mother-father relationships.

The question "What factors inhibit fathers in Marion County from participating in their children's lives?" evaluated factors that lead to a lack of father involvement in their children's lives. Local and national data provided insight into factors, including:

- Military deployment
- Divorce and marital separation
- Teen pregnancy
- Birth out of wedlock
- Gatekeeper dynamics by the child's mother
- Work obligations
- Death of a father or father figure
- Incarceration of a father or father figure
- Remarriage and multi-family obligations
- Social service and school system efforts to include fathers in child activities
- Societal roles and personal beliefs about child-rearing responsibilities for men

- Social determinates that impact family dynamics

Though this is not a comprehensive list of causes that constrain father involvement, the initial research identified accessible and relevant data for these categories. The study's scope encompassed all of these involvement-inhibiting factors; however, the bulk of the research focused on primary factors that impacted a significant portion of Marion County's population (e.g., divorce, separation and births out of wedlock). Once the involvement-inhibiting factors were identified, the study teams searched for factors that increased the likelihood or incidence of each constraining factor. For instance, if divorce in Marion County was a leading cause of father disengagement from their children, what were the primary catalysts for divorce? The study group evaluated social determinate data to see if there were correlations between involvement inhibitors and income, education or health.

The question "How do we create sustainable systems to help Marion County fathers?" evaluated potential solutions to increase father involvement (positive father-child interactions). This question was posed at the outset of the study, but it conveyed assumptions and conclusions that were not (yet) supported by empirical evidence. The question conveyed a hypothesis that (1) Father involvement had a positive impact on child outcomes and (2) Sustainable systems did not already exist to support fathers in Marion County. As this study was driven by evidence-based data and research, this question was set aside until the final phase of the investigative process. Once the data were compiled and analyzed, potential solutions were included within the scope of the study.

In addition to addressing questions posed at the onset of this father involvement study, the team evaluated interconnected factors that related to father involvement and child outcomes. Research on non-resident fathers versus resident fathers was included in the study's scope, as it represented two distinct categories of fathers with unique father-child interactions and challenges. Research on father-child dynamics was also integrated (and resultant interactions/outcomes) for step-children and remarriages. As politics and policy also impact father involvement, research and case studies that identify legal impediments to father-child interactions, was included

Conduct of Study

Initial Meetings:

The study group convened as a full committee for four consecutive weeks at 7:30AM on May 4, 11, 18, 25 (2016) at the College of Central Florida's Ewers Center, Room 101.

These meetings included between 26 and 32 participants, representing the school system, early childhood education, the sheriff's office, the faith-based community, Kids Central, Inc. (KCI), the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the library system, the Marion County Children's Alliance, the Marion County Board of County Commissioners, United Way, the College of Central Florida, legislators, citizens and private industry.

The first four full committee meetings evaluated state and local data regarding factors that impacted father involvement, including divorce proceedings, child support, abuse and neglect, poverty, incarcerations and other data relevant to father involvement (or factors that inhibit father involvement).

Study participants provided the following key County data from their respective organizations:

- 80% of children in protective services have no father involvement (KCI)
- A majority of Marion County's children in fatherless, single-parent homes live in poverty (Children's Alliance)
- Fatherless homes lead to increased incarceration of children (Sheriff's Office)
- Father involvement affects education, social and emotional development, etc. (Centers for Disease Control)
- A significant portion of absentee fathers in Marion County do not provide financial support to their children (KCI/DCF)
- 1 in 3 children in Marion County resides in a female head of household family (Centers for Disease Control)

In search of additional sources of data, it was determined that the fatherhood study group should form individual subcommittees to evaluate and review specific topics.

Formation of Subcommittees:

Before forming subcommittees, the team evaluated topic categories that had been discussed during initial meetings. The team grouped topics into common issues, which helped form key focus areas for each subcommittee. Participants signed-up for committees, based on their personal interests and areas of expertise. The first three subcommittee conferences met (at the same time and room location) at the College of Central Florida, where they separated into breakout sessions. After the third meeting, subcommittees were permitted to schedule meeting times and locations to better serve each group's schedules. Each subcommittee submitted meeting notes to Becky Linn, and to the study chair.

Committee chairs participated in ongoing monthly meetings, beginning in August 2016, where they shared committee activities, initiatives and findings. As the field work and data collection activities began to wind-down in March of 2017, committee chairs met with the study chair to develop sections of the study's final report. The subcommittee chair for both Education and Systems was Scot Quintel, President and CEO of United Way of Marion County and the subcommittee chair for Best Practices & Data was Debra Wise-Velez, Deputy Chief of Programs at Kids Central, Inc.

Three Subcommittees:

1. Systems – Review systems in Marion County that impact and interface with fathers (education, criminal justice, social services, faith-based, etc.)
2. Education – Evaluate evidence-based data on ways to educate fathers and families about fathering best practices and curricula.
3. Best Practices & Data – Collect and analyze local and national data regarding fatherhood involvement (or lack of involvement).

Systems Subcommittee Topics:

1. Integrating father involvement initiatives with existing systems (schools, social services, criminal justice, faith-based)
2. Providing father-friendly environments
3. Evaluating current systems that lead to effective father involvement
4. Identifying systems that impede father involvement (criminal justice, school system, divorce, child support process, etc.)

Education Subcommittee Topics:

1. Educating fathers, mothers and teens about the impact of father involvement (toolkits, awareness campaigns, evidence-based curricula/training material)
2. Educating caregivers on activities that define effective role models
3. Educating parents considering divorce about impacts of absentee fathers

Best Practices & Data Subcommittee:

1. Finding solutions for absentee father scenarios (e.g., military, prison, deceased, divorce, etc.)
2. Evaluating, documenting and replicating successful fatherhood programs in Marion County
3. Conducting surveys and/or interviews (case studies) to evaluate issues, such as: What is the mother's perspective of fatherhood and fatherly roles? What is the father's perspective of fatherhood and fatherly roles (e.g., upon divorce, implications of the child support system, etc.)

Each subcommittee was tasked with the following initial responsibilities:

1. Develop committee Goals and desired Outcomes
2. Set meeting times and agendas
3. Invite guest speakers and additional members to assist with goals
4. Select a committee chair
5. Chairs attend monthly meetings to share committee updates
6. Forward meeting notes to Becky Linn

The committee chairs and study chair compiled data into broader categories to help evaluate the study's primary conclusion: *How Father Involvement Impacts a Child's Success*. As there were limited data sources relating to fathers in Marion County, the Education and Systems subcommittees often referenced the same sources; therefore, there was some duplication of data sources, discussion topics

and recommendations. To ensure the most effective use of time and resources, the Education and Systems committees were merged in February 2017.

Influencers: Father Contributions

- Social & Emotional Development
- Financial
- Morals – Faith
- Role Model – what is a father? (biological, step, extended family, pastor, etc.)

