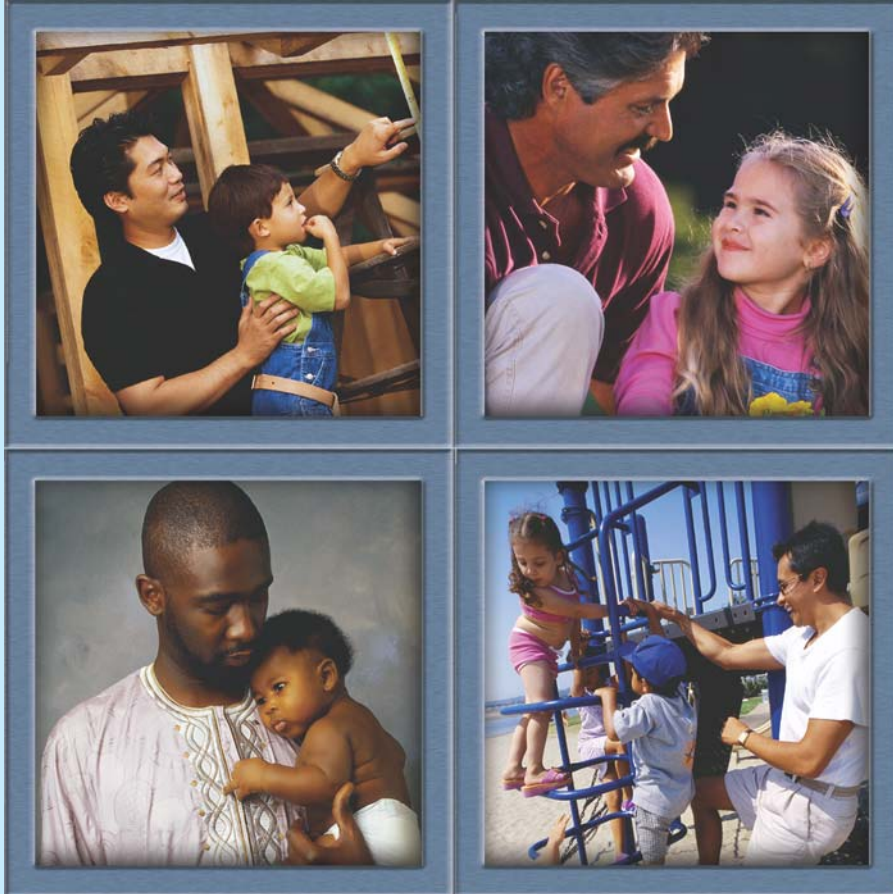


# Fathers

**in San Mateo County**



**A Needs Assessment  
The Fatherhood Collaborative  
Of San Mateo County**

**Submitted to First 5 San Mateo County  
February 2003**

**Fathers in San Mateo County:  
A Needs Assessment**

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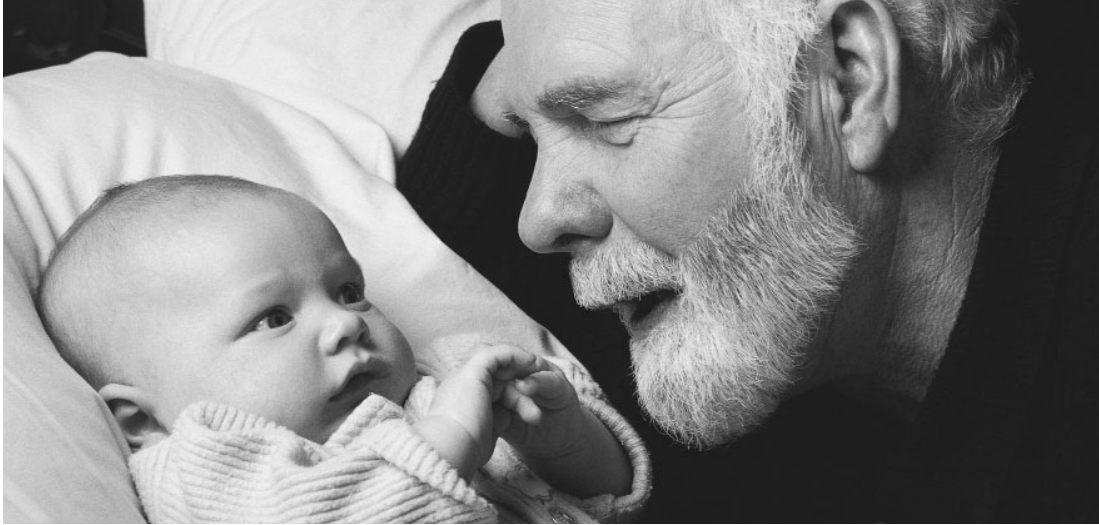
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# Executive Summary

The Fatherhood Collaborative of San Mateo County (Fatherhood Collaborative) was established in 1998 by a group of practitioners, providers, and public and private community organizations that shared an interest in expanding local services for fathers. Since then, more than 50 organizations and individuals countywide have joined the efforts to:

1. Increase the community's awareness and support of fathers and men in the lives of children;
2. Increase the health and well-being of children in San Mateo County by increasing the strength and quality of their relationships with their fathers and male caregivers; and
3. Improve the coordination of family services for fathers and to encourage male responsibility in families.

The goal of the Fatherhood Collaborative is to strengthen families by addressing the needs of children, fathers and mothers.

In 2001 the Fatherhood Collaborative conducted a countywide needs assessment of fathers with children ages zero to five because the majority of families seeking services in San Mateo County have children in this age group. The primary purpose of this project was to ask fathers directly about their personal needs and the need for county services. Over the course of six months, fathers, practitioners, and program administrators identified current service-related needs and barriers to accessing services.

Qualitative data collection strategies included community topical dialogues, key stakeholder interviews, and case management chart reviews. A 35-question survey was administered to collect quantitative data directly from fathers. This report is one of the first countywide efforts to gather information on father-related issues in San Mateo County. First 5 San Mateo County, formerly the San Mateo County Children and Families First Commission, the Peninsula Community Foundation, and the Fatherhood Collaborative all made this needs assessment possible.

## **Key Findings**

San Mateo County fathers have needs similar to those of fathers throughout the nation. The needs identified also align in large part with the five areas of need previously identified by the Fatherhood Collaborative: legal assistance, personal development, parenting skills, family health, employment and job training.

