



Today's Dads

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

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Walk for Children... More than one Chapter

By Peter Kerr

I was quite surprised a couple of weeks after Walk For Children concluded. I thought the walk would be a single event, but it seems to have taken on a multi chapter dimension. I was invited to speak and receive an "Outstanding Father Award" at the Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative's "Strengthening Fathers and Families" summit held on October 13/14th of this year.

I was excited and humbled that The Milwaukee Mayor's office that sponsored the event, thought that what I'd done was so noteworthy. Tomorrow, on behalf of the Milwaukee Fatherhood Collaborative and the Office of Milwaukee County Executive we're attending the Wisconsin County Executives and Administrators Association to present the Wisconsin Fatherhood Initiative to be held in Madison on March 16th and 17th.

So it appears, what I've learned on my 800+ mile grassroots adventure through many Wisconsin communities is on the right track. On my Walk I met many, many people and was pleased to confirm that the vast majority of Wisconsin people are wonderful people and the vast majority of parents are wonderful parents. I asked the hard questions.

"Family Court, by its nature is an adversarial court. How can an adversarial court, that pits a Mom and Dad against each other using mud slinging and gutter tactics, to produce an - on purpose - unequal parenting decision, where one parent becomes the "gatekeeper" and the other parent the "visitor" ever be "in the best interests of the child".

And the answer has overwhelming been, it cannot. The current unequal parenting decisions are continually failing our children. It guarantees conflict in a child's life as it enables the primary parent to control the relationship with the visitor parent. It leaves the visitor parent with only two choices, walk away leaving the child fatherless (bad) or fight to maintain a relationship and counteract the minimalizing tactics the primary parent utilizes (also bad).

(continued on page 2)

It's Time for Bi-partisan Reform in Family Court

By Bill Savage

In an age where cities like Milwaukee are searching for answers on why violent crime is up, opportunities are down and schools are failing, the time is ripe to invite Milwaukee law makers to join our cause. Milwaukee's elected officials on both the state and local level understand that children growing up without a Father are a key cause of the present situation that many cities across the country find themselves.

Children growing up with an active Father in their lives are far more likely to graduate from high school, stay out of jail, and lead a successful life. I wonder how many of Milwaukee's drug dealers have a high school diploma? I would venture to say not many! How many gang members in Milwaukee have a high school diploma? Again, probably not many.

This past election has presented us with a grand opportunity to gain support from democrats and republicans alike. The Senate is controlled by democrats and they now have a chance to come to the table under the leadership of Senator Jeff Pyle who has been a supporter of father's rights and is expected to introduce a 50/50 placement bill in the Senate.

The assembly is still controlled by republicans who passed a 50/50 placement bill last session under the leadership of Rep. Pridemore. I expect that this session our new 50/50 placement bill will pass as well. In order for the Wisconsin Legislature to get anything done, both houses and both parties must work together. I can't think of a better place to start than passing Family Law reform that allows children to have equal and meaningful relationships with both parents.

(Continued on page 3)

Editors Note: The point of 50/50 advocacy isn't to require every one to divide parenting time exactly equally, rather it's to prevent judges from ordering law-abiding, fit parents to involuntarily stay away from their own children more than half the time. WFCF does not oppose voluntary unequal parenting agreements, nor do we support equal parenting when one parent has been convicted of child abuse.

More than one Chapter. . . (Continued from page 1)

But let's step back a moment; if two parents love and respect their children, they won't go down the Family court route. They will see it for what it is, a financially draining, emotionally draining, conflict creating system. They will come to an amicable arrangement themselves - as good parents should.

It's only when one parent thinks they can gain an advantage by going down the Family Court road, and we all know that's not the Fathers! And because of that selfishness, the children suffer.

When our children act selfishly and cause trouble, we don't reward them with more candy, we send them to their room for a time out.

When a primary parent acts selfishly and causes trouble, they get sole custody and Dad gets thrown in jail for not paying child support.

Everyday the court of public opinion is seeing the damage that Family Court is doing to our children. Everyday the taxpayer is funding this atrocious behavior of our elected officials that causes the youth suicide, school drop-outs, teen pregnancies, overflowing jails and drug addictions. The public is sickened by it. The taxpayer has had enough of it. I just spend 800 miles finding it out.

There is one thing that became glaringly obvious during my walk, that equal parenting will happen, the only variable is time.

Think back to the Boston Tea Party, the suffragettes, Martin Luther King, Jr. Those that are dispensing unequal parenting today will be seen tomorrow as the destructive dinosaurs that severely damaged our society and created all the social ills that go with a Fatherless society.