Outcomes: Successes & Impediments

- Income – Poverty, education, divorce, health
- Education – literacy, drop-out rates, education level
- Job stability and Earning potential
- Divorce Rate – Child protective services, social determinants
- Mental Health – Behavioral, crime, violence, addiction

Correlations & Underlying Causes – Data Driven

- What causes father involvement to diminish?
 - Divorce (custody, alimony, child support)
 - Non-resident fathers
 - Multi-family dynamics (remarriage, multi-mothers/fathers)
 - Unwed mothers
 - Teen pregnancies
 - Incarceration
 - Work obligations
 - Active duty in the military

Study Observations

- Unlike other recent PPI study topics, there is not a comprehensive system for father involvement and commensurate data to evaluate wide-ranging, father-specific data in Marion County. For example, criminal justice and education have well-established systems for operations and data collection. To extract father-specific data from local sources, several unaffiliated entities provided solicited data points. This makes cross-referencing local data difficult, and often not useful for consequential analysis.
- There was ample national research and evidence-based data to conclude strong correlations between father involvement and child outcomes.
- There was limited data on the efficacy of father involvement programs (on a local and state level), as fatherhood programs often use empirical evidence, facilitator observations and participant surveys.
- According to several study group participants, personal experiences and generalizations often precipitated and dominated group discussions. Frequently, this led to dialogues that did not focus on evidence-based data, or solutions based on such data. One primary reason for such

dialogues was the lack of father-specific data sources from institutions in Marion County. Without such information, groups experienced two common research errors: the Fallacy of Causation Without Correlation and the Fallacy of a Hasty Generalization⁸.

- Once teams identified evidence-based research from national studies, the study chairs reviewed their group's analyses and recommendations, then compared those analyses/recommendations to national research. This process allowed the group to utilize information derived from study group discussions, while identifying evidence to support or negate group analyses and recommendations.
- One of the key solutions identified to improve mother-father relationships and father involvement for unwed parents in Marion County is the development of a co-parenting court model, like the one administered in Hennepin County, Minnesota. Co-Parent Court is a pioneering diversion court that helps unmarried parents learn about their parenting roles and establish a co-parenting plan while establishing paternity through the court system. Outcomes examined for this model program included consistency of child support payments after participation by unwed parents, and measures that evaluated parent attitudes about the significance of the role of fathers in a child's life. Upon completion to the co-parenting court, the majority of mothers and fathers reported a clear and better understanding that a father's involvement is important for their child's development (beyond the act of providing child support).⁹

Key Points and Questions for a Co-parent Court Consortium:

- Courts and community agencies partner to construct a quality program for unmarried parents and their children.
- What types of community agencies are critical to provide a network of support for young, financially-stressed, unwed parents?
- What encouragements and enticements are needed to get unmarried parents to complete a multi-component intervention (education, case management and an agreed upon parenting plan)?

Subcommittee Focus Areas & Recommendations:

Systems Subcommittee:

- Integrating father involvement initiatives with existing systems (schools, agencies, criminal justice, faith-based)
- Providing father-friendly environments
- Evaluating current systems that lead to successful father involvement
- Identifying systems that impede father involvement (criminal justice, school system, divorce, child support process, etc.)

⁸ Basic Applied Logic, Kenton Machina

⁹ Marczak, M. S., Galos, D. L., Hardman, A. M., Becher, E. H., Ruhland, E. and Olson, K. A. (2015), Co-Parent Court: A Problem-Solving Court Model for Supporting Unmarried Parents. *Family Court Review*, 53: 267–278. doi:10.1111/fcre.12145

Systems Committee Finding:

- o Determine if evidence-based research from national studies supported the study recommendation to allocate resources and increase funding for father-involvement initiatives at social service agencies, faith-based organizations, the jail/prison system, and the Marion County Public Schools.
- o Encourage local social service agencies to make their environments and practices more father-friendly. This entails training and policies to ensure that staff routinely included fathers in communications and activities that involve their children.
- o Initial study group considerations indicated that the child support system and related court proceedings in Marion County lead to mother-father conflict and disengagement; therefore, this conflict is a precursor to a disengagement between a father and his children. Evaluate evidence-based research from national studies to determine if there are alternatives to Marion County's child support/paternity system, which is less contentious between mothers and fathers.
- o Recommend implementing a co-parenting court, similar to the promising system utilized in Hennepin County, Minnesota. Opposed to a system whose primary objective is to establish paternity and to determine child support payments, this co-parenting court model has a track record of improving father involvement through a combination of education, case management and development of a co-parenting plan for unwed parents. Responsible Marion County parties would include DCF, KCI, Children's Home Society, The Centers, and Marion County Family Court judges.
- o To reduce mother/father conflict after divorce or disillusion of marriage, it is recommended that a supervised drop-off center in Marion County be created. Responsible partners may include the DCF, KCI., The Centers, the City of Ocala, the Marion County Board of County Commissioners, the Marion County Sheriff's Office, and the Ocala Police Department. The closest drop-off center is in Hernando County.

Education Subcommittee:

- Educating fathers, mothers and teens about the impact of father involvement (toolkits, awareness campaigns, community champions)
- Educating caregivers and parents on activities that define effective role models
- Educating parents considering divorce about impacts of absentee fathers or role models

Education Subcommittee Recommendations:

- o Identifying and utilizing standardized educational toolkits or manuals that agencies and families can use to enhance father involvement.
- o If evidence-based material exists, they should be sourced, distributed and utilized at schools and local social service agencies.

- Determining if there are different toolkits and manuals that should be used for varying situations (age-specific, new fathers, boys vs. girls, etc.).
- Providing training opportunities and disseminating father-involvement information to new and expectant mothers and fathers, in cooperation with Florida Hospital Ocala, Healthy Start, the Department of Health in Marion County, and local obstetrician's offices.
- The Marion County Children's Alliance should be the repository for such evidence-based material, and should also be utilized to disseminate such father-involvement material. This helps ensure use of the evidence-based material for the fatherhood programs, and provides standardization and consistency of information that agencies and community groups utilize throughout the county.

Best Practices & Data Subcommittee:

- Finding solutions for absentee father scenarios (e.g., military, prison, deceased, divorce, etc.)
- Evaluating, documenting and replicating successful fatherhood initiatives in Marion County
- Conducting surveys or interviews (case studies) to evaluate issues, such as:
 - How often do fathers visit their children, and do they believe they spend enough time with them?
 - What is the mother's perspective of fatherhood and fatherly roles?
 - What is the father's perspective of fatherhood and fatherly roles (e.g., upon divorce, implications of the child support system, etc.)?

Best Practices & Data Subcommittee Recommendations:

- Evaluate the efficacy of father-involvement programs for incarcerated fathers in Marion County. Determine if community partners should scale-up and expand existing programs.
 - The study chair identified evidence-based research that revealed positive outcomes from the *InsideOut Dad Curriculum* for incarcerated fathers. This program's goal is to reduce recidivism and reinforce father-child relationships for imprisoned fathers. Analysis of the program found statistically significant overall positive changes for fathering skills, parenting knowledge, and parenting behaviors at program delivery sites. Fathers in the treatment group were statistically more likely to call or interact with their children.¹⁰ Building Better Dads, which is operated through the Marion County Children's Alliance, currently utilizes the *InsideOut Dad Curriculum* with inmates within Marion County. Referenced evidence conveyed positive outcomes and the validity to expand this program throughout our jail and prison systems.

