



NEWS RELEASE

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Agencies work together to help men be better fathers

To encourage more single fathers to take legal responsibility for their children, Hamilton County's child support agency is bringing its services to the new Fatherhood Center in Walnut Hills.

Child Support workers with the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services (HCJFS), are visiting the center one evening each month. Workers will start the process for fathers who want to establish paternity and provide information about genetic testing. They'll also take requests from people who want to change their child support order and provide general information about child support.

Plenty of men want to be better fathers, but they need information and education, preferably in a safe place that caters to their needs, said Calvin Williams. Williams is director of the Fatherhood Project a program of SUMA in partnership with Santa Maria Community Services.

"We are bringing our services out into the community because we want to show people that we are willing to go the extra mile to help them with child support issues," said Shari Street, an HCJFS Child Support Team Leader.

Child support workers will be at the Fatherhood Center from 4-7 p.m. on the third Monday of the month. The center is located at 1007 E. McMillan Street in Walnut Hills. All child support customers are welcome, not only fathers. Workers will not be able to answer questions about specific cases, but can take requests to research a case issue when they return to the office. Also, genetic testing cannot be offered at the Fatherhood Center; parents must come to HCJFS downtown for that service.

For unmarried couples, the normal process to establish paternity requires the father to sign a paternity affidavit in the presence of a notary public. This can be done in Probate Court, hospitals, at HCJFS headquarters downtown, and at the Bureau of Vital Statistics. Signing a birth certificate alone does not establish paternity. Child support orders cannot be set until paternity is established. Mothers on public assistance are required to identify the fathers of their children. If they don't, their benefits can be sanctioned. At the Fatherhood Center, HCJFS workers can help with initial paperwork and conduct paternity interviews.

The Fatherhood Center opened in May as the first of its kind in Cincinnati. The center caters to single fathers who want to participate more fully in the lives of their children. It provides a haven for men to educate themselves, participate in classes on fatherhood, and find a support system. The center has computers with Internet access (for job searching), a resource library, discussion areas, kitchen, and a "listening and healing room" for counseling.

“We explain to fathers that it’s their duty to establish paternity and get a child support order, but we also teach them that without paternity, they don’t have any rights as a father,” Williams said. “A whole lot of men think that having their name on the birth certificate suffices. There are so many guys who have little to no knowledge about their rights, responsibilities and options.”

Given the right information and encouragement, men can “stop fathering on myths and hearsay,” Williams said.

In addition to collaborating with the county child support agency, Williams is working with the Black Lawyers of Cincinnati to arrange for attorneys to talk to the men about their legal rights and responsibilities as fathers.

HCJFS and other local fatherhood initiatives also work together by serving on boards and committees who are trying to improve the child support system. These include fatherhood programs at the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency and the Urban League of Greater Cincinnati. HCJFS also works with PACE, a parent support and advocacy group that focuses primarily on fathers.

Child Support customers can submit questions and find information on the HCJFS web site – www.hcjfs.hamilton-co.org.