



# Today's Dads

NEWSLETTER OF WISCONSIN FATHERS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
( <http://www.wisconsinfathers.org> )

Volume 24, December 2012

## Walsh County, North Dakota Passes Equal Parenting Initiative

November 7th, 2012 by Robert Franklin, Esq.

The voters of Walsh County, North Dakota approved a ballot initiative on Tuesday that would require family courts to give equal rights to fathers and mothers in custody cases as long as neither parent had been found to be unfit. Read about it in the *Grand Forks Herald*, 11/7/12.

*Under Measure 3, divorcing parents would be assumed to have joint legal and physical custody of their children, unless one parent can prove in court that the other parent is unfit.*

The measure was spearheaded by Mitch Sanderson of Park River. Earlier this year he headed a petition drive to place the initiative on the ballot. It passed in August and was placed on the ballot. The measure passed yesterday with about 66% of the vote.

Interestingly, the Walsh County initiative appears to track U.S. Supreme Court precedent in its requirement that parents have equal rights unless one is adjudicated unfit. Such, at any rate, are the dicta of *Troxel vs. Granville* and previous cases. In those cases, the Court strongly suggests that states may neither take away nor infringe the rights of parents absent a showing of unfitness. Of course they do exactly that every day, many times a day, which has always struck me as odd, but the stark contradictions between Supreme Court rulings and the behavior of state family courts, child welfare agencies, adoption courts and the like are there for all to see.

Let's not overlook the fact that this equal-parenting initiative managed to pass wholly outside the usual legislative process. That is, the people voted for it to be placed on the ballot and the people voted it into law. They didn't rely on the state legislature to do so. As we've seen in states like Minnesota, where it took 13 years for equal parenting legislation to pass only to be vetoed by a know-nothing governor, elected officials are, shall we say, often motivated by

factors other than the rightness of a particular cause.

So, congratulations to Mitch Sanderson and his unflagging support for equal parental rights. And congratulations to the voters of Walsh County for enacting fairness and justice in family law.

### The Ballot

**Initiated County Ordinance - Equal Physical Custody - Providing for Equal Physical / Legal Custody to be awarded in separations and divorces, in Walsh County, if no parent is found unfit by clear and convincing evidence.**

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF WALSH COUNTY - NORTH DAKOTA:**

Acknowledging the long established legal tenet, by the US Supreme Court, and God given right that fit parents act in the best interest of their children and that parents have a fundamental liberty interest in the care, custody and control of their children. No requesting parent shall be denied Equal Physical / Joint Legal Custody of a child in a separation or divorce in Walsh County, without first having been declared unfit, utilizing the clear and convincing evidentiary standard.

Upon the passing of this citizen's initiative it will be the law and policy / ordinance of the County of Walsh and all courts setting in Walsh County. No parent that has been divorced in Walsh county shall be denied any petition or motion, by the courts in Walsh County or any judge sitting in that court, to have a fitness hearing to obtain Equal Physical / Joint Legal Custody rights. Upon no finding of unfitness by clear and convincing evidence the court shall award Equal Physical / Joint Legal Custody which is in line with the Fourteenth Amendment providing equal protection under the law.

Equal Physical / Joint Legal Custody of the children is defined as a rebuttable presumption of equal time sharing or "as close as possible" by the

parents or any written agreement between both parents based on their unique family circumstances and both parents shall be primary caretakers.

### **A Court Order from a Jury of 4286 people!**

Voters in Walsh County overwhelmingly approved a countywide shared-parenting initiative, the first in North Dakota.

The measure passed 2,828 to 1,458, or 66 percent to 34 percent.

The Walsh County measure, patterned after a failed 2006 statewide initiative, will establish equal parental rights if the couple is divorced or separated, as long as neither parent is legally determined as unfit to be a parent.

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## **Part of the Solution Or Part of the Problem?**

By Pete Kerr

I'll say this first and I'll say this last, Thanks to Judge Michael Dwyer and Judge Ashley for attending and presenting at our most recent general meeting in Milwaukee. These are two courageous men and two committed Fathers.

It's not easy to face a room packed full of parents in pain because their relationships with their children have been damaged, if not severed. These are parents who have committed no crime, who get up and go to work, who pay their taxes, and who continue to love their children. Judge Dwyer and Judge Ashley faced an audience of adults in pain with the tools of experience to deal with it. I can only imagine the father-absence pain their children are going through and these are our most innocent citizens who don't have the tools of experience to deal with it.