¹⁰ Block, S., Brown, C.A., Barretti, L., Walker, E. Yudt, M., & Fretz R. (2014). A mixed-method assessment of a parenting program for incarcerated fathers. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 65, 50-67

- Before expanding or replicating existing father-involvement programs in Marion County, utilize evidence-based research from national studies to determine the best use of community resources.
 - Over the years, several agencies utilized the *Parents as Teachers* curriculum to improve father involvement techniques and positive father-child interaction: however, the *Parents as Teachers* program did not experience any meaningful effects for fathers on parenting knowledge, attitudes, or stress. In addition, participating fathers' levels of parenting satisfaction essentially decreased while participating in the program .¹¹ Based on research of the limited efficacy of this curriculum, it is recommended that agencies and schools evaluate the use of this program and seek more evidence-based and efficacious curricula for fathers.
 - The subcommittee reviewed and identified evidence-based data and outcomes from several fatherhood programs. The following programs were subjected to rigorous testing, which revealed efficacious outcomes for father involvement and improved father-child, or mother-father relations included: *Preparing Fathers for the Drug Free Years*, *InsideOut Dad*, *Family Transition Program*, *An Ache in their Hearts*, *Triple P – Positive Parenting Program*, *Supporting Father Involvement* (couples program), *Parenting Together Project*, *Head Start Based Father Involvement Program*, *24/7 Dads* (Hawaii Program), *Young Dads*, *Effect of Parenting Education on First- Time Fathers*, *Peace Program* (for divorcing parents), *Non-Custodial Parenting Choices*, *A Parental Education Intervention*.¹²
- Since surveys indicated that fathers frequently visit county and city parks with their children, more family and father-specific events and activities should be developed at Ocala and Marion County local parks. This should be a collaborative effort between the city and county park systems to advertise events in the Ocala Star Banner, on digital billboards and through local publications. The city and county parks departments should develop and disseminate a comprehensive/unified calendar of events. The Marion County Hospital District and representatives from the Marion County Parks and Recreation are currently working on new family activities through the Active Marion Project (AMP). Curt Bromund of the Marion County Hospital District will work on a father-involvement parks component through AMP, encouraging family and father-child activities in collaboration with city and county park systems.

¹¹ Bronte, Burkhauser & Metz, 2009

¹² Craver, Dillon, Hovey, Osborne: Making Good on Fatherhood: A Review of the Fatherhood Research, 2016

Data

Marion County Data & Surveys

As indicated in the data provided from studies in the following section, divorce, poverty and financial strife have significant impacts on both father involvement and child outcomes. Single mothers are much more likely to live in poverty than single fathers or married couples with children. The following Marion County-specific data identifies social determinates and other key factors that impact father involvement and child outcomes.

According to United Way's 2017 Florida ALICE[®] Report for Marion County:

- o 16% of households live in poverty
- o 47% of households are in poverty or in high risk of financial crisis
- o Married couple households with children – 14% live in poverty, and 38% are at high risk of financial crisis
- o Single female head(s) of households with children – 74% live in poverty, and 97% are in poverty or in high risk of financial crisis
- o Single male head(s) of households with children – 30% live in poverty, and 75% are in poverty or in high risk of financial crisis
- o Median household income in Marion: \$40,050 (state average: \$49,426)
- o The poverty level for a single adult is \$11,770, but the minimum household survival budget in Marion is \$17,412
- o The poverty level for two adults, one infant and one preschooler is \$24,250, but the minimum household survival budget in Marion is \$49,788

Marion County, 2015

Town	Total HH	% ALICE & Poverty
Bellevue	1,821	66%
Bellevue CCD	45,390	41%
Dunnellon	958	65%
Dunnellon CCD	5,612	52%
East Marion CCD	7,625	65%
Fellowship CCD	10,985	47%
Fort McCoy-Anthony CCD	5,383	56%
Ocala	21,664	56%
Ocala CCD	52,626	53%
Reddick-McIntosh CCD	4,666	58%
Silver Springs Shores CDP	2,964	75%

Below is a breakdown of poverty and ALICE (risk of financial crisis) in specific Marion County cities (by percentage of households).

Marion County Households Living in Poverty or on the Verge of Financial Crisis

Source: United Way ALICE Report – Florida 2017

In addition to United Way's ALICE Report data, the study workgroups collected additional Marion County-specific data that impacts father involvement and child success:

- 1,904 births to unwed mothers (55% of total births) in 2016¹³
- 253 children born to teenage mothers in 2016¹⁴
- 737 children under 18 were affected by divorce¹⁵
- 421 divorces in 2015 involved minor children¹⁶

¹³ Florida Vital Stats Annual Reports <http://www.flpublichealth.com/VSBOOK/VSBOOK.aspx>

¹⁴ State of Florida, Department of Health <http://www.floridahealth.gov/>

¹⁵ State of Florida, Department of Health <http://www.floridahealth.gov/>

- o Female head(s) of households with minor children comprise 8,619 of Marion County households -- 6.3% of our total households¹⁷
- o There were 3,455 births in 2016¹⁸
- o 2,707 people were incarcerated in Marion County in 2016¹⁹
- o Kids Central, Inc. reported that only 33% of Marion County fathers (in their system) are involved in their children's lives when they are part of the child welfare system, and only 29% of fathers are involved with their children in diversion cases.

The following Marion County data on education attainment and income by education level was obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey:

- o 15% of Marion County adults did not graduate high school
- o Only 17.4% of Marion County residents have a bachelor's degree or higher
- o 26.5% of residents over 25 years of age who did not graduate high school live in poverty, and 30% of women in the same group live in poverty
- o 15.1% of residents over 25 years of age who graduated high school (or equivalency) live in poverty, and 17% of women in the same group live in poverty
- o 12.1% of residents over 25 years of age with some college (or associates degree) live in poverty, and 13.6% of women in the same group live in poverty
- o 5.9% of residents over 25 years of age with a bachelor's degree or higher live in poverty, and 6.1% of women in the same group live in poverty
- o Median Earnings in Marion County by Educational Attainment (Age 25 or older, Median Earnings in past 12 months – 2013):
 - o \$17,559 for less than high school education
 - o \$23,938 for high school graduates (or equivalency)
 - o \$26,279 for some college or associates degrees
 - o \$38,928 for bachelor's degrees
 - o \$56,709 for graduate or professional degrees

Local Surveys

The Best Practices & Data Subcommittee conducted a survey in cooperation with Kids Central, Inc. (KCI) to solicit father involvement information and opinions from mothers and fathers in Marion County (with at least one child in common). Survey participants were selected randomly; however, all participants fall under KCI's child protected services network of families in Marion County. Mothers and

¹⁶ State of Florida, Department of Health <http://www.floridahealth.gov/>

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census

¹⁸ State of Florida, Department of Health <http://www.floridahealth.gov/>

¹⁹ State of Florida, Department of Corrections, Bureau of Research and Data Analysis 2 <http://www.dc.state.fl.us/>

fathers were provided with separate surveys, and data was compiled into distinct responses for all mother respondents and all father respondents.