Let's look at some facts:

- 5 of every 6 custodial parents were mothers (83.3 percent) and 1 in 6 were fathers (16.7 percent), proportions statistically unchanged since 1994 (U.S. Census Current Population Report March, 2002)
- Wisconsin divorces were 49% of the total number of Wisconsin marriages, 54% of all Wisconsin divorces in 2004 involved couples with children under 18 years of age (*Wisconsin Marriages and Divorces, 2004 (PPH 5359-04, May 2005) Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services*)
- In Washington County, Circuit Court 1, the current

rate of wives that file for divorce is 75.00% and husbands is 21.43% with joint petitioning making up 3.57%. In Washington County, the statistics for the two Family Court Commissioners is wife - 76.68%, Husband - 18.65% and joint - 4.66% (Wisconsin Court System—CCAP)

- Wisconsin Births to Single Mothers is 31% (Milwaukee County is 50%) and Births to Teen Mothers is 31% (Milwaukee County is 62%). (Anne E Casey Foundation)

Adding it up, while the judiciary continue to discriminate against Fathers by awarding unequal parenting decisions with primary placement to mothers, mothers will continue to file for divorce during the (inevitable) rocky periods of marriage, creating single parent households to the detriment of our children.

And one last fact from the US Census: In 2001, 26% of the children living in single-parent families headed by women were poor, compared to 5% of children in two-parent families.

And tell me again "How is this in the best interests of our children?"

Interestingly, a couple of nights ago, I watched the classic 1979 movie, *Kramer v. Kramer*, starring Dustin Hoffman and Meryl Streep. Dad received every second weekend and one night through the week. It didn't go unnoticed that it's the same deal Dad's are getting today. Society has moved on - my two immediate neighbors are stay at home Dad's - but it appears the Wisconsin Family Courts are still living in the dark ages "in the best interest of our children"

As you all know I'm a strong advocate for equal parenting. The reason is not because I -black and white- believe that the kids should spend one week with Mom and one week with Dad, it's because when there is no advantage given to choose the Family Court path, fit healthy parents won't chose it. They will do what they should do, take their emotions under control, go back to the table and work things out for the benefit of their children, so that both parents play a significant role in their lives.

Equal parenting promotes flexibility, cooperation and communication - a good place for a child to be; Unequal parenting promotes conflict gate keeping and ultimately Fatherless ness - a bad place for a child to be.

Many people have labeled me a Fathers Rights advocate; to the contrary I am not. I am an advocate of my daughter's expectations of equality (continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2) and fairness during her life. If the Family court says it's OK to discriminate against a child (male or female) so they have a 9/14 nights relationship with their Mom, and a 5/14 nights relationship with their Dad, then it must be OK for a boy to bounce 9 times on a trampoline and a girl 5 times, for a girl to have 9 hits with the baseball bat and a boy 5 hits. It must be OK for a woman to earn \$50,000 a year as a co-DJ on a Madison radio station and a man to earn \$90,000 to do the same job as co-DJ.

In fact it must be OK for Dad to pay 5/14th of the GAL bill and Mom to pay 9/14th of it!

Walk for Children is all about our children's expectations of equality and fairness. To have an expectation of equality and fairness in the workplace, we need to teach our children equality and fairness in the homeplace. After all the childhood is formidable learning years.

Let me state again: "There is one thing that became glaringly obvious during walk, that equal parenting will happen, the only variable is time."

Walk On.....

Peter Kerr



Bi-partisan Reform.....(continued from page 1)

Senator Lena Taylor and State Representative Jason Fields have recently shown their support for the "Institution of Fatherhood" in a letter they co-sponsored with Rep. Grisby and the black caucus in the matter of Edward Lefore, an African-American father trying to gain custody of his child.

We cannot continue to alienate men from their vital roles as fathers in Wisconsin. Being an active father should be something Wisconsin law should encourage, especially in Milwaukee.



President's Message

Hi all,

With Thanksgiving Day behind us and the holiday season and new year approaching I can be thankful and optimistic at once. Thankful for the support the members of WFCF have shown and hope that the events of the coming year will justify that support.

WFCF members came out in large numbers back in March to testify on behalf of the equal placement bill. Members came out to accompany Peter Kerr on his Walk for Children. Others helped out with our membership drive in Milwaukee. This list doesn't even include all these members who've provided technical support or preformed other services free of charge. I am thankful for

their support.

I am thankful to the members of the WFCF board who volunteer their time to perform the mundane tasks necessary to keeping this organization functioning; from keeping track of the money and membership lists to seeing that the newsletters comes out on time, to making sure our website is top notch and up to date. Other members contribute their time and efforts by advancing the cause through pro-active programs of WFCF. Whether helping to educate legislators who are drafting legislation helpful to fathers or making contacts with other organizations who are interested in fatherhood with whom we can ally, they help move us forward toward our ultimate goal, equal and fair treatment for both parents and of course, the children.