One of the Fathers at the meeting phoned me the next day crying because his son was in Rogers Memorial Hospital after cutting himself and

- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes.
  - 85% of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes.
- (Source: Center for Disease Control).

attempting suicide caused by a no-contact order preventing the 14 year-old Son from seeing his Father. He was cutting himself while the two judges regaled us with all the known failures of the adversarial and toxic system called the Family Court of Wisconsin.

There are many failings in the current system, recognized by not just the two judges presenting to our general meeting, but judges right across the State of Wisconsin.

I have personally thanked Judge Dwyer and Judge Ashley and offered any time, any place, to discuss ways of improving the process which so obviously damages children by pitting one parent against another parent. By definition and by admittance at our meeting, the current process of the Family Court of Wisconsin can never be considered "in the Best interest of the children".

As a new legislative session engages, will we see the Judiciary offering solutions to the current adversarial problems, or will we continue to see the Judiciary resist any efforts of change, so our children continue to suffer in contested custody and placement cases.

There are a large group of parents who do not need the services provided by the Family Court of Wisconsin. They respect their children's need for a strong relationship with both parents and come to an agreement without ever knowing what a GAL is, the definition of "maximize" and who Mike Landwehr and Mike May are, all while maintaining their children's college fund.

Then there is the other group, where one parent's greed, selfishness and revenge drives their children into the adversarial and toxic environment of Family Court.

A court order that awards primary placement to a selfish, greedy and revengeful parent, will vindictively damage, if not sever that child's relationship with the minor parent, and in my book, that's child abuse, and the Family Court commissioner, GAL, Social worker and Judge who enabled that court order are accessories to child abuse.

This is not only my opinion; it's the opinion of the

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legislators of New Hampshire as well. And it's also in the opinion of every parent that attended our general meeting to hear Judge Dwyer and Judge Ashley speak.

*The [New Hampshire House Committee on the Redress of Grievance] Committee understands what fathers know all too well, but no one else in the state wants to admit:*

*[T]he resulting effect generally [has] been court order[ed] child abuse in the denial of her access to a loved parent for the period of two years. This has become a common report before this committee: that the Family division of the court, established to protect children, actually inflicts the injury on the child itself.*

Clearly, at the very beginning of the process, a Family Court Commissioner who, in a space of 30 minutes, with no evidence presented, with no witness called, even with no third-party opinion or recommendation from a GAL or social worker, will arbitrarily and discriminatorily award temporary primary placement to one parent and "every second weekend and 3 hours on Wednesday evening" to the other parent, a parent who has not been found unfit to parent his children.

Of course the rewards of Child Support follow this lack of evidence and lack of witnesses with a kangaroo court order.

Of course mediation is the savior isn't it? A process where the two parents work out their own placement schedule with their children, rather than a judge deciding.

Clearly articulated to me by Washington County Mediation Coordinator - Toni Vacca, fundamental procedural failure is assured as no vindictive partner will mediate away their rewards of child support, so the other "it's your fault our marriage failed" parent gets more time with their children.

With no evidence of unfitness, Family Court Commissioners create the toxic environment of high conflict which is such an abuse of our most innocent citizens - our children.

By Judge Dwyer and Judge Ashley's admittance of a process that needs improvement, my hand is outstretched to work together to improve things.

Are there any Judges out there who have the courage to change the child-toxic environment of the adversarial Family Court of Wisconsin?

Are you part of the solution or part of the problem?

Thank-you Judge Dwyer and Judge Ashley for having the courage to appear in front of a painful audience - I am reaching out for change.

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## HelpLine -What say you Judge?

Submitted on 08/10/2012 - 9:31am

Submitted by anonymous user: [74.202.96.5]

Submitted values are:

E-mail: [qjxxxxxxxx@yahoo.com](mailto:qjxxxxxxxx@yahoo.com)

First Name: Qxxxxxxxx

Last Name: Jxxxxxxxx

Address: 2941 N. xxth St

City: Milwaukee

Zip Code: 53210

County where you Case is located: Milwaukee

Phone Number: 904-555-2120

Issue requiring Help: I am not being allowed to see my child. I don't have a court date until December, and I don't know what options I have. I have tried going to ALL of the different rooms at the courthouse, I am up to date on my child support, but NOBODY has given me any other options. I feel like as a father who IS taking care of his responsibility, I have no rights. I need someone to give me some advice or at least point me in the right direction.

Best Time to Call: Any

Forward to Legislators: Yes

## Feds Spend \$499 in Child Support Enforcement for Every \$1 for Access and Visitation

July 27th, 2012 by Robert Franklin, Esq.