Among the fathers who responded to the survey questionnaire, financial assistance, shelter and housing, healthcare, food, and employment were prioritized as current needs. Approximately half of those fathers surveyed felt that the community's support for fathers in raising children was good to excellent. Support service needs that were prioritized included father-child activities, parks or recreational activities, better schools, parenting classes and support groups for fathers. Television, newspapers and radio were identified as the best sources for providing the father-focused information.

A small group of fathers were also supported with case management services. The majority of fathers who received case management services during this period were self-referred and sought services because of current legal difficulties, including issues with the Department of Child Support Services and with Family Law Court mediation and visitation services. In addition to a lack of understanding of court orders, fathers also experienced difficulty in understanding agency and court protocols, policies and procedures. These fathers also felt that there was gender bias and insensitivity to the needs of both custodial and non-custodial fathers. The service-related needs of this group of fathers centered on child-custody and visitation, employment, housing, mental health and relationship-building skills.

Program and policy implications of the needs assessment results were also identified. They will be a basis of ongoing strategic planning by the Fatherhood Collaborative.

# Introduction

## The Fatherhood Collaborative of San Mateo County



The Fatherhood Collaborative is committed to providing leadership and a forum for bringing together organizations and individuals who are concerned about the issues of men, children, and families. The mission of the organization is to engage parents, providers, employers and the broader community to better understand the importance of men and fathers as they relate to children.

Programs initiated during the past year include: “Dad and Me @ the Library,” “Dad and Me @ the Park,” and a “Youth Education Model.” In this model, presentations are made to teens in local high schools about the many challenges associated with early parenthood and the importance of fathers in families. In addition, the Fatherhood Collaborative has acted as an advisory body to the study of fatherhood in the child welfare system.

The Fatherhood Collaborative also provides support to father-focused pilot projects. Partial funding has been provided to “Fathers and Families”, a project where

selected inmates (fathers) participate in reading skills classes and record children’s stories on audiotapes to be sent to their children. The Service League of San Mateo County, San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office, Redwood City Project Read and the Notre Dame AmeriCorps developed the project. Currently, plans are being developed to implement services for fathers in Redwood City, San Mateo and Pescadero.

Other annual activities of the Fatherhood Collaborative include: (1) The DADS COUNT Breakfast—Family Friendly Employer Awards; (2) the Annual Fatherhood Conference and Awards Ceremony; and (3) Babies and You, a series of classes for pregnant county employees and their partners where the Fatherhood Collaborative provides speakers to discuss “The Father’s Role.”

### First 5 San Mateo County

The vision of First 5 San Mateo County, formerly known as the San Mateo County Children and Families First Commission, is success for every child. The mission is that all children in San Mateo County will be healthy, eager and ready to learn, have a loving attachment to a parent or other adult, and are able to reach their fullest potential.

First 5 San Mateo County was established after a ballot measure passed in 1998, adding a surtax on tobacco products, provided a new source of revenue to fund services for children ages zero to five years and their families. A 9-member commission manages available resources, funding projects and programs in three focus areas:

1. Childcare and early learning;
2. Family support and parent education; and



## ***Introduction***

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### 3. Health and well-being.

In addition to funding a competitive grant-making process, First 5 San Mateo County also funds both Strategic Initiatives and Statewide Initiatives, also in the three focus areas.

First 5 San Mateo County provided funding for the Fatherhood Collaborative to conduct this needs assessment in order to identify the needs of fathers and to provide important information for further programming efforts.

## **Why Address the Needs of Fathers?**

National and statewide indicators overwhelmingly reflect the need to build sound, comprehensive father-focused programs. According to statistics from the Responsible Fatherhood Act of 1999 as reported by the United States Senate<sup>1</sup>:

- Nearly twenty-five million children in the United States, 36%, live apart from their biological fathers
- Forty percent of children who live in households without a father never visited their father's home
- Children who live without contact with their biological father, in comparison to children who have such contact are:
  1. Five times more likely to live in poverty
  2. Twice as likely to drop out of school
  3. More than twice as likely to abuse drugs and alcohol
  4. More likely to commit suicide
  5. Twice as likely to commit crimes
  6. More likely to exhibit learning difficulties
  7. More likely to become pregnant as teenagers

The Fatherhood Collaborative began working with fathers directly in the spring of 1999 when frustrated dads started to contact the organization for assistance and support. Typical problems needing resolution included: understanding visitation and child support orders that were received by mail; trying to understand the dynamics of a failed relationship; and needing help to complete paperwork prior to the next Family Law Court hearing. Homelessness, unemployment, affordable childcare, healthcare coverage and trust in local government were also among their major concerns.

Fathers often demonstrated a lack of skill in identifying county resources and accessing services. Sadness, anger, distrust, and frustration were pervasive among these parents who were trying desperately to understand why bureaucracies had “purposely” complicated their lives. Yet these men remained adamant about staying actively involved in their children's lives.

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1. Fatherhood Training Curriculum: Principles, Policies, and Practices to Engage Fathers in their Children's Lives. National Family Preservation Network, 2001.



The Fatherhood Coordinator and members of the governance committee have assisted a culturally diverse group of twenty-seven dads during the past three years. These individuals were either self-referred or referred by agencies. The Fatherhood Collaborative has no ongoing direct services, but instead guides fathers in need to local agencies, organizations, and programs for assistance and support.

In 2000, the Fatherhood Collaborative identified five areas of need that were based on information obtained from the fathers served. The five areas include:

1. **Legal Assistance**—paternity establishment, child support, mediation/visitation and other legal matters.
2. **Personal Development**—paternal role identification, life skills, negotiation skills, literacy, family and social support
3. **Parenting Skills**—nurturing and care giving, child development, discipline and shared parenting.
4. **Family Health**—child health, development and safety, and men’s health.
5. **Employment**—education, job readiness, and self-sufficiency.

It became clear to the Fatherhood Collaborative that father-involvement was a term that had different meanings to different people. After reviewing literature on fathers, the Fatherhood Collaborative adopted the definition that was established by The National Fatherhood Initiative in Gaithersburg, MD, an organization that continues to be a valued resource. Father-involvement contains three central components:

1. **Engagement**—One-on-one interaction with the child.
2. **Accessibility**—Being there for the child both physically and emotionally.
3. **Responsibility**—Understanding the needs of the child and participating in the child’s well-being.

This definition is broad enough to encompass those fathers who reside with their children but are not emotionally connected. It also allows for the development of intervention strategies to involve fathers when it is inappropriate for them to have physical contact or access.