I am grateful for the support our issues have gotten in the legislature and the help we have received from the professionals in the family court system. Yes, you read correctly, the family court system. Few people know, but many family court agencies across the state refer dads to WFCF via the dads line or the web. Members of the WFCF board sit on advisory committees, family court judges and other officials in the bureaucracy have spoken to our group and attorneys who practice family law offer advice.

All of the above people deserve the gratitude of all of us.

I am hopeful for the future as well, WFCF will be cooperating with the Milwaukee Fatherhood Collaborative to host the statewide Fatherhood Conference on March 16th and 17th, 2007. We are planning a "meet and greet" for new members of the legislature to acquaint them with our issues and provide them with reliable information. WFCF has been working with several members of the incoming legislature on both sides of the aisle and we believe that meaningful reform is very possible this session.

I want to wish you all as happy a holiday season as possible. I know from experience how painful the holidays can be for some of us. All the Super Elmos or Playstations3s, all the Christmas music in the stores, all the cards and wishes of happiness, even from your friends and family only intensify the heartbreak you feel when you know you are not going to see your kids open their presents. Possibly some other man will be doing that with your kids Christmas morning. When you realize that you are no longer a part of your children's family. Only a visitor.

Working together we can see to it that next year will be better.

This is the last "President's Message" to appear in Today's Dads. The "Message From the Board" will appear in its place in the future.

Thanks,
Steve Blake, WFCF President



Board Meeting Summary

By Tom Pfeiffer — WFCF Secretary

The WFCF Board met in Madison on 11/13/06. Reports were heard on the condition of the treasury and the Walk for Children Fund as well as on current membership status. A discussion of press releases with WFCF's heading lead to the wider topic of the issuance of any public written statements by WFCF. There was general board agreement that any official material from the organization should be disseminated by way of the President.

The board adopted a public relations policy statement which reads as follows:

No person, member or associate of WFCF shall use the name, logo, or any likeness of WFCF, no shall any person, member, or associate speak on behalf of WFCF without the consent of the board, or in the board's absence, the Board's Executive Committee.

We discussed ideas for topics to be considered for upcoming newsletters, including a special issue on Peter Kerr's Walk for Children as a review of WFCF's accomplishments in 2006, which would likely be included in our first issue of 2007. Other possible newsletter topics included:

- The November election results
- Letters to the editor; which we haven't had in a while
- Christmas holiday tips for those difficult times without the kids
- The Milwaukee Fatherhood Collaborative's late winter conference in Madison
- A notice of our annual meeting, which we agreed should be held in Madison on Monday 1/8/07

A significant portion of the meeting was devoted to a discussion of the Milwaukee Fatherhood Collaborative and programs it is planning. This organization recently won a significant grant award and is in the process of planning ways it can use these fund. One project in the works is a state-wide fatherhood conference they plan to have in Madison on March 16th and 17th, 2007 at the Sheraton Hotel. Ideas for speakers for this event were discussed. They would like to get some nationally known speakers and have a few in mind. Names of potential state-based speakers were given, including a well-known and respected judge, some state legislators who have been supportive of fathers' rights and perhaps our newly elected attorney general, who has

voiced strong support of enforcement of family laws which protect a father's right to placement time without interference. The Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative is working with WFCF on this conference and would like WFCF to put on some conference workshops such as ones on testifying, working with the legislature, etc.

The board had a general discussion of strategies we might consider in education the legislature about our issues in 2007. We focused on a need to form more coalitions with other organizations, especially ones that tend to appeal to a broad base across political lines. On that note, the linkage between WFCF and the Milwaukee Fatherhood Group is an excellent step in this direction. ♦

Meet the Board of Directors

By Jodi Roberts

Robert Moore

Bob was voted to the board of directors in 1996 and has continuously serves as Vice President for Membership since then. In addition to the general responsibilities that come along with being a board member, he maintains the database, prints the address labels for all issues of Today's Dads and for many other mailings, and sends all renew request letters.

Bob joined the organization in 1991, following separation earlier that year and before divorce (in 1992). Bob has three children ages, 22, 17 and 16. He has gone through two full custody and placement studies before the judge finally stopped prohibiting him from being an equal parent to his children.

Since then he has had to endure 3-4 challenges to the equal placement arrangements. Although Bob's court orders since 1996 have called for equal placement of the minor children, refusal of the courts to comply with mandatory provisions of state statutes, and refusal of the district attorney to prosecute felony placement violations, have resulted in a reality that has been far different.

Bob has a Ph.D. in Biochemistry and is a Senior Scientist at the University of Wisconsin where he performs toxicology research. ♦

Are you interested in advertising in our newsletter?