The United States government spends over \$499 for child support enforcement for every \$1 it spends to enforce access and visitation by non-custodial parents. That's the news from a document entitled "Payments to States for Child Support Enforcement and Family Support Programs" issued by the Department of Health and Human

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Services' Administration for Children and Families. It's a breakdown of expenditures for various programs in the recent past and budgeted for the near future.

First the good news. The Office of Child Support Enforcement knows that keeping fathers involved in their children's lives is good for all concerned, particularly the kids. It also knows that non-custodial fathers are a lot more likely to pay the child support they owe when mothers don't obstruct access to their children.

The proposal also requires states to establish access and visitation responsibilities in all initial child support orders. The proposal also would encourage states to undertake activities that would support access and visitation. Implementing domestic violence safeguards is a critical component of this new state responsibility. These services will not only improve parent-child relationships and outcomes for children, but they also will result in improved collections. Research shows that when fathers are engaged in the lives of their children, they are more likely to meet their financial obligations. This creates a "double win" for children - an engaged parent and more financial security.

Great. So when it comes time to put their money where their mouth is, what do they do? The actual expenditures for 2010, the most recent year for which those figures are available, were \$4,993,417,000 for child support enforcement including incentive payments to states and \$10,000,000 for access and visitation support. Now, don't blame the administrative agency for those radically unequal expenditures; the \$10 million allocated for access and visitation is capped at that number by law. That's right, our elected representatives in Washington refuse to spend more than that to promote children's relationships with their fathers.

Back in 2010, I posted this piece on the respective expenditures by the State of Texas for child support enforcement and visitation. Back then, Attorney General Gregg Abbott was crowing about having received a \$500,000 grant from Washington for access and visitation support, so I tried to figure out how much the state spent on support enforcement. My quick-and-dirty figuring

suggested the figure was about \$257 million. I was wrong. The figures in the DHHS document for expenditures for each state show that in fact, Texas received a whopping \$378 million for child support enforcement versus just \$702,000 for access and visitation. That's about in line with the 499:1 national ratio.

And, as I said in my piece two years ago, if you're trying to figure the relative values assigned by our current system of custody and support to custodial and non-custodial parents, that 499:1 ratio is about as good a measure as their is.

But it's deceptive. In fact, it probably overstates the value we place on non-custodial parents' relationships with their children. That's because, as I mentioned in my previous piece, even the meager funds that are supposedly spent on access and visitation actually go to organizations that list support for those activities as only part of what they do. The Texas agencies I looked at included support for visitation as part of their mission, but you can guess what another part was, right? If you said "child support enforcement," go to the head of the class. If other states are anything like Texas, only a fraction of that \$10 million expenditure actually goes to promote visitation by dads.

But, as you might expect, it gets worse. The Access and Visitation Grants Program was established by statute in 1996 and funded in 1997. The same statute that caps support for access and visitation nationwide at \$10 million, also restricts how funds may be spent in that worthy cause.

The statute specifies certain activities which may be funded including: voluntary and mandatory mediation, counselling, education, the development of parenting plans, supervised visitation, neutral drop-off and pick-up, and the development of guidelines for visitation and alternative custody arrangements.

Did you notice anything missing? Yep, me too. Not a single cent is to be allocated to help non-custodial fathers hire attorneys to enforce their visitation orders in court. Not a cent. Mothers who want help collecting child support have a free lawyer to represent them in court - the attorney general of the state she lives in. She's got all the power of the state plus billions of dollars from the federal government at her beck and call at no cost

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to her. But the same federal government that spends billions every year in legal fees and administrative costs for custodial mothers, spends not a cent for father who want to see their kids. Most parents who divorce do so without a lawyer. That's because they can't afford one. Well, that continues to be true post-divorce, but if Mom wants help with child support, she gets it in spades. Dad? He's on his own. If Mom prevents him from seeing his kid, it's up to him to hire a lawyer. Gender equality anyone?

The remainder of the document verges on black humor. As we know, if Mom receives benefits under Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), it's up to Dad to pay it back, so his child support check goes, not to Mom but to the state treasury. But the Department of Health and Human Services tells states that, if they so desire, they can send Dad's payments on to his ex and child instead of keeping them for themselves. Yes, out of the goodness of their hearts, states can elect to forego that source of revenue. And if I won the Power Ball lottery, I'd give it to Mother Theresa. How much TANF reimbursement do states choose to send to custodial parents instead of keeping for themselves? The DHHS document doesn't say, I suspect because the figure verges on zero.