To help determine the complexity and family dynamics of each mother and father, the committee requested information regarding the number of children for each respondent, in addition to the number of mothers or fathers associated with each respondent's children. To elicit each participant's perceived level of father involvement, the committee asked mothers and fathers to convey how frequently fathers visit their children (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, etc.). In addition to frequency, fathers were asked "Do you feel you spend enough time with your child(ren)?," and mothers were asked "Do you feel that the father spends enough time with your child(ren)?" This is one of the few questions that varied between mother and father surveys and was intended to identify differences in father involvement perceptions between mothers and fathers.

The first set of survey data were derived from male respondents, while the second set of survey data was derived from female respondents.

What services in the community do you feel are missing for fathers?	What would be the best way for you to receive information about resources or activities for children and/or parents?	Age	Race	Zip Code
Father daughter dances	Television	18-24	Black	34472
The ability to provide for a family only working 40 hours	Email	35-44	White	34465
	Text message	25-34	Black	
	Email	35-44	Black	34472
Support	Text message	18-24	Hispanic/Latino	34474
Good jobs	Text message	25-34	Black	
Father friendly activities and events		55-64	Black	
Spending more time with children	What I see in my children, love, and passion because I supply their needs	25-34	Black	32668
		18-24	Black	34475
All of the above		Other	Black	34474
Father parenting programs	Email	35-44	Black	34471
Community clean ups	Text message	35-44	Black	34475
	Flyers, Facebook	35-44	Black	34471
Father friendly activities and events	U.S Postal	55-64	Black	34475
Father friendly activities and events, father focused parenting classes	Internet	25-34	White	34480
Father son events, daddy daughter events	Internet	25-34	Black	34472
	email	25-34	white	34472
			white	
	mail	35-44	white	34473
they don't have father classes	facebook			
		25-34	black	34475
	phonecall	25-34	black	34491
	email or mail	25-34	black	34474
		25-34	white	
help for father's to get custody (full or shared) father focused parenting classes/events	mail	25-34	white	32134
all of the listed above	email	25-34	multi-racial	34420

Number of children__.	Number of mothers__.	How often do you see your child(ren) and for how long?	Do you feel you spend enough time with your child(ren)?	What is stopping you from spending more time with your child/children?	What type of activities do you do with your child(ren)?
2	2	Daily	Yes	I feel I spend more than enough time with my children.	Sing, dance, color, count, spell
2	1	Daily	No	Work/school	Gymnastics, fishing, golf, swimming
1	1	Daily	Yes	Working	Read, museum, church
4	2	Every other week	Yes	Bad relationships	Movies, park
1	1	Weekly	No	Mother	Play games
2	1	Daily	No	Work	Park
1	1	Other	No	Shes in prison	None
3	1	Daily	Yes	Nothing	Take them to the park, go get some ice cream
No	1	N/A	No		
0	0	Other	N/A	N/A	N/A
1	1	Every other week (or weekends)	No	Transportation	Parks
7	3	Daily	No	Work and trying to keep drama down with children's mothers	Skating, movies, soccer, kickball
2	2	Every other week (or weekends)	No	Transportation	Go to park, movies, etc.
1	1	Daily	Yes	Live in different homes	Homework, play, go places
1	1	Daily	Yes	Spend as much time as possible	Play, sing
5	1	Daily	Yes	Some work days	
2	1	daily	yes		read, play outside
2	1	daily	yes	Nothing	bike rides, learning games
2	2	daily	yes	none	go to park, beach, church
3	1	daily	yes	work, money	movies, park,dinner, free activities
3	1	daily	yes	nothing	play games, park reading, drawing, everything
5	2	daily	yes	mother to my last son	everything
1	1	daily	yes	work	park, movie, ride bikes
6	1	daily	yes		we go swimming, biking to the park, fun things, play together, family activities
2	2	daily/other	yes and no	older son's mother won't let me see him, I've tried putting myself on child support, bought presents for him but she won't give them to him. I'm on the birth certificate, I'm going to have to take her to court.	Everything, park, Dr. Appts (with younger son)
3	1	Weekly	No	work	park, play and learn

Number of children:		Number of mothers		How often see child(ren)	
1 child	7	1 mother	18	Daily	18
2 children	8	2 mothers	6	Weekly	2
3 children	4	3 mothers	1	Every other week	3
4 children	1	NA	1	Other	2
5 children	2			NA	1
6 children	1	Barriers to spending time:			
7 children	1	None	6	Missing Services:	
None	2	Work	5	Father/Child Events	6
		Work/School	1	Parenting for Fathers	4
Feel you spend enough time		Bad relationship w/ mom	4	Good jobs	2
Yes	15	Mom in prison	1	Support	1
No	9	N/A	2	Spend more time with children	1
Yes and No	1	Transportation	2	Community Clean Ups	1
NA	1	work/money	1	All of the Above	2
		different homes	1		
		No answer	3	Zip Code	
Best Way to Receive Info				32134	1
Television	1	Age		34471	2
Internet	2	18-24	3	34472	4
Text	4	25-34	12	34473	1
Facebook	2	35-44	6	34474	3
e-mail	5	55-64	2	34475	4
No Answer	6	Other	1	34420	1
USPS	4	No Answer	2	34465	1
Phone call	1			32668	1
		Race		34480	1
		Black	16	34491	1
		White	7	No Answer	6
		Multiracial	1		
		Hispanic/Latino	1		
		No Answer	1		

Survey Results:

- 40% of surveyed mothers believe that fathers do not spend enough time with their children; however, the majority of fathers (58%) feel that they do spend enough time with their children.
- The majority of fathers (69%) reported that they see their children on a daily basis; however, only 29% of surveyed mothers reported that their children’s fathers see their children on a daily basis.

- The frequency of father involvement indicated by mothers revealed that 42% of the fathers see their children less than once per month. Fathers, in comparison, reported that at least 88% of respondents see their children more frequently than once per month.
- 37% of surveyed mothers reported that they have children from at least two fathers. 30% of surveyed fathers reported that they have children with at least two mothers.
- Regarding perceived barriers to fathers spending time with their children, both mothers and fathers indicated a wide range of factors with no predominant barrier reported (e.g., work, school, relationship with other child's parent, no reason, etc.). An interesting result from mother's responses is that a significant number chose not to respond to the question (22 of 73 respondents). Compared to other questions in this survey, this question resulted in the highest frequency of mothers choosing not to respond to a question. We were unable to elicit common reasons from surveyed mothers for this anomaly.