When distances are too great for frequent physical contacts, strategies that promote responsibility should be employed. Recording children’s stories on audiotape, and written acknowledgement of birthdays, good grades or other special events should be encouraged. In situations where it is inappropriate for fathers to be physically involved, helping fathers develop strategies for meeting their financial obligations regarding child support, childcare, and healthcare coverage can also promote responsibility.

Medical research has demonstrated that environmental influences on brain development during the early years is long lasting, and that both parents and caregivers play a crucial

## ***Introduction***

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role in shaping the child's environment. Three influential components of a child's environment that parents can provide include appropriate tactile and audio stimulation, and adequate nutrition.

The best source of nutrition for infants is breast milk. And a father's attitude towards breastfeeding often determines whether the mother chooses to breast-feed or bottle-feed. Mothers' perception of fathers' attitude toward breastfeeding was the most common reason mothers chose to bottle-feed in one recent study.<sup>2</sup> Most men understand the benefits of breastfeeding, but they often believe that it is unacceptable to breastfeed in public.<sup>3</sup> Since a mothers' decision to breastfeed her newborn may be influenced by the father, routine inclusion of fathers in breastfeeding education programs could be very beneficial.

It has been known for some time that fathers play a unique, significant and irreplaceable role in influencing a child's development.<sup>4</sup> They provide a more playful style that stimulates different muscle groups and parts of the brain during infancy.<sup>5</sup> And through interaction and stimulation, fathers encourage babies to distinguish different sounds, faces and touches, thereby, making them less fearful of new experiences. Paternal bonding and attachment also enable the child to form trusting relationships beyond those already established with the mother.<sup>6</sup> Educating fathers regarding the audio and tactile stimulation that young children need for healthy growth and development, and helping them to understand the added value to father, child and family relationships when fathers and male caregivers are emotionally involved should form the basis of father-centered programs.

Learning difficulties, violent behavior, self-esteem, socialization and high-risk behaviors can be linked to the emotional, cognitive and social development of children during the formative years, the most rapid period of brain development. A father's high level of infant involvement (e.g. amount of time spent alone with and playing with the child, attitude and behavioral sensitivity) is directly related to the social, emotional and cognitive development of toddlers.<sup>7</sup> Studies in child development continue to support the belief that relationships established between fathers and infants have a direct bearing on the child's ability to develop healthy relationships during adulthood.

Children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, exhibit empathy and pro-social behavior, and avoid high-risk behaviors such as drug use, truancy, and criminal activity compared to children who have uninvolved fathers.<sup>8</sup> Since poverty and maladaptive behaviors in children have also been associated with fathers being absent and uninvolved, it is logical for us to conclude that involved fathers do make differences in children's lives.

In a review of the literature, several factors that influenced paternal bonding and attachment were identified. Mothers' pre-birth expectations of fathers, quality of the mother-father relationship, father-fetal attachment, birth attendance and father's persistent contact

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2. Arora S, McJunkin C, Wehrer J and Kuhn P. Major Factors Influencing Breastfeeding rates: Mother's Perception of Father's Attitude and Milk Supply. *Pediatrics* 2000;106 (5):1-8.

3. Freed GJ, Fraley K and Schnaler RJ. Attitudes of Expectant Fathers regarding Breast-Feeding. *Pediatrics* 1992;90 (2): 224-6.

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8. *Father Facts*. National Fatherhood Initiative, 2002.

during the first five months of life were predictors of paternal-involvement during the child's earlier years.<sup>9-11</sup> Perceptions regarding the quality of the marital relationship, father's level of education, mother's employment status, and maternal depression are some of the variables attributed to paternal involvement among fathers who were employed and lived with their children.<sup>12-13</sup> The variables identified in studies targeting disadvantaged, nonresidential fathers and fathers of children born to teen mothers were slightly different. Financial insecurity, disinterest in child rearing, quality of the father's romantic relationship with the mother, father's relationship with the child's maternal grandmother and employment status were major predictors of involvement among this group.<sup>14-15</sup>

Gathering information on fathers has presented major challenges in San Mateo County and throughout California. Unlike most states, California does not have a state-sponsored Fatherhood Initiative Program that designates funds to fatherhood programs at county and local levels. The new California department of Child Support Services and the Welfare to Work Program, funded by the Workforce Investment Act, are the two known exceptions in San Mateo County. The Williams and Flora Hewlett Foundation and Community Foundations have been major contributors to community-based fatherhood efforts in San Mateo County and across the State.

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12. Ibid.

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14. Rhein, LM et al. Teen Father Participation in Child Rearing: Family Perspectives *Journal of Adolescent Health* 1997;21: 244-52.

15. Gavin LE et al. Young, Disadvantaged Fathers' Involvement With Their Infants: An Ecological Perspective. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2002;31:266-76.

# Methods



Both qualitative and quantitative strategies were utilized to collect data representing fathers in San Mateo County.

## Quantitative Data

A 35-question confidential survey was developed and piloted. The data from the survey provide us with an objective assessment of the service-related needs of fathers. Twelve hundred surveys were distributed to 16 agencies across the county. Due to the fact that San Mateo County is geographically, culturally and socio-economically diverse, an attempt was made to distribute the surveys to agencies countywide with different target populations. These included the Department of Child Support Services, Marin Day Child Care Centers, The Service League of San Mateo County (which serves incarcerated fathers), Peninsula Partnership for Children, Youth and Families sites throughout the county, Peninsula Works (the One-Stop Center), as well as to San Mateo County employees. In total, 240 surveys were received and analyzed, a

response rate of 20%. Data were entered in Excel and analyzed using Intercooled Stata 7.0.

Six hundred and fifty surveys were distributed to male county employees who had added a new child to their health insurance plan in the previous five years. At other agencies and organizations survey distribution varied. Some left the surveys in the waiting room for fathers to complete. Others had providers give surveys directly to fathers, while some agencies may have even required survey completion. From the 16 organizations that distributed surveys, 12 returned surveys. The survey respondents were a convenience sample.

## Qualitative Data

Qualitative data were collected from focus groups/community dialogues, key stakeholder interviews, and case management chart reviews.