Then there's the fact that Washington pays states 66 cents for every dollar of "administrative costs" they incur in squeezing non-custodial parents. That of course means that the more money you spend in administrative costs, the more you get from the feds. It may come as no surprise that state administrative costs are high, given the fact that they have no impetus to be kept low. As of 2010, the feds spent about \$4.5 billion to reimburse states' administrative costs. At 66 cents on the dollar, that means states spent about \$6.75 billion to collect child support. According to the DHHS figures, a total of \$26.4 billion was collected in 2009. Assuming administrative costs were the same in 2009 as in 2010, that means they're over 25% of the total collected. Not impressive.

By way of comparison, health insurance companies that spend over 20% in administrative costs are required under the Affordable Care Act to reimburse the overage to policy holders. Now, insurance companies have never been known for their efficiency, but they look like Scrooge compared to state child support collection agencies. Stated

another way, child support enforcement is a massive gravy train ridden by lawyers and administrative personnel employed by state attorneys general and hauled laboriously down the track by an army of fathers who are denied that most humble of desires - to see their kids every so often. Nice.

Thanks to Steven for the heads-up.

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## Federal Class Action Lawsuit Filed Against State Bar Association

Legislation is introduced in Maryland in 2010 and 2011 calling for a presumption favoring equality in custody cases in the family courts. The bill never makes it out of committee for a vote. Legislation is introduced in 2010 in the state of Tennessee calling for shared parenting and presumptive equality in custody cases in the family courts; it fails to move out of committee. Legislation is introduced in 2010 in the state of Wisconsin calling for shared parenting and presumptive equality in custody cases in the family courts; it fails to move out of committee.

In 2011 legislation overhauling Alabama court custody practice is introduced; the bill goes nowhere.

Legislation is introduced in Minnesota in 2012 calling for increasing the time sharing presumption for children with both parents in child custody cases. After being watered down, legislation passes the House and Senate overwhelmingly, only to be vetoed by the governor. In 2011 and 2012 legislation is introduced in South Carolina providing for shared parenting. The bills give way to a compromise bill that requires parenting plans, and creating a study committee to recommend further changes to the statutes, but removes language that would mandate children spend significant time with both parents. Child custody reform legislation in North Dakota, Virginia, Ohio, Texas, Michigan, Nebraska and other states is introduced but is killed in committee or never given serious consideration.

Just what is going on here? And what does a class

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action lawsuit have to do with child custody legislation?

Those engaged in family law reform know one of the primary opponents of shared parenting are state bar associations. In every instance above where legislation was introduced the family law sections of the state bar association stood opposed. The bar associations in each of these states lobbied aggressively against bills providing children a fuller relationship with both parents.

### **Lawsuit Alleges Lobbying by Bar Associations Impermissible Activity**

A new class action lawsuit filed against the Nebraska State Bar Association alleges lobbying activity by its state bar association violates the civil rights of attorneys who do not agree with the positions advocated. The suit further alleges that requiring attorneys to pay dues to the bar association as a condition of practicing law in the state, and then using those dues for broad based lobbying is an impermissible activity.

Mountain States Legal Foundation has filed suit against the Nebraska State Bar Association on behalf of Nebraska State Senator Scott Lautenbaugh. Senator Lautenbaugh is an attorney licensed to practice in the state of Nebraska. Senator Lautenbaugh also supports reforming family law and giving children a fuller relationship with both parents. Senator Lautenbaugh is tired of the state bar association coming over to the legislature and lobbying for or against legislation. Senator Lautenbaugh, on behalf of over 1,100 attorneys in the state of Nebraska, is seeking to restrict the state bar association's lobbying activity, not just as it relates to family law legislation, but in many areas. We 'tip the hat' to Senator Lautenbaugh and support his efforts to end abuse of the public and legislative processes by the bar association.

While this case has been filed in federal court, the Nebraska Supreme Court is also showing interest in the activity of the bar association and has ordered it to provide detailed records of how it is spending members funds, particularly focusing on the bar's lobbying expenditures.

Over 80% of the states listed at the beginning of this article have integrated state bar associations that

engage in the same type of activities as the Nebraska bar. This lawsuit is important to citizens in a number of areas, family law being just one. We'll keep you informed as the suit develops.

As Charles Dickens noted (paraphrasing); the one great principle of the legal profession is to create business for itself. It's time to end the practice of letting bar associations write the laws that end up being enforced through the courts.

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## **The Causes of Fatherlessness**

by Edward Kruk, Ph.D.

The causes of fatherlessness have more to do with anti-father attitudes within judicial and social welfare institutions than irresponsible fathers.