Final Notes on Survey Results:

There was a disparity in the number of fathers (26) who chose to participate in the survey in relation to the number of mothers (73) who responded to the survey. Evaluating results from similar surveys, this may be endemic with family and child-focused surveys. Mothers are often perceived as the primary parent responsible for child-rearing, and fathers may be reluctant or unable to respond with adequate detail. The disparity in the number of responses between mothers and fathers may also be impacted by the topic of father involvement (responding fathers needed to be introspective and self-assessing).

The survey results revealed disparities in mother's and father's perceptions of father involvement in their children's lives. In general, fathers felt they spent adequate time with their children, while mothers believed that fathers did not spend enough time with their children. This disparity is important for organizations attempting to engage fathers in fatherhood initiatives. If fathers believe that they spend enough time with their children, they may not feel the need to participate in father-focused events and father-child activities.

Both parents indicated that father-child activities often take place at parks. Since fathers already gravitate toward activities with their children at local parks, it is recommended to increase fatherhood programs and father-child activities through the County and City park systems. Participation in fatherhood programs and father-focused activities often results in low turnout, and engaging fathers where they naturally gravitate with their children (such as parks) may result in increased father involvement.

Fatherhood Involvement Data Overview

Federal and state agencies have invested significant funds to support healthy marriages and education programs to improve father involvement in their children's lives. In 2005, Congress allocated \$150 million in funding for healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood through the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Administration for Children and Families (ACF) utilized these funds to initiate Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grants to states and community-based service providers. ACF issued these grants to help fathers and parents build healthy relationships, and to enhance father-child interactions. Expected outcomes from such programs included: more stable family units, decreased incidence of divorce, more effective and positive co-parenting in households with resident and nonresident fathers, improved job skills and job stability for fathers, reductions in child abuse and domestic violence, improved rates of fathers providing child support, etc.).

The majority of fatherhood programs initiated through the Deficit and Reduction act of 2005 targeted economically disadvantaged, low-income fathers. This population of fathers, on average, experienced low levels of father involvement and challenges with meeting child support obligations. Evaluations of fatherhood programs created through DRA identified common challenges with father retention and

engagement in such programs; therefore, positive outcomes from such fatherhood initiatives were minimal or nonexistent in several instances.²⁰

ACF also engaged in a large-scale, nine-year initiative called the Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) project, which created and administered marriage education programs for low-income married couples with children. ACF rolled-out a parallel initiative known as the Building Strong Families (BSF) project, which is similar to SHM, but focused on unmarried parents of newborns or babies up to three months old. Efficacy and outcomes from these programs varied widely, based on factors, such as location of program delivery, meeting times and meeting duration (weeks, months), skill and background of agency personnel conducting the education and training programs, and participation levels of mothers and fathers at each training site.

Inconsistent participation and high attrition are common challenges for fatherhood initiative and parent relationship programs. Adding another meeting obligation to a father's schedule often hampers recruitment and sustainability of such programs. Conflict between mothers and fathers often hampers the efficacy of parent relationship programs that foster co-parenting techniques and strategies. Outcomes from some relationship-building initiatives revealed varying degrees of effectiveness.

Engaging fathers where they naturally gravitate can improve the messaging and efficacy of fatherhood initiatives. Churches, synagogues, and other faith-based gatherings offer specific opportunities to engage fathers and families. Parks, community centers, YMCA, gyms and local sporting events are also natural venues to engage fathers and mothers in father involvement activities. This requires a multi-faceted approach that involves numerous community partners in a unified approach to father-child engagement. The goal should be to increase the quality and quantity of time fathers spend with their children. Quality time includes activities, such as reading activities (father to child and child to father), participating in homework activities, engaging in conversation about school, friends and future aspirations, and joining in games and physical activities. There does not appear to be adequate evidence-based research to determine if phone calls and text messages (between fathers and their children) have the same positive impacts as face-to-face interactions. Successful father involvement initiatives often focus on parental positive reinforcement, positive and constructive communication (with the child and the mother) and conflict resolution techniques.²¹

Not all father involvement leads to positive child outcomes. Abusive, argumentative, critical and demeaning interactions do not result in positive child outcomes. In these instances, father-child interactions may impair a child's development. When there is conflict between a child's mother and father, particularly with non-resident fathers, increased father involvement can actually lead to

²⁰ Martinson, Karin, and Demetra S. Nightingale. 2008. *Ten key findings from responsible fatherhood programs*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

²¹ Haimi & Lerner, 2016

detrimental effects on a child's behavioral outcomes .²² In essence, this research indicates that increased father involvement, by itself, should not be the primary goal of fatherhood initiative programs; however, the goal should be the promotion of positive and encouraging interactions between fathers and their children. Resources and toolkits for positive fatherhood involvement techniques are referenced in the appendixes of this study.

Parental conflict due to divorce/separation is one of the most negatively impactful and common impediments to positive father involvement. Divorce and separation often lead to mother-father disagreements regarding custody, child support, visitation, finances and new relationships. Family dynamics become more complex as the parents enter new relationships, remarry and integrate additional children into their lives. All of these factors can lead to challenges with co-parenting and father involvement.

As cited in the local data section of this report, Marion County experienced 421 divorces in 2015 that involved minor children. Though the average number of divorces in Marion County showed a decreasing trend over the past 10 years, the *total number* of children impacted by divorce in the County is significant, and has a negative impact on father-child interactions. Divorce and separation also lead to an increase in the number of single mother head(s) of households, which the local data revealed as a cause for increased poverty in Marion County (14% of Marion County married couples with children live in poverty, and 74% of single mothers live in poverty). Research showed a strong correlation between educational attainment and divorce rate. A study conducted in 2013 revealed that approximately 50% of marriages end in divorce among people without a high school diploma, opposed to 30% of marriages ending in divorce among college graduates.²³

The high number and percent of unwed mothers in Marion County (identified in the local data section of this report as 55% of the total births) is another substantial barrier to father involvement. In Florida, a biological father does not automatically have legal parental rights to visit his child. Establishing parental rights and paternity in Florida is a potentially complicated process for fathers who are not married at the time of birth. Under Florida law, there is a clear distinction between a biological father and a legal father. A biological father is defined as the man who fathered a child, whereas the legal father is the man with the legal rights and responsibilities of parenthood. To become a legal father, the man must be married to the mother at the time of birth, adopt a child, or gain legal rights via a court ruling (e.g., establishing paternity). The Florida Statute that governs paternity is available at: FS 742.10.

When a man who fathered a child is married to the mother at the time of birth, he is both the biological and legal father of that child. If a man has a relationship with a woman, they conceive a child together, but were not married at the time of birth, the man is only a **biological** father. If the woman married

²² Amato & Rezac, 1994

²³ Alison Aughinbaugh, Omar Robles, and Hugette Sun, "Marriage and divorce: patterns by gender, race, and educational attainment," *Monthly Labor Review*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, October 2013, <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2013.32>

another man (not the biological father) at the time of birth, this new man becomes the **legal** father of the child. In this case, the biological father has no inherent rights to co-parenting or visitation.