### *Focus groups/community dialogues*

Trained facilitators conducted nine focus groups/community dialogues organized by the Fatherhood Collaborative and the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center. The 80 participants included fathers, agency staff serving fathers and families, adolescent parents and

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Survey distribution sites included: Department of Child Support Services-Redwood City, Peninsula Partnership for Children, Youth and Families sites (Daly City Parks and Recreation, Bayshore Child Care, Family Support Center, Pacifica Fatherhood Collaborative, Redwood City 2020, San Mateo Fatherhood Collaborative, Community Learning Center, South San Francisco Public Library), San Mateo County Employees-Countywide, Young Dad's Group-Daly City, Peninsula Works-Daly City, Service League of San Mateo County-Redwood City, Black Infant Health Program-East Palo Alto, Cabrillo School District-Coastside.

others. The questions varied depending on the group's participants. Participants were recruited at agency staff meetings and by using flyers and posters advertising the event. Many of the fathers were participants in current county programs for fathers, including the Black Infant Health Program and the Young Dads Group. These focus groups occurred at various county locations including Redwood City, Daly City, East Palo Alto, San Mateo and South San Francisco. Several attempts at holding focus groups on the Coast were unsuccessful.

### ***Key stakeholder interviews***

A 13-item interview tool was developed in consultation with the Fatherhood Collaborative Coordinator and an outreach worker, both of whom have significant experience working with fathers in San Mateo County. Of the 20 key stakeholders identified, 16 participated in approximately one-hour face-to-face or telephone interviews. Participants were from a variety of agencies including, Department of Child Support Services, Interfaith Health Ministries, San Mateo County Health Services Agency, San Mateo Perinatal Council, San Mateo Medical Center, Sequoia High School District, Teen Parenting Programs, Family Visitation Services, Child Care Services and Montessori Preschool.

### ***Case management chart reviews***

After removing all personal identifiers, 20 case management records of fathers were reviewed. Cases were reviewed for demographic data regarding the father, presenting problems and referrals.

## **Data Limitations**

### ***Quantitative Data***

Both the qualitative and quantitative data came from a convenience sample. A randomized sample may have yielded results that were more truly representative of fathers in the County, and with less possibility of bias.

For the quantitative data, 1,200 surveys were distributed to San Mateo County employees as well as agencies, who then distributed them to fathers. While the response rate appears to be approximately 20%, the number of surveys that were actually distributed to fathers is unknown. The response rate may actually be higher. The agencies that received surveys for distribution were located throughout the various geographical regions of the county, but not all agencies returned surveys and some surveys were returned to the data collection team by mail. The inclusion of geographical references on the survey questionnaire, such as zip code of residence, may have improved our ability to determine if all geographical areas of the county had been surveyed. County employees, whose awareness and knowledge of available resources for fathers may differ from those fathers who are not county employees, completed many of the surveys that were returned.

It is important to compare some of the demographics of our survey participants to other quantitative data sources, such as the US Census 2000. Some of the demographics demonstrate that this sample is fairly representative of the County, but others provide some evidence that over or under-sampling of particular groups may have occurred, which is not unusual in a convenience sample.

In addition, it is possible that the higher need or non-custodial fathers may have been less

## ***Methods***

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likely to complete the survey. Other resources on data collection among non-custodial fathers have indicated that these fathers are a very difficult group to reach for surveying. They are often under represented in survey samples. The qualitative data allowed a more in depth examination of the higher need fathers.

### ***Qualitative Data***

The qualitative data provided a better understanding of some of the higher need fathers. This sample was also a convenience sample. Randomization may have improved the quality of the results. The fathers who participated in the focus groups and community dialogues were self-selected, and may be more highly motivated than the general population. Some of the fathers' responses demonstrated that they were not aware of all of the resources available to fathers in the county, such as the Peninsula Works One-Stop programs at four sites in the County. Improving the outreach efforts of available programs may improve access to services.

Despite its limitations, these results provide a better understanding of the types of services higher need fathers are currently receiving and for which they are seeking referrals. These data provided a stronger voice for higher need fathers. It also allowed fathers to provide possible solutions that the county could use to help improve services to fathers. The results emphasize the services and sensitivity the county needs to truly assist the higher need fathers who are often silent and hard to reach.

Additional information regarding possible solutions and strategic methods to increase services for fathers may have been helpful. Some of the prioritized needs are difficult to impossible to solve, such as financial assistance. Others are more concrete and may be easier to provide, such as father-child activities. In addition, it is possible that the higher need, non-custodial fathers may have been less likely to complete the survey. Since these fathers are a very difficult group to reach for surveying, they are often under represented in survey samples. The qualitative data allowed a more in-depth examination of the higher need fathers.

Finally, many current families are "non-traditional" in structure. the survey may have been more difficult to complete for these families, and there may be some under-representation of these families among the data and results.



# Results

## Quantitative Data



### **Sample Demographics:**

Demographic data collected on the confidential survey included father's age, ethnicity, and education level (**Table 1**). Over one-half of the fathers were over 34 years of age, and almost one-half had a college degree.

**Table 1. Demographic Data of Fathers Surveyed (n=240)**

Ethnicity	Fathers Surveyed	Age (Years)	
White	33.3%	14–18	1.3%
Hispanic	26.7%	19–21	2.1%
Asian	18.8%	22–25	6.3%
Other/Multi	10.0%	26–29	10.4%
Black	8.3%	30–34	14.6%
Nat. America	0.4%	35–38	22.9%
No Response	2.5%	>39	30.4%
		No response	12.1%

Education	Fathers Surveyed	San Mateo County
High School Diploma/GED or Equivalent	19.2%	17.5%
College Degree	47.9%	39.0%





**Results**

**Family Information**

The data in **Table 2** provide more information regarding the fathers place in the family. Over three-quarters of men returning surveys were married, and a similar percentage lived in the family household. Almost 85% had at least one child under 5 years of age.

**Table 2. Family Information (n=240)**

Marital Status		Does Father Live in Household?	
Never Married	11.7%	Yes	80.0%
Married	76.7%	No	8.8%
Separated or Divorced	10.0%	Sometimes	10.8%
No Response	1.7%	No response	0.4%

Number of Children		One or More Children Under 5 Years of Age	
1	33.3%	Yes	84.6%
2	42.9%	No	15.0%
3	15.0%	N/A	0.4%
4	4.5%		
5 or more	2.5%		
No response	1.2%		

**Fathers Identified Needs**

Fathers were asked to prioritize their current needs. These included: financial, housing, health care, food and employment (**Table 3**). In the 2001 Quality of Life survey of San Mateo County, financial problems were also identified as the greatest problem facing families in the County.<sup>16</sup>

**TABLE 3. Top Five Needs (n=240)**

Financial	35%
Housing	20%
Health Care	20%
Food	19%
Employment	18%

**The Community-Support Services Needed**

Fathers were surveyed about their feelings about the county and the support services provided for fathers by the county. Fifty percent of fathers surveyed thought their community was “good” to “excellent” as a place that supports fathers in the raising of their children, while 39% rated the county “fair” to “poor” and 11% did not respond (n=240). In addition, fathers were asked to prioritize the support services that the community needed to provide in order to better their role as a father. The top five prioritized support services identified by fathers include: Father-Child Activities, Parks or

**TABLE 4. Top Five Support Services Needed (n=240)**

Father-Child Activities	47%
Parks or Recreational Activities	37%
Better Schools	35%
Parenting Classes	33%
Support Groups	25%

16. 2001 Community Assessment-Health & Quality of Life in San Mateo County. Professional Research Consultants, Inc. May, 2002.