### **Reply to Passive Fathers**

Before and after divorce, children need both parents to be physically and emotionally attuned, involved and responsive in their lives. Young children in particular need regular interaction with each of their parents as attachment figures, as relationships with both mothers and fathers are psychologically important. Emotional attachment and availability are, more than anything else, crucial to children's emotional security and comfort, and this is what fathers (and mothers) need to provide their children.

There is no question that many fathers are not emotionally present or available for their children, and worse, abrogate their responsibilities with respect to not only children's emotional well-being, but also to their basic physical needs, and this has a profoundly negative impact on children's well-being.

But the majority of fathers don't fit that stereotype of the "deadbeat dad," and I am challenging that stereotype. In the majority of cases, fathers want to be actively involved as active caregivers and attachment figures, but are prevented from doing so. The causes of fatherlessness have more to do with anti-father attitudes within judicial and social welfare institutions than irresponsible fathers.

### **Father Absence, Father Deficit, Father Hunger**

The Vital Importance of Paternal Presence in Children's Lives

Published on May 23, 2012 by Edward Kruk, Ph.D.

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### in Co-Parenting After Divorce

According to the 2007 UNICEF report on the well-being of children in economically advanced nations, children in the U.S., Canada and the U.K. rank extremely low in regard to social and emotional well-being in particular. Many theories have been advanced to explain the poor state of our nations' children: child poverty, race and social class. A factor that has been largely ignored, however, particularly among child and family policymakers, is the prevalence and devastating effects of father absence in children's lives.

First, a caveat: I do not wish to either disparage single mothers or blame non-residential fathers for this state of affairs. The sad fact is that parents in our society are not supported in the fulfillment of their parental responsibilities, and divorced parents in particular are often undermined as parents, as reflected in the large number of "non-custodial" or "non-residential" parents forcefully removed from their children's lives, as daily caregivers, by misguided family court judgments. My target of concern is those responsible for laws and policies that devalue the importance or, to use an old-fashioned word, the sanctity of parents in children's lives, and parental involvement as critical to children's well-being. Children need both parents, and parents need the support of social institutions in regard to being there for their kids.

#### Bottom of Form

Despite President Obama's 2011 Father's Day lament on the irresponsibility of "deadbeat fathers" footloose and fancy free from taking responsibility for their children, in fact the two major structural threats to fathers' presence in children's lives are divorce and non-marital childbearing. More often than not, fathers are involuntarily relegated by family courts to the role of "accessory parents," valued for their role as financial providers rather than as active caregivers. This view persists despite the fact that fathers in two-parent families, before divorce, typically share, with mothers, responsibility for the care of their children. This is both because fathers have taken up the slack while mothers work longer hours outside the home, and because fathers are no longer content to play a secondary role as parents. Most fathers today are keen to experience both the joys and challenges of parenthood, derive satisfaction from their parental role, and consider active

and involved fatherhood to be the core component of their self-identity.

Whereas parents in general are not supported as parents by our social institutions, divorced fathers in particular are devalued, disparaged, and forcefully disengaged from their children's lives. Researchers have found that for children, the results are nothing short of disastrous, along a number of dimensions:

- children's diminished self-concept, and compromised physical and emotional security (children consistently report feeling abandoned when their fathers are not involved in their lives, struggling with their emotions and episodic bouts of self-loathing)

- behavioral problems (fatherless children have more difficulties with social adjustment, and are more likely to report problems with friendships, and manifest behavior problems; many develop a swaggering, intimidating persona in an attempt to disguise their underlying fears, resentments, anxieties and unhappiness)

- truancy and poor academic performance (71 per cent of high school dropouts are fatherless; fatherless children have more trouble academically, scoring poorly on tests of reading, mathematics, and thinking skills; children from father absent homes are more likely to play truant from school, more likely to be excluded from school, more likely to leave school at age 16, and less likely to attain academic and professional qualifications in adulthood)

- delinquency and youth crime, including violent crime (85 per cent of youth in prison have an absent father; fatherless children are more likely to offend and go to jail as adults)

- promiscuity and teen pregnancy (fatherless children are more likely to experience problems with sexual health, including a greater likelihood of having intercourse before the age of 16, foregoing contraception during first intercourse, becoming teenage parents, and contracting sexually transmitted infection; girls manifest an object hunger for males, and in experiencing the emotional loss of their fathers egocentrically as a rejection of them, become susceptible to exploitation by adult men)

- drug and alcohol abuse (fatherless children are more likely to smoke, drink alcohol, and abuse drugs in childhood and adulthood).