An unwed biological father who marries the mother of his child after birth may still gain legal parental rights through a process known as *legitimization*. If the unwed biological father does not marry the mother, he must establish paternity. The mother and father can sign a Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity, which provides the father with legal rights and responsibilities for the child. If either party disputes paternity, an action to establish paternity may be enacted by the mother, the purported father, a legal guardian/representative of the child, or the Florida Department of Revenue (for child support purposes). Once paternity is established the courts (through DNA testing, testimony or other evidence), they will create a time-sharing and custody plan. Some fathers are reluctant to establish paternity, since it obligates the father to child support and the cost of insurance coverage (retroactive to the date of the child's birth).

The following section presents national data and evidence-based findings about the link between father involvement and its impact on poverty, education, behavioral health, crime, addiction and a range of other factors. Although it is not true that a father's level of involvement *always* contributes to a child's increased chances of success, the data overwhelmingly correlates a lack of father-child interactions with negative outcomes. The data also does not suggest that single mothers cannot rear successful and healthy children. Many cases exist where single mothers reared children with successful outcomes, without the aid or influence of the children's fathers. The subsequent research is a resource to help in learning about a range of evidence on father involvement and its significances and consequences on child development.

National Data & Evidence-Based Research

Father Impacts on Poverty

Children in father-absent homes are approximately four times more likely to be poor. In 2011, 12 percent of children in married-couple families lived in poverty, compared to 44 percent of children in single mother families.²⁴

In 2008, American poverty rates were 13.2% for the entire US population, and 19% for families with children, compared to 28.7% for female-headed households.²⁵

From 1970-1996, there was a 5% increase in child poverty that was attributed primarily to the rise in single-parent families. A significant portion of the increase in child poverty was due to the increase in single mother households.²⁶

Father Impacts on Child Development & Behavior

Data from three phases of the Fragile Families Study was utilized to examine the prevalence and effects of mothers' relationship changes between birth and age three on their children's well-being. Children born to single mothers show increased levels of aggressive behavior, in comparison to children born to married mothers.²⁷

Children with involved fathers experienced fewer behavioral problems and scored higher on reading achievement.²⁸

People who come from divorced homes are almost twice as likely to attempt suicide than those who do not come from divorced homes.²⁹

²⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Children's Living Arrangements and Characteristics: March 2011, Table C8. Washington D.C.: 2011.

²⁵ Edin, K. & Kissane R. J. (2010). Poverty and the American family: a decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 460-479.

²⁶ Sawhill, I. V. (2006). Teenage sex, pregnancy, and non-marital births. *Gender Issues*, 23, 48-59

²⁷ Osborne, C., & McLanahan, S. (2007). Partnership instability and child well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69, 1065-1083

²⁸ Howard, K. S., Burke Lefever, J. E., Borkowski, J.G., & Whitman, T. L. (2006). Fathers' influence in the lives of children with adolescent mothers. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20, 468- 476

A study using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth observed father-child relationships and father's parenting styles as predictors of first lawbreaking and substance use among adolescents in intact families. The results indicate that increased father-child involvement is associated with reduced incidents of crime and delinquency.³⁰

Father involvement is related to positive cognitive, developmental, and socio-behavioral child effects, such as improved weight gain in preterm infants, higher receptive language skills, and higher academic achievement.³¹

Evidence suggested that father involvement has an impact on a child's social, behavioral, and psychological outcomes. Father involvement appears to reduce the occurrence of behavioral problems in boys and psychological problems in young women. Increased father involvement also decreases delinquency in low-income families.³²

Research provided evidence that father involvement can positively impact the development of their children's literacy skills. Fathers can improve children's reading skills by reading books to them, engaging their children in discussions about books they read, and encouraging their children to read more books.³³

Children whose fathers were actively involved exhibited enhanced outcomes on most cognitive, social, and emotional measurements developed by researchers; for example, high levels of father involvement were positively correlated with sociability, confidence, and increased levels of self-control in children. In addition, children with involved fathers are less likely to act out in school or engage in risky behaviors as adolescents.³⁴

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth was utilized to evaluate the benefits of biological father involvement in adolescent lives. Nonresident biological fathers who provided continuous emotional support and social interaction significantly reduced their children's behavioral problems. The benefit of each unit of biological father involvement was two to three times greater when the father lived with his

³⁰ Bronte-Tinkew, J., Moore, K.A., & Carrano, J. (2006). The father-child relationship, parenting styles, and adolescent risk behaviors in intact families. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27, 850-881

³¹ Garfield, C. F., & Isacco, A. (2006). Fathers and the well-child visit, *Pediatrics*, 117, 637-645.

³² Sarkadi, A., Kristiansson, R., Oberklaid, F., & Bremberg, S. (2008). Fathers' involvement and children's developmental outcomes: a systematic review of longitudinal studies. *Acta Pædiatrica*, 97, 153-158

³³ Saracho, O. N. (2007). Fathers and young children's literacy experiences in a family environment. *Early Child Development and Care*, 177, 403-415

³⁴ Anthes, E. (2010, May/June). Family guy. *Scientific American Mind*

children, compared to nonresident fathers. There was no significant difference in how father involvement affects sons versus daughters.³⁵

Children have the highest level of well-being when they are reared in a low-conflict, married household, highlighting the importance of positive maternal, as well as paternal, relationships.³⁶

Father Impacts on Educational Outcomes

Father involvement in schoolwork and school-related activities is associated with the higher likelihood of a student obtaining A's in school. This was the case for fathers in biological parent families and for families with stepfathers.³⁷

The less that fathers read to their infants, the poorer their toddlers scored on a measure of expressive vocabulary by 2 years of age.³⁸

Children are positively impacted by high levels of father involvement during early childhood as well as the frequency with which parents interact with young children, such as how often they read, tell stories and sign and play with their children. These early childhood experiences contribute to a child's language and literacy development.³⁹

Children and adolescents who experienced divorce, separation, or an unmarried birth have higher levels of behavioral problems in school than do youths who consistently lived with both biological parents. In addition, children and adolescents living in stepfamilies or single-parent families are both more vulnerable to school-related behavioral problems than children/adolescents who always lived with both biological parents.⁴⁰

³⁵ Carlson, M. J. (2006). Family structure, father involvement, and adolescent behavioral outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 137–154

³⁶ Sobolewski, J. M. & Amato, P. R. (2007). Parents' discord and divorce, parent-child relationships and subjective well-being in early adulthood: is feeling close to two parents always better than feeling close to one? *Social Forces*, 85, 1105-1124.

³⁷ Nord, Christine Winqvist, and Jerry West. *Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools by Family Type and Resident Status*. (NCES 2001-032). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001

³⁸ Paulson, J.F., Keefe, H.A., & Leiferman, J. A. (2009). Early parental depression and child language development. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 50, 254–262

³⁹ Bredekamp, S. and Copple, C. 1997. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

⁴⁰ Tillman, K. H. (2007). Family structure pathways and academic disadvantage among adolescents in stepfamilies. *Sociological Inquiry*, 77, 383-424.