Recreational Activities, Better Schools, Parenting Classes and Support Groups (Table 4).

**Available Support**

Approximately 75% of fathers surveyed indicated that they had enough support or information during the first year of their child’s life. Almost 15% of the fathers indicated that they were currently having problems with their wife, girlfriend or partner (82% indicated no current problems, while 3 % did not respond). Fathers felt most comfortable asking their wife, partner or girlfriend how to raise their children and their mothers ranked second as a source for information (Table 5). The responses also indicated that fathers felt more comfortable asking doctors, nurses, and home visitors about raising their children than they did other relatives and friends.

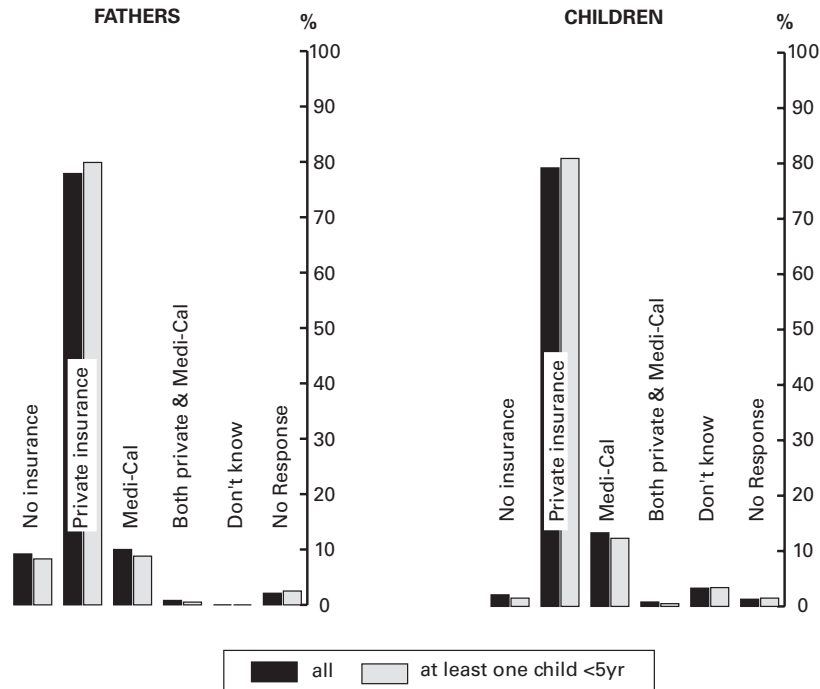
**Table 5. Who do you feel comfortable asking about how to raise your child or children? (Check all that apply) (n=240)**

Wife, partner, or girlfriend	63.3%
Your Mother	53.3%
Doctor, Nurse or Home Visitor	42.0%
A Relative	32.0%
A Friend/Neighbor	29.6%
Your Father	23.3%

**Health Care**

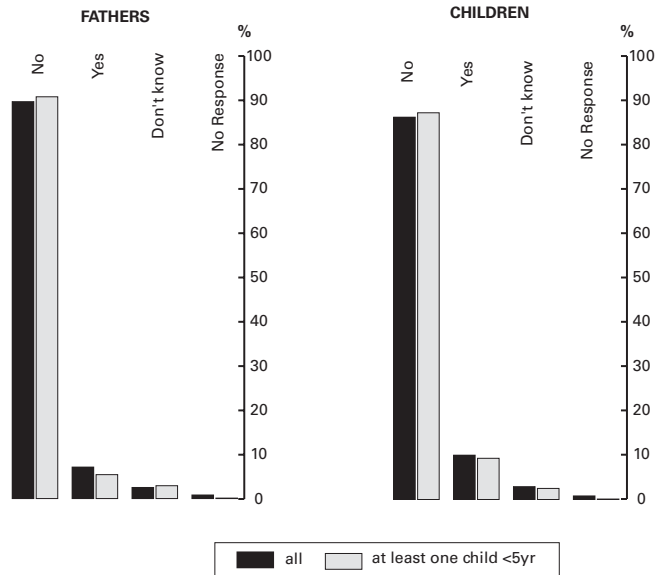
Fathers were surveyed about their health insurance status, current health conditions and need of health care for both themselves and their children (Figure 1-2).

**Figure 1. Health Insurance Status (n=240)**



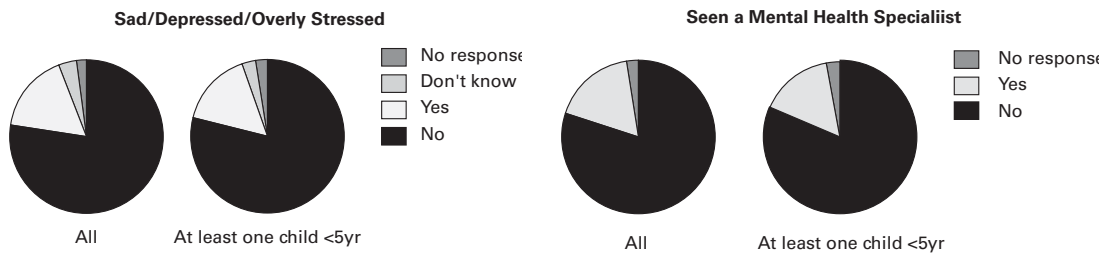
**Results**

**Figure 2. Health Care Needs (n=240)**



There does not seem to be a difference between fathers with only older children and those who have at least one child under the age of 5 years. Despite the fact that 20% of fathers prioritized health care as a need, only 7% indicated that they currently needed health care. Approximately 50% of those who indicated they were in need of medical care indicated health care was something they needed at this time.

**Figure 3. Mental Health (n=240)**



In addition, fathers were asked questions regarding their mental health (**Figure 3**).