- homelessness (90 per cent of runaway children

have an absent father)

-exploitation and abuse (fatherless children are at greater risk of suffering physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, being five times more likely to have experienced physical abuse and emotional maltreatment, with a one hundred times higher risk of fatal abuse; a recent study reported that preschoolers not living with both of their biological parents are 40 times more likely to be sexually abused)

-physical health problems (fatherless children report significantly more psychosomatic health symptoms and illness such as acute and chronic pain, asthma, headaches, and stomach aches)

-mental health disorders (father absent children are consistently overrepresented on a wide range of mental health problems, particularly anxiety, depression and suicide)

-life chances (as adults, fatherless children are more likely to experience unemployment, have low incomes, remain on social assistance, and experience homelessness)

-future relationships (father absent children tend to enter partnerships earlier, are more likely to divorce or dissolve their cohabiting unions, and are more likely to have children outside marriage or outside any partnership)

-mortality (fatherless children are more likely to die as children, and live an average of four years less over the life span)

Given the fact that these and other social problems correlate more strongly with fatherlessness than with any other factor, surpassing race, social class and poverty, father absence may well be the most critical social issue of our time. In *Fatherless America*, David Blankenhorn calls the crisis of fatherless children "the most destructive trend of our generation." A recent British report from the University of Birmingham, *Dad and Me*, confirms Blankenhorn's claims, concluding that the need for a father is on an epidemic scale, and "father deficit" should be treated as a public health issue.

We ignore the problem of father absence to our peril. Of perhaps greatest concern is the lack of response from our lawmakers and policymakers, who pay lip service to the paramount importance of the "best interests of the child," yet turn a blind eye to father absence, ignoring the vast body of research on the dire consequences to children's well-being. What is the solution to father absence? Many

fathers' advocates have stressed the need for fast, low-cost, effective ways for non-residential parents to have their court-ordered parenting time enforced. While access enforcement is important, legislating for shared parenting would be a more effective measure to ensure the ongoing active involvement of both parents in children's lives. A legal presumption of shared parenting would affirm the primary role of both parents, and make clear that even in the absence of a spousal relationship, both mothers' and fathers' parental responsibilities to their children's needs are "sacred," and therefore deserving of full legal protection and recognition.

## Thank feminism for an ever-improving line of fathers

By Chloe Angyal

My father was born in the final year of the 1940s, the son of immigrants from Austria and Hungary, who had arrived about a decade earlier. His father was 28, grandpa was made an officer of the Order of the British Empire. When my grandfather died a few weeks ago, I rushed home from overseas to be with my family. At some point during the week I spent in Sydney, ferrying food and flowers to various relatives, I looked at my dad and thought to myself: as wonderful as my grandfather was, I would rather be my father's child.

My grandfather became a dad for the first time in 1945. Back then it wasn't expected for fathers to have much of an emotional relationship with their children. The father's dominion was discipline, and most of the care-giving was mother's work.

By the time my father became a dad in 1984, the world had changed. The feminism that burst into being when my father was in his early 20's declared that women had the right to have careers. And, it insisted that, for women to have careers and children, men would have to shoulder more work of parenting.

Statistics indicate that decade's later parents in two-career families have yet to figure out how to split that work equally. Women in the families still work what the sociologist Arlie Hochschild calls a "second shift" of domestic and parenting work when they get home from their day jobs. Still, women are no longer expected to leave the work



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force forever when they have children; for the fact that motherhood and paid work are no longer mutually exclusive, we have feminism to thank.

Thanks to feminism, my relationship with my father is entirely different to the one he had with his late father. When I was a little girl, it was dad who did my hair for Saturday morning ballet class. Until I was 15, when I finally mastered the art myself, he was the ballet bun master-in-chief in our house. Thanks to feminism, my father and I can talk about our feelings, something men of his generation could rarely do with their dads. Might things have been different had I been a boy? Possibly.

The American sociologist Michael Kimmel, the author of *Guyland* and the leading thinker in masculinity studies, says that even when they have sons, fathers who had children during or after the women's movement are determined to do things differently than their dads did. And their succeeding: he argues, American dads today are more likely to hug their kids and to tell them that they love them than previous decades – regardless of the child's gender.

One of the greatest challenges feminism has faced is getting men on board. Without their investment, the fight against sexism is much harder to win. When my dad was my age, the challenge was to get men to take discrimination against women seriously. Now it is to make young men see that while we have eradicated a good deal of sexism – though far from all of it – feminism is no longer just about women. It's about gender. Which means it's about men, too.