Students living in father-absent homes are two times more likely to repeat a grade in school. Additionally, students living in a home with a stepfather are also two times more likely to repeat a grade.⁴¹

About 50% of students living in single-parent families or stepfamilies have parents who are highly involved in school-related activities, while 62% of students living with both of their biological parents have parents who are highly involved in their school activities. This 12% increase in school involvement was directly attributable to the presence of both biological parents.⁴²

Kindergarteners who live in single-parent homes are more likely to experience low health, social and emotional, and cognitive outcomes.⁴³

A large-scale study on children's learning outcomes revealed that fathers who are actively involved with their children's school activities increased the probability of their children's scholastic achievement.⁴⁴

Children raised in single-mother households for at least 75% of their first four years experienced elevated behavior complications and lower reasoning/cognitive achievement scores.⁴⁵

Father Impacts on Children's Health

Infant mortality rates are 1.8 times higher for children of unmarried mothers than for married mothers.⁴⁶

High-quality interaction by all forms of fathers (step, biological) predicts better infant health.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Nord, Christine Winquist, and Jerry West. *Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools by Family Type and Resident Status*. (NCES 2001-032). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001.

⁴² Nord, Christine Winquist, and Jerry West. *Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools by Family Type and Resident Status*. (NCES 2001-032). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001.

⁴³ Wertheimer, Richard and Tara Croan, et al. *Attending Kindergarten and Already Behind: A Statistical Portrait of Vulnerable Young Children*. Child Trends Research Brief. Publication #2003-20. Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2003.

⁴⁴ McBride, Brent A., Sarah K. Schoppe-Sullivan, and Moon-Ho Ho. "The mediating role of fathers' school involvement on student achievement." *Applied Developmental Psychology* 26 (2005): 201-216.

⁴⁵ Fomby, P. & Cherlin, A. J. (2007). Family instability and child well-being. *American Sociological Review*, 72, 181-204.

⁴⁶ Matthews, T.J., Sally C. Curtin, and Marian F. MacDorman. *Infant Mortality Statistics from the 1998 Period Linked Birth/Infant Death Data Set*. National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 48, No. 12. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2000.

Children living with their married biological or adoptive parents have improved access to health care than children living in any other family living arrangement.⁴⁸

When fathers are involved with the mother during her pregnancy, infants have fewer complications at birth.⁴⁹

Infants with a father's name on the birth certificate are four times more likely to live beyond one year of age.⁵⁰

A study of 2,921 mothers discovered that single mothers were twice as likely as married mothers to experience a session of depression in the prior year. Single mothers also experience increased levels of stress, fewer interactions with family, and less involvement with church or social groups.⁵¹

A study of 3,400 middle schoolers revealed that not living with both biological parents quadruples the risk of the child developing an emotional disorder.⁵²

Children who do not live with their fathers are more likely to experience asthma-related symptoms, and experience an asthma-related emergency. Marital disturbances (divorce/separation) after birth is associated with a six times increase in the child's emergency room visits, and five times increase of an asthma-related emergency.⁵³

⁴⁷ Carr, D. & Springer, K. W. (2010). Advances in families and health research in the 21st century. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 743-761

⁴⁸ Gorman, B. G., & Braverman, K. (2008). Family structure differences in health care utilization among U.S. children. *Social Science and Medicine*, 67, 1766–177

⁴⁹ Alio, A.P., Mbah, A.K., Kornosky, J.L., Marty, P.J. & Salihu, H.M. "The Impact of Paternal Involvement on Feto-Infant Morbidity among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics". *Matern Child Health J.* 2010; 14(5): 735-41.

⁵⁰ Alio, A.P., Mbah, A.K., Kornosky, J.L., Marty, P.J. & Salihu, H.M. "The Impact of Paternal Involvement on Feto-Infant Morbidity among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics". *Matern Child Health J.* 2010; 14(5): 735-41.

⁵¹ Cairney, John and Michael Boyle et al. "Stress, Social Support and Depression in Single and Married Mothers." *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 38 (August 2003): 442-449.

⁵² Cuffe, Steven P., Robert E. McKeown, Cheryl L. Addy, and Carol Z. Garrison. "Family Psychosocial Risk Factors in a Longitudinal Epidemiological Study of Adolescents." *Journal of American Academic Child Adolescent Psychiatry* 44 (February 2005): 121-129.

⁵³ Harknett, Kristin. Children's Elevated Risk of Asthma in Unmarried Families: Underlying Structural and Behavioral Mechanisms. Working Paper #2005-01-FF. Princeton, NJ: Center for Research on Child Well-being, 2005: 19-27.

Father Impacts on Criminal Activity

Even after controlling for income, youths in father-absent home had significantly higher odds of incarceration than those in mother-father families. Children and adolescents who never had a father in the home experienced the highest odds of incarceration and arrests.⁵⁴

A 2002 Department of Justice survey of inmates revealed that 39% of jail inmates lived in mother-only households. Approximately 46% of jail inmates had a previously incarcerated family member. Approximately 20% of the inmates had a father in prison or jail at some point during their lives.⁵⁵

A study of 109 juvenile offenders revealed that family structure is a strong predictor of juvenile delinquency (e.g., married and living together vs. single mother households).⁵⁶

A study of low-income minority children, aged 10-14 years, found that increased social encounters and frequent communication with nonresident biological fathers reduced adolescent delinquency.⁵⁷

A study on data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health evaluated the relationship between family structure and the risk of violence. The results revealed that when the number of fathers is low in a neighborhood, then there is an increase in incidents of teen violence.⁵⁸

Father Impacts in Teen Pregnancy & Sexual Activity

When a child is reared by a single mother, there is an increased incidence of teen pregnancy, and the child eventually marrying someone with less than a high school degree, and entering into a marriage where both spouses have less than a high school degree (increasing the likelihood of poverty).⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Harper, Cynthia C. and Sara S. McLanahan. "Father Absence and Youth Incarceration." *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 14 (September 2004): 369-397

⁵⁵ James, Doris J. *Profile of Jail Inmates, 2002*. (NCJ 201932). Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, July 2004.

⁵⁶ Bush, Connee, Ronald L. Mullis, and Ann K. Mullis. "Differences in Empathy Between Offender and Nonoffender Youth." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 29 (August 2000): 467-478.

⁵⁷ Coley, R. L., & Medeiros, B. L. (2007). Reciprocal longitudinal relations between nonresident father involvement and adolescent delinquency. *Child Development*, 78, 132–147.

⁵⁸ Knoester, C., & Hayne, D. A. (2005). Community context, social integration into family, and youth violence. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 767-780.

⁵⁹ Teachman, Jay D. "The Childhood Living Arrangements of Children and the Characteristics of Their Marriages." *Journal of Family Issues* 25 (January 2004): 86-111.