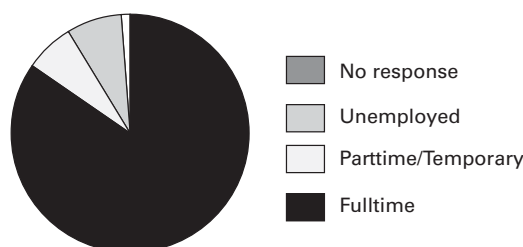
Among those fathers who indicated that they were currently sad, depressed or overly stressed (n=40), only 22% indicated that they had seen a mental health specialist. Twelve percent of fathers who indicated that they were sad, depressed or overly stressed indicated they were in need of counseling (compared to 5% for all fathers surveyed).

Other health-related needs that fathers were surveyed about included current need of family planning services (5%), and smoking cessation services (4%). While no fathers indicated a current need for alcohol or drug counseling, 5% indicated that the community needed substance abuse services.

**Employment**

Fathers were surveyed regarding their current employment status (**Figure 4**). The majority of fathers surveyed had a full time job or a full and part time job, while 7.5% were currently unemployed (two-thirds of these were currently looking for employment), 6.7% had seasonal, temporary or part time employment, and 1.3% did not respond (n=240). Nearly 6% of all fathers surveyed, indicated they were currently in need of employment training. In addition, 21% of fathers surveyed prioritized jobs and 6.7% prioritized job training as necessary services in the county to help them become a better father.

**Figure 4. Employment (n=240)**



**Parenting Classes**

Fathers were also asked about parenting classes, another means of support and information. 37.5% of fathers surveyed indicated that the county needed to offer more parenting classes, and 33.3% indicated parenting classes as a priority. In addition, 25% prioritized support groups for fathers as a necessary community service.

Of the fathers surveyed, 32.5% had participated in parenting classes. Almost 50% of those who had taken a parenting class thought that the community needed parenting classes for fathers to help them become a better father. **Table 6**

describes the location of classes taken. Most of the parenting classes were not for fathers only, and just 25.6% of fathers who had taken a parenting class had taken one for fathers only. Those who had taken parenting classes did not vary greatly in their view on the community

as a place that supports fathers raising children (52% “good to excellent” compared to 50% of all fathers surveyed) or in feeling they had enough support or information during their child’s first year of life (73% said “yes” compared to 75% of all fathers surveyed). Therefore it is difficult to tell from this survey if the parenting classes led to an improved sense of preparedness or served as a crucial source of information.

**Table 6. Location of Parenting Classes (Check all that apply) (n=78)**

Hospital	44.9%
Other Location	28.2%
Community Center	25.6%
Baby’s Doctor’s Office	16.7%
Child Care Center	15.4%
Church	12.8%
Mother’s Doctor’s Office	3.9%
No response	2.6%

## Results

### Legal Assistance

Fathers were asked about their need for legal assistance, particularly child custody and child support assistance. The majority of the fathers surveyed were still married and/or living with their children, so legal assistance was lower on the list of priority support services needed for fathers in the community (5%). However, among those respondents indicating that they were not or sometimes living with their children currently (n=48), 27% indicated legal assistance was a support service that the community could provide to help them become a better father. In addition, among those respondents indicating that they were not or sometimes living with their children currently, 9% indicated they were now in need of legal assistance, 18.8% currently were in need of child custody assistance, and 25% currently were in need of child support assistance.

### Personal Development/Fathers Role

Fathers were surveyed regarding their primary role as father (Table 7). Many respondents checked more than one answer indicating they shared the perception that fathering consists of multiple roles.

In addition, fathers were surveyed about the activities that they like to do with their children. Eighty four percent indicated that they liked just spending time with their children. Fathers indicated that they like to participate in a wide range of activities with their children (Table 8).

In addition, fathers were asked specifically about how often they read to their children. Only 10% of fathers indicated that they did not read to their children, approximately 48% indicated they read to their children between one to three times per week, while 17.5 % indicated that they read to their children between four to six times per week, and 22.5% indicated that they read to their children more than six times per week. Among fathers with at least one child under the age of 5 years, 10% did not read to their children, 44% indicated that they read to their children between one to three times per week, 19% indicated that they read to their children between four to six times per week, and 25% indicated that they read to their children more than six times per week.

**Table 7. Primary Role as Father (n=240) (Check all that apply)**

Parenting	75.4%
Role Model	50.4%
Pay the Bills	42.5%
Disciplinarian	39.2%
Care Giver	38.3%
Head of the House	37.5%
Teacher	35.4%
Mother's Support	28.3%
Providing Transportation	26.7%
No Role as Father	2.9%
No response	2.9%

**Table 8. Activities that fathers like to do with their children (Check all that apply) (n=240)**

Spend Time	84%
Play Games	81%
Talk	78%
Read	72%
Hold/Cuddle	67%
Teach	67%
Eat	63%
Take Trips	63%
Walk	62%
Play Sports	55%
Watch Videos	54%
Go Camping	35%
Play Computer Games	30%

### ***Informational Sources***

The top three places that fathers surveyed indicated they would like to see more information for fathers included television (66%), newspapers (52%), and radio (43%). Many fathers also wrote in that they would like to see more information and resources for fathers available on the Internet.

### **Qualitative Data**

Qualitative data was collected from several sources, including focus groups and community dialogues, key stakeholder interviews and case management chart reviews. This data together with the qualitative data collected in the survey provides a clearer picture of the needs of fathers in the community.

#### ***Community Dialogues/Focus Groups***

Eighty people participated in the community dialogues and focus groups to discuss the needs and available resources for fathers. The focus groups generated several themes, many of which were similar to those needs identified as a priority by the survey. These included:

- ***Legal Services***—Fathers stated they needed general legal assistance, including assistance completing lengthy paperwork and navigating the legal system.
- ***Employment and Employment Training***—This was a common issue, particularly considering the current economic climate both in the state and county.
- ***Family Counseling***—This was identified as a need, especially when child custody issues exist.
- ***Parenting Classes***—A need for father-focused classes that provide skills in caring for young children, especially girls, was identified. Access to father-focused early childhood development and education was also a frequent theme. Finally, anger management courses for fathers were identified as a priority need.
- ***Transportation***—Fathers stated that it is difficult to meet scheduled appointments and maintain normal schedules when relying on the current public transportation system. Increased public transportation services in San Mateo County are needed.
- ***Childcare***—Quality and affordable childcare was frequently mentioned in focus groups as well as written in on the survey as a support service needed countywide.

Other needed community services that were identified include housing, medical and mental health services, domestic violence programs, peer education, gang-specific services, case management and fatherhood mentorship programs.

In addition, fathers provided possible solutions to some of these problems or issues. The survey did not address this area. Their ideas included:

- ***Fatherhood Resource Center***—The center, or one-stop, could provide comprehensive services, including housing, legal, case management, parenting education and support groups, at one central location.