Space is available at reasonable rates
Contact: editor@wisconsinfathers.org
for more information

Alone for the Holidays?

By Jodi Roberts

Did you dread the holidays because you knew you would be alone? For those of us who were and are alone, this can be a difficult season — especially if you know what it is like to be in a relationship during this time of year.

I want to share a few of the tricks I learned my first Christmas alone following my divorce. I missed my kids something fierce. I was sad and cried a lot, but when the crying was over I picked myself up and tried to make the best of it.

- Participate in lots of holiday gatherings. Who knows? You may find a new friend and you won't have time to dwell on missing the kids so much.
- Volunteer and help those less fortunate. Give and be generous (if you can). Give to friends, family and loved ones, but also give to strangers and charity.
- Attend Church: both religion and spirituality can be uplifting and satisfying for your soul.
- Participate at work. Are there events going on at work? If not, then lead the way and organize some.
- Send out a holiday letter. Mail a letter about your life to your friends and family. Tell them about the events of your year.
- Step out of the ordinary. Participate in activities that you either normally avoid or that you normally don't have time to do. Take time to look for new activities.
- Make a significant emotional shift. Learn something extraordinary and profound about yourself, your relationships or your life.

Some of these tips and tricks can be used throughout the year to ease the pain and keep your mind off missing the kids. It's never too late to make a change for the better. ♦

"The Best Parent is Both Parents"

Today's Dads, published bi-monthly, is a voice for fathers and mothers who have been denied the equal right to parent their children following divorce or separation.

"We believe that mothers and fathers are equally important in the parenting of children and that all fit parents should be entitled to equal placement with their children regardless of gender. We oppose the great prevalence of gender bias in our courts, governmental agencies and in society in general and stand as a force to work for equality in all of these areas."

Today's Dads is distributed to all paid members of Wisconsin Fathers for Children and Families. In addition copies of each issue are distributed to all Wisconsin legislators, judges, and court commissioners as an educational outreach.

E-mail: editor@wisconsinfathers.org

WFCF web page: www.wisconsinfathers.org

Save the Date...

**Statewide Fatherhood
Conference**
March 16th and 17th, 2007
in Madison, WI
at the Sheraton Hotel

More Information will be coming...

Holiday Stress and Divorced Families

By: Jodi Roberts

Holidays are a stressful time for most families. However, they may be more troubling for children of single-parent and step-family homes. Holiday traditions can cause children to remember times when mom and dad were together. Here are some ways to help children in these families cope with the special stress of the seasons.

- Make a serious and dedicated attempt to keep the season from being a battleground whereby the children become casualties. Develop and maintain an awareness of the effect that the parents' own unresolved negative feelings and emotions may have on their children. A "truce" can be established, if necessary, to keep the children from being caught in the middle and forced to "walk on egg shells."
- Give children the time and opportunity to discuss their feelings and emotions.
- Involve grandparents and other family members to help promote a sense of continuity and tradition needed at this time.
- Avoid questioning the child about what happened in the other parent's home or making the child a messenger of information to the other household.
- Send and receive the child to and from the other parent with feelings of love, trust and assurance that both parents are a haven of security to him or her.
- Children who feel secure, loved by both parents and not caught in the middle of old battles between their parents can have a very happy holiday season.

Most kids, even those dealing with loss or family transitions, do enjoy the holidays. However preparation, patience and honesty will help to prevent conflict, reduce stress and enhance the holiday season for the whole family. ♦

WFCF Annual Meeting

and Holiday Party

**Monday, January 8, 2007 at
7:00 PM**

At this meeting we elect our Board of Directors and Officers

At Coliseum Bar

232 E. Olin Ave. Madison, WI

Food and Refreshments provided.

What's Inside?

President's Message...page 3

Meet the Board...page 4

Summary of WFCF Board Meeting...page 4

Alone for the Holidays?...page 5

Holiday Stress and Divorced Families...page 5

Save the Date...page 5

Father's Night Out

Support and social dinner meeting.

Green Bay Sunday, January 7th at 6:30 p.m. and every first Sunday of the month thereafter.

Place: **Title Town Brewing Co.**

Frost Room Restaurant 200 Dousman Street, Green Bay (at Dousman Street and the Fox River in Downtown GB)

Milwaukee Wednesday, January 3rd at 7 p.m. and every first Wednesday of the month thereafter.

Place: **Pallas Family Restaurant**

1657 S. 108th Street, West Allis

Madison Monday, January 8th 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. and every second Monday of the month thereafter. Board meeting follows at 7:30 p.m.

Place: **Coliseum Bar and Restaurant**

232 E. Olin Ave (South side of Madison—just north of John Nolan Drive exit Hwy 12/14/18)

Wisconsin Fathers for Children and Families
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