If sexism keeps women trapped in the stereotypical boxes – over-emotional and dependent, with lower sex drive – it keeps men trapped too: stoic, always in charge, and forever looking to score. When men become parents, those same stereotypical boxes stop them from taking parental leave, or supporting a son's passion for, say, sewing, or a daughter's desire to be a leader.

It is in men's interests to change the system that keeps them trapped in those boxes. Recent history shows us that changing that system makes a very real, deeply personal difference from one generation of men to the next.

Feminism is one of the best things that ever happened to fatherhood. Thanks to feminism, men of my generation have richer, more meaningful

relationships with their dads than their fathers had with theirs. Thanks to feminism, the men my friends and I will marry will be engaged, emotionally present fathers. Thanks to feminism, our children will grow up with fathers who improve those statistics on the second shift and who shoulder more of the burdens and share more of the pleasures of emotional care-giving.

Those men, some of whom are just meeting their future spouses, will feel the positive influence of feminism every day. Of course, only the very best among them will perfect the fine, fidgety art of the ballet bun.

Chloe Angyal is an Australian writer living in New York.

[Editor's Note: In the 1979 movie *Kramer v. Kramer*, Dad gets "Every Second Weekend and One Night Through the Week".

**The United States Supreme Court held that the "old notion" that "generally it is the man's primary responsibility to provide a home and its essentials" can no longer justify a statute that discriminates on the basis of gender. No longer is the female destined solely for the home and the rearing of the family and only male for the marketplace and the world of ideas. *Stanton v. Stanton*, 421 US 7, 10; 95 S Ct 1373, 1376, (1975).**

We are 37 years on from *Stanton v. Stanton* and still the same gender bias is prevalent and forced upon the child/father relationship. The Wisconsin Supreme Court in *Landwehr v. Landwehr* (2006) supported the trial court's ruling of "Every Second Weekend" 10 days with Mom and 4 days with Dad, was an acceptable time for a Father to participate with his daughters.

**U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration**

**U.S. Bureau of Census Issued December 2011**

**Custodial Mothers and Fathers: 2009**

An estimated 13.7 million parents had custody of 22.0 million children under 21 years of age while the other parent lived somewhere else.

The majority of custodial parents were mothers (82.2 percent), and about 1 in 6 (17.8 percent) were fathers.

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**Data are from Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Health, Center for Health Statistics WISH data system**

Births to Single Mothers (Percent) – 2010 Milwaukee 55% - Wisconsin 37%

Births to Teen Mothers (Rate) – 2010 Milwaukee 48.2% - Wisconsin 26.5%

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## What's Wrong with Family Courts?

To the Editor:

In the recent Freeman newspapers, the Hartford Free Press covered an article about discrimination by FCC Bomrad in the Washington County Family Court.

As a help line counselor on the Wisconsin Fathers for Children and Families outreach program, I know first hand the blatant discrimination that occurs in Washington County.

Of the Dad's who phone for help, whose cases are in Washington County, they always say "how did you know?" when I "guess" that their placement schedule from their temporary hearing is "every second weekend and Wednesday night". They are also surprised when I guess that their court commissioner is Delores Bomrad. They are always hopeful that their court ordered mediation will bring some sanity to their parenting participation. When I ask, knowing your soon to be ex-wife like you do, is she likely to give up the child support money you have been court order to give her, so you can see your kids more? They start to recognize the destructive road they are being forced to travel.

The issue that drives acrimonious divorces is fear. Husbands and wives know each other well – better than the courts do. When you create a non-custodial parent, and that non-custodial parent knows the Primary parent is selfish, greedy and vindictive, you can guarantee their children will be abused by being used as weapons against the other parent.

Creating unequal parents is done on purpose; it's done because every one earns money from it, except the children. Parents should be treated as

competent, until they are proven not to be, but before any evidence is presented FCC Bomrad orders "every second weekend and one night through the week". This does not solve the problems it escalates it.

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## The Newtown, Connecticut Shooter: The Conversation You Won't See Anywhere Else

*Ned Holstein, MS, MD Founder & Chairman of the Board – Fathers and Families, Boston, MA*

After our tears dry for the twenty little darlings and seven others who were mowed down by Adam Lanza, we begin to ask "Why?"

There is always a dominant narrative to explain the unthinkable. Now it is mostly about the absence of effective gun controls, or about mental illness. Or, we hear about the effects of violence on television and video games.

We don't hear about the effects of fatherlessness, especially on young men. We don't hear that the most reliable predictor of crime is neither poverty nor race but growing up fatherless. We don't hear that a large majority of violent criminals were fatherless. We don't even hear that young male elephants go on violent rampages unless they are kept in line by the old bulls.