## **Results**

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- **Young Dad's Council**—The council would help to serve the needs of young fathers, an often overlooked group. In addition the council would provide advocacy, policy development, case management, and job training.
- **Strategic Advertising**—Campaigns focused on showing fathers as competent parents, leaders in the community and important in their child's lives should be portrayed on television and radio and print media.
- **One Stop Job Training**—This would provide fathers with countywide, culturally sensitive, one-stop job training and referral sites. Many of these services are available at the four Peninsula Works sites in the county.
- **Taxi and Bus Voucher Programs and Car Loan Programs**—to assist fathers' transportation needs when appropriate.

In addition, the focus groups asked fathers about barriers and challenges that they face. Several of the issues discussed were in greater detail than the survey responses allowed. These included the following:

- **Negative perception of non-custodial fathers**—Fathers expressed the notion that they are not treated fairly when dealing with child support and legal services. There is a perception by fathers that they are presumed "guilty" prior to any type of investigation. Fathers felt that the negative perception of a few non-custodial "deadbeat dads" carried over to all fathers, regardless of their involvement both financially and personally in their child's life.
- **Lack of father focused services**—A need for father-focused services was repeatedly mentioned as family services were considered by fathers to be focused exclusively on the mothers.

### **Key Stakeholder Interviews**

Sixteen key agency stakeholders were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the needs of fathers in the county. The top 5 needs identified by the stakeholders were similar to those identified by the data collected in the fatherhood survey, and they are: employment, healthcare, parenting education, legal assistance and housing. Stakeholders also identified support services needed by fathers in the county. Those identified were similar to services identified by fathers in the survey and include: father-child activities, parenting classes for fathers, connections with community colleges, housing, and job training and employment opportunities.

The stakeholders also identified solutions to these barriers for fathers. These solutions include increased information to fathers, legal assistance, education, outreach (including advertising aimed towards fathers), counseling, and increased funding to programs. When asked what types of programs they would develop if funding was available, answers from stakeholders included: training, counseling, parenting groups and classes, case management, faith-based programs, job skills development, information and referral services, male health services, and increased recreation and exercise opportunities.

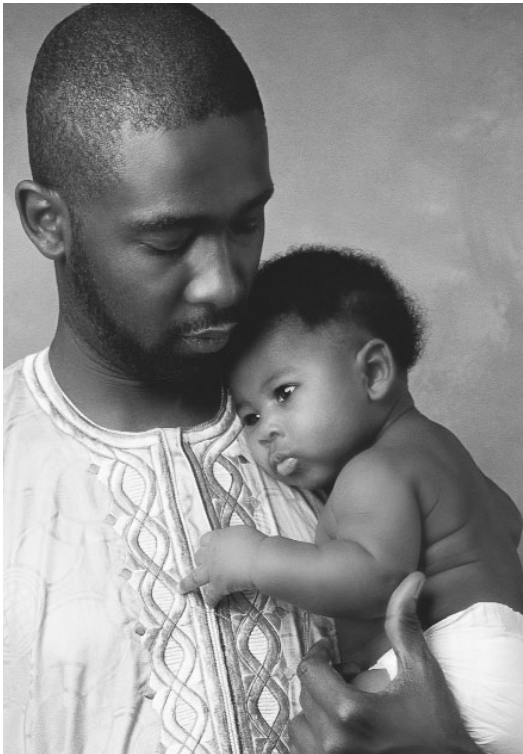


***Case Management Chart Reviews***

A chart review of twenty case management files was conducted. The clients were served by case management programs in a number of locations in the community, including East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Daly City and San Mateo. Sixty percent of fathers were African American, 25% were Latino, and 10% identified themselves as bi-racial. The fathers averaged two children per father (twenty fathers were parents of 35 children). Unlike the fathers participating in the survey, the majority of these fathers were single (85%). Seventy-one percent of their children were under five years of age.

The majority of the case management clients had three to four problems identified at intake. Some of the commonly identified issues included, child custody issues, visitation, employment, mental health, housing, and relationship issues. Common referrals for these fathers include counseling and mental health services, support and parenting groups, job training, child care referral, smoking cessation, health and dental care, and legal assistance (including court and family court facilitation, legal aid, child support services).

# Discussion



In the course of the San Mateo County Fatherhood Needs Assessment, a large amount of data, both qualitative and quantitative, was collected. The next step for the Fatherhood Collaborative is to use these data in order to improve San Mateo County's support services for fathers. The qualitative data and quantitative data compliment each other. By examining both the county can better serve fathers. Data collection should be an ongoing process.

Nationally, there is a paucity of data related to fathers. In San Mateo County, these data have begun to be collected. These efforts must be continued in order to continually provide support services for fathers.

In comparing the demographic data to other standard data sources, the included sample of fathers is fairly representative of San Mateo County residents. According to the 2002-2005 San Mateo County Child Care Strategic Plan which cites information from the San Mateo County Office of Education, the child population in San Mateo County is

41% White, 30% Hispanic, 23% Asian/Pacific Islander, 5% African American, and 1% Native American.<sup>17</sup> The distribution of the children in San Mateo is very similar to the sample collected in our survey. According to the US Census 2000, San Mateo County's population is 59.5% White, 21.9% Hispanic (any race), 3.5% African American, 0.4% American India/Alaska Native, 21.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 5% two or more races.<sup>18</sup> Based on these two other data sources, this survey sample seems to over-represent African Americans.

According to the US 2000 Census data from San Mateo County for educational attainment, 39% of residents had a bachelor's degree or higher, 17.5% were high school graduates (including equivalency) and 21.5% had some college.<sup>19</sup> In comparison to the Census standard, this survey may have over-sampled fathers with a higher education level, which may affect the results because these fathers may have fewer needs. In addition, according to the US Census 2000, nearly 80% of family households with children under 18 years of age were married-couple families.<sup>20</sup> This is similar to the survey results of 80% of fathers living with their children, and 76% of fathers being married. These similarities indicate that the results are fairly representative of the county as a whole.

Employment status is another factor that may reflect current level of need and can be compared to other data sources to determine if the sample is representative. According to the

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17. 2000-2005 San Mateo County Child Care Strategic Plan. Child Care Partnership Council.