A study of rural southern adolescents (851 females and 558 males) aged 11 to 18, evaluated the correlation between father absence and an adolescent's sexual activity. The results indicated that adolescents in father-absent homes were more likely to report being sexually active, compared to adolescents living with their fathers.⁶⁰

In a study exploring the viewpoints of daughters who experienced father absence during childhood, the women expressed difficulties forming healthy relationships with men. They attributed these struggles with their father's absence from the home and lack of father involvement. The interviewees also revealed a significant need for affection from men, which was attributed to the lack of affection received from their absentee fathers.⁶¹

Researchers concluded that father absence has significant impacts on early sexual activity and increased incidents of teenage pregnancy. Teens without resident fathers were two times as likely to be involved in adolescent sexual activity, and seven times more likely to experience teen pregnancy.⁶²

Father Impacts on Child Abuse & Neglect

Outcomes from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study revealed that the absence of a biological father contributes to increased rates of child abuse and neglect. Research indicates that families with a non-biological (also known as a social) father figure in the household, experience a higher probability of abuse and neglect to children.⁶³

In a study exploring father-related factors that predict risks of maternal child abuse, researchers conducted interviews with mothers (to evaluate factors relating to family dynamics). The results revealed that mothers, who were married to fathers, have a lower risk for maternal physical child abuse.

⁶⁰ Hendricks, C. S., Cesario, S. K., Murdaugh, C., Gibbons, M. E., Servonsky, E. J., Bobadilla, R. V., Hendricks, D. L., Spencer-Morgan, B., & Tavakoli, A. (2005). The influence of father absence on the self-esteem and self-reported sexual activity of rural southern adolescents. *ABNF Journal*, 16, 124-131.

⁶¹ East, L., Jackson, D., & O'Brien, L. (2007). 'I don't want to hate him forever': Understanding daughter's experiences of father absence. *Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 24, 14-18.

⁶² Ellis, Bruce J., John E. Bates, Kenneth A. Dodge, David M. Ferguson, L. John Horwood, Gregory S. Pettit, and Lianne Woodward. "Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy." *Child Development* 74 (May/June 2003): 801-821.

⁶³ "CPS Involvement in Families with Social Fathers." *Fragile Families Research Brief No.46*. Princeton, NJ and New York, NY: Bendheim-Thomas Center for Research on Child Wellbeing and Social Indicators Survey Center, 2010.

In addition, researchers determined that *advanced educational attainment and positive father involvement* with their children are good predictors of decreased maternal physical child abuse.⁶⁴

Father Impacts on Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Drug use is more prevalent in homes where the father is absent and not actively involved in a child's life.⁶⁵

In a study of children from ADDHEALTH, lack of father involvement increases the likelihood that a child's circle of friends or acquaintances smoke tobacco products, consume alcohol, and smoke marijuana.⁶⁶

Children and adolescents are more at risk of first substance use when a father is not actively involved in their children's lives. Living in a mother and father household decreases the risk of first substance use.⁶⁷

A study consisting of 441 college students revealed that an inadequate or nonexistent relationship with one's father increased occurrences of depression, which is a factor that frequently leads to alcohol abuse and other addictions.⁶⁸

African American boys from father-absent homes experience an increased risk for drug abuse.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Guterman, N.B., Yookyong, L., Lee, S. J., Waldfogel, J., & Rathouz, P. J. (2009). Fathers and maternal risk for physical child abuse. *Child Maltreatment*, 14, 277-290.

⁶⁵ Hoffmann, John P. "The Community Context of Family Structure and Adolescent Drug Use." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64 (May 2002): 314-330.

⁶⁶ National Fatherhood Initiative. "Family Structure, Father Closeness, & Drug Abuse." Gaithersburg, MD: National Fatherhood Initiative, 2004: 20-22.

⁶⁷ Bronte-Tinkew, Jacinta, Kristin A. Moore, Randolph C. Capps, and Jonathan Zaff. "The influence of father involvement on youth risk behaviors among adolescents: A comparison of native-born and immigrant families." Article in Press. *Social Science Research* December 2004.

⁶⁸ Patock-Peckham, J. A., & Morgan-Lopez, A. A. (2007). College drinking behaviors: Mediation links between parenting styles, parental bonds, depression, and alcohol problems. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 21, 297–306

⁶⁹ Mandara, J., & Murray, C. B. (2006). Father's absence and African American adolescent drug use. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 46, 1-12

Even after controlling for community context, there is significantly more drug use among children who do not live with their mother and father.⁷⁰

Father Impacts on Childhood Obesity

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth revealed that obese children are more likely to live in father-absent homes than children who are not obese.⁷¹

Children of fathers with limited parent-child involvement had increased odds of being in a higher Body Mass Index (BMI) scores.⁷²

Research indicates that an engaged father's percentage of body fat is the best predictor of changes in daughter's total and percentage of body fat. The mother's percentage of body fat was not a consistent or valid indicator of a daughter's percentage of body fat.⁷³

A father's lack of physical activity is strong predictor of a child's level of physical activity.⁷⁴

Children who lived in single mother households were more likely to experience obesity.⁷⁵

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⁷⁰ Hoffmann, John P. "The Community Context of Family Structure and Adolescent Drug Use." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64 (May 2002): 314-330.

⁷¹ National Longitudinal Survey of Youth

⁷² Wake, M., Nicholson, J.M., Hardy, P., & Smith, K. (2007). Preschooler obesity and parenting styles of mothers and fathers: Australian national population study, *Pediatrics*, 12, 1520-1527.

⁷³ Figueroa-Colon R, Arani RB, Goran MI, Weinsier RL. "Paternal body fat is a longitudinal predictor of changes in body fat in premenarcheal girls." Department of Pediatrics, General Clinical Research Center, Medical Statistics Unit, Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of Alabama at Birmingham

⁷⁴ Trost SG, Kerr LM, Ward DS, Pate RR. "Physical activity and determinants of physical activity in obese and non-obese children. School of Human Movement Studies, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland 4072, Australia.

⁷⁵ Strauss RS, Knight J. "Influence of the home environment on the development of obesity in children." Division of Pediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Robert Wood Johnson School of Medicine, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

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Making Good on Fatherhood January 2016 84

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Appendix

Toolkits:

- [A Driver's Manual for New Dads](#)
- [Co-Parent Communication Guide](#)
- ["What Works" in Fatherhood Programs? Ten Lessons from Evidence-Based Practices](#)
- [Evaluation Resource Guide for Responsible Fatherhood Programs](#)
- [Healthy Relationship/Healthy Marriage Idea Guide](#)
- [Toolkits for Hispanic Families](#)
- [Together We Can Co-Parenting Curriculum](#)

Links to Fatherhood Websites & Resources:

- National Fatherhood Initiative
- National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse
- The Fatherhood Institute
- Responsible Fatherhood
- Fatherhood Educational Institute
- The Fathers Network
- National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute
- Native American Fatherhood & Families Association
- National Center for Fathering
- Supporting Father Involvement
- National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System
- Center on Fathers, Families, and Public Policy