We know that Adam's parents separated around 2006 and divorced around 2008. We know that his father, Peter Lanza, moved to Stamford, CT, remarried, and is believed to earn about \$1 million per year as a General Electric executive – enough that Adam's mother and he have lived in a big home and that she has not worked.

The *Daily Mail* reports quotes several of Adam's former classmates to the effect that his problems got much worse after the separation. "He was always weird but the divorce affected him. He was arguing with his mother. He was a ticking time bomb waiting to explode."

Several news organizations have combed through the divorce records for tidbits, but none of them have reported obvious issues of importance. Was

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## Today's Dads

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Mom stable and capable of helping and of overseeing Adam (apparently not)? Was she careful about keeping her guns out of Adam's hands (apparently not)? Did Dad try and fail to get custody? Has he remained active in Adam's life (probably not: he chose to move 40 miles away, and we have heard almost nothing from him since the tragedy.)? Was he more capable of keeping Adam in line than Mom, or of seeing that he got help? Was Adam's distress after the divorce about losing the love and guidance of his Dad, or what?

The fatherhood narrative is absent from our society and from this terrible story.

It was also absent from the awful stories of mass shooters Jared Loughner, James Holmes, Seung-Hui Cho and Jacob Tyler Roberts. Of this group, only Roberts was without a father, but we still need to understand what it is about fathers that inhibits violence in young men.

In fairness, most rare and awful events are the result of numerous influences acting together. The accident happened because the driver was intoxicated and the brakes were worn and the pedestrian was careless and the road was slippery and the lighting was poor. No one factor explains all. If just one of these factors had been different, there would have been no accident.

But fatherhood is not even on society's list. This is especially sad because a simple change in divorce laws towards shared parenting would take a big chunk out of this factor at no cost. This is a much cheaper fix than a bureaucracy to enforce new gun laws or more mental health services, not that these might not be good ideas.

The dominant narratives shut out the other narratives. There was a time in America when the dominant narratives would have told us that Adam Lanza's soul was possessed by the Devil. Or that his actions were God's punishment for our sins. Or, in the nineteenth century, we might well have heard that Lanza was not raised with sufficient discipline. Or, in the twentieth, that this tragedy was the result of that ole' devil drink — either Adam's or his mother's.

The dominant narratives of the age close the door on other truths. They are not remarked upon, analyzed, or investigated.

Our job as a movement is to put the fatherhood narrative front and center. That is my job and your job. It may be one of the most powerful ways to help troubled kids — and prevent mass murder.

It is possible that with reformed family courts and more fathering, Adam Lanza and his victims would be alive today. We just don't know, and we never will know.

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## Father Facts

*Fiction: Most children are satisfied with the amount of time that they are allowed to spend with their fathers after their parents divorced.*

**Fact:** Most children say that they would like more time with their dads. The main reason that a child doesn't want to spend more time with his dad is because he feels like an interloper in his father's new life. If he saw his father more often, the child would feel more included as a part of the family, instead of feeling like a "white elephant" of a previous marriage who drops in every other weekend.

*Fiction: Children don't want to live part-time in both parents' homes, going back and forth.*

**Fact:** As long as a parent portrays shared parenting — and the going back and forth — as "normal," it feels normal to a child.

It is similar to the mother who has a career. If she says to her children, "Okay, now we go to daycare," daycare will seem like a normal part of their lives. If she says, "I'm sorry that I have to spend so much time away from you," the children will feel resentful. Shared parenting follows the same line of reasoning.

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# Wisconsin Fathers for Children and Families



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Wisconsin Fathers  
for Children and  
Families

Annual Meeting

Monday 14<sup>th</sup> January  
2013 7:00pm at

The Coliseum Bar and Restaurant  
232 E. Olin Avenue, Madison, WI  
53713 ph: 608-251-2434

Election of WFCF Board Members

Discussion of Equal Parenting  
Legislation by Members, the  
Board and Legislative Leaders

Food and Refreshments  
provided

## Fathers Night Out Support and Social Dinner Meeting

**Milwaukee:** Milwaukee area meetings are held the first Monday of the month at 7:00 PM at **The Chancery Restaurant** 7615 W. State St. - Wauwatosa, WI (*between corner of Harwood and 75th*)

**Madison:** Madison area meetings are held the third Monday of the month at 6:15 PM at the **Yes Buffet** 3038 Fish Hatchery Rd. - Madison, WI (*approximately half a mile south of the Beltline*)

Call 608-ALL-DADS or visit  
[www.wisconsinfathers.org](http://www.wisconsinfathers.org)  
for more information