18. Census 2000. US Census Bureau

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

2001 Community Assessment of San Mateo County, unemployment was at 3.4% in December 2001.<sup>21</sup> The survey results are certainly higher at 7.5%, of which two-thirds were currently looking for work. Unemployed fathers may have been over-sampled. In addition, employment opportunities may also be worse considering the current economic climate. According to the 2001 Quality of Life Survey, a “fair/poor” rating of local economic opportunities has grown significantly, to 39.5% in August 2001.<sup>22</sup> This statistic may continue to decline with current economic difficulties.

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21. 2001 Community Assessment-Health & Quality of Life in San Mateo County. Professional Research Consultants, Inc. May, 2002.

22. Ibid.

# Next Steps: Program and Policy Implications



Potential solutions may be identified by examining these results. This will allow the Fatherhood Collaborative to better target its efforts.

- **Ongoing Data Collection**—Nationally, data on fathers is lacking. In San Mateo County, fathers have been identified as a priority. Data regarding fathers, the resources that they access and their needs should be obtained at regular intervals. This will allow for a better assessment of what is available and what gaps exist. Developing a yearly assessment, which includes data from various agencies and organizations across the county, would be a useful tool to assist programs as well as advocates. Making father-related indicators a part of ongoing data collection efforts is crucial to continue to best serve the needs of fathers.
- **Financial Assistance and Employment**—Finances were identified as the largest problem facing families in San Mateo County (2001 Quality of Life Survey). Financial assistance as a whole may be difficult for the county to provide and improving the cost of living may be virtually impossible. Providing job training, and better strategic advertising of the available county resources, such as at the Peninsula Works One-Stops, may be one possibility to service these needs.

Research conducted by the Urban Institute has documented that the many non-custodial, low-income fathers lack education, face unemployment or underemployment, have criminal histories and substance abuse problems. The general observations from many of those who case manage fathers in San Mateo County have found that a large percentage of our county's non-custodial fathers experience the same issues. Since many private-sector employers prefer to hire women and teenagers, these fathers are left with few options.

The formation of partnerships, among large private-sector employment programs (such as Goodwill Industries and Salvation Army) with fatherhood programs and Workforce Investment Act programs (which distribute federal funds at the local level), could be mutually beneficial. These partnerships could provide added incentives for fathers to obtain and sustain employment while receiving the much needed support from their case managers and peers.

- **Health Care and Mental Health**—Only 2% of fathers surveyed reported that their children were uninsured, but parents frequently underreport their children’s lack of insurance. With the start of the San Mateo County’s Healthy Kids program, an insurance program to serve children under the age of 18 years and below 400% of the poverty level, the health care and health insurance needs of children should improve across the county. However, fathers will continue to have unmet health care needs (7% in our survey population) and continue to be without health insurance (9% among our survey population) and are a more difficult population to reach than children. Access to mental health services also is difficult, and 5% of our surveyed fathers were currently in need of counseling services. Providing children with health insurance is a necessary first step to improving access to health care services. We hope the same will be done for parents in the future.

Implementing the use of the yearly National Depression Screening Day Tool to randomly assess fatherhood program participants for depression and bipolar disorder may increase fathers’ awareness of their need for mental health services.<sup>23</sup> In addition, more non-traditional methods must be considered in order to encourage men to obtain mental health care if necessary.

- **Father-Child Activities**—Fathers prioritized this as a needed service in the county. Fathers indicated that they like to spend time, play games, and talk with their children. This assessment emphasizes the countywide need for programs that encourage fathers and children to participate in joint activities.
- **Education and Literacy**—Other states have explored securing funds to increase literacy among fathers whose children participate in literacy, ESL and tutoring programs. While children are being tutored after school, their fathers attend education classes and parenting groups. A similar approach could be piloted in San Mateo County.
- **Parenting Classes/Support Groups**—The Fatherhood Collaborative has provided ongoing support for two father-focused parenting groups. Among survey respondents, 50% of fathers who had participated in parenting classes felt that the county needs parenting classes. It is difficult to tell from the data if they felt this way because the classes were successful, or the classes were unsuccessful and they wanted something different or better. An evidence-based review of available curriculum of parenting classes would help in planning new or additional parenting classes. Father-centered curricula that highlight the prevention of family violence and juvenile delinquency should be given primary consideration.
- **Legal Assistance**—This is a very important need among the non-custodial fathers as highlighted by the qualitative data. Improving the perception of non-custodial fathers

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23. The Hands Screening Tool. The Harvard Department of Psychiatry/National Depression Screen Day Scale.

## ***Next Steps***

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among Child Support Services and other legal aid agencies may be an important first step to improving these agencies' relationships with fathers. A strategic advertising plan about fathers may be a first step. Instead of making father and mother case management such an adversarial environment, legal services should assist parents in working together for the benefit of their children whenever possible. In addition, mentorship programs of other non-custodial fathers may help fathers in need navigate the system better. Free and low-cost legal services for fathers need closer review. Often, the mother and her case manager have connected with publicly funded legal services making it a conflict of interest for legal support to be provided to the father. In addition, County Bar Associations in several Bay Area Counties have specific programs to assist fathers. Exploring such strategies with the San Mateo County Bar Association has great potential.

- ***Mediation Services***—Many providers and fathers have identified mediation and counseling needs among participants. Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center provides free family mediation to individuals who reside, work or have an event that needs mediation in San Mateo County. Fatherhood programs should consider this option.
- ***Family Mediation/Visitation***—The development of a shared-parenting plan concept should be explored. Canada and some of the states within the United States are exploring the idea of both parents developing a shared-parenting plan prior to child custody/visitation hearings. The plan must include strategies that will involve both parents and allow equal access to the children.
- ***Development of a Fatherhood Resource Center***—The center could be used to provide comprehensive services, including housing information, job training, legal assistance, case management, father-centered parenting education and support groups, all at one central location. Peninsula Works One-Stops and San Mateo County Family Resource Centers may be two possibilities to service these needs. Currently, some of these services are available, but many fathers lack awareness of their existence. Different outreach strategies might be necessary in order to best reach fathers across the county. In addition, a directory of services available to fathers across the county would be a beneficial resource.

## **Conclusion**

The Fatherhood Needs Assessment provides the Fatherhood Collaborative of San Mateo County and San Mateo County as a whole with evidence of the needs of the fathers in the county. From the data and results, efforts and interventions can be directed and targeted appropriately. However, there must be an ongoing attempt to provide exemplary service to the fathers and families of the county. Data must continue to be collected and assessed. Gaps must continue to be filled. Discussions and dialogues about fatherhood-related issues between organizations and agencies must persist. Ultimately the Fatherhood Collaborative aims to promote countywide cooperation to foster the strength of the family as a whole - father, mother and children.

