

Community Forum On Poverty Reduction

Submitted by: Kids & Dad Shared Support

**To: Deb Matthews, Ontario Minister of Children & Youth Services
John Milloy, Minister of Training, Colleges & Universities**

For Your Information:

Kids & Dad Shared Support (K&D) exists to ensure that every child has both of their parents involved in their daily life, whatever their family arrangement.

Enclosed is a summary of our mission and mandate.

Our work strongly suggests that poverty (in all its forms) is often closely connected to the breakdown of the family. This has serious consequences and negative outcomes for the parents and children.

As such this submission is going to be limited and focus **on research, common sense, agency experiences and related factors.**

Kids & Dad works mainly, but not exclusively, with separated dads, new partners to separated dads and paternal extended families. Our agency is unique in that respect.

Comment: In Waterloo Region K&D has been surprised to find the level of income for many of our separated dads to be in the \$10 to \$15 per hr. range at best. The common profile is also that their former partner from the intact relationship earned less or a similar wage. **In almost all cases the couple at the time of separation had debts that exceeded their assets. They had created a lifestyle that exceeded their two incomes.**

Someone or 'someones' are going to be living in poverty if these couples WITH CHILDREN separate.

K&D works with these families and has also noted the **significant # of newly separated families with children in their toddler years. Supporting one parent at the cost of the other parent has become the financial reality of government policies at all levels.**

Unfortunately this approach has an unwanted outcome of damaging the parent-child relationship with one of the parents, usually the dad. It also ignores the research around what children need to thrive and grow into responsible, resilient and happy young adults.

Please find enclosed a summary of research on father involvement. It provides the evidence that children are more likely to have positive outcomes on a wide variety of indicators when they have an involved, supportive father in their daily life. Our society

recognizes that a mother's involvement has such significance for children; our common sense, experience and now research confirm a dad's similar significance.

The key here is a simple one: **How do we as a society ensure that every child has an involved mom and DAD following a family dissolution?**

Comment: In its beginnings, K&D held a moderate view toward the legal system and the way it works for separated families. This is no longer our working view! **It is clear that the SYSTEM has become part of the problem, not the solution.**

K&D has consistently observed the failure of the system and as such the outcomes for separated families is far-reaching and unacceptable.

They include: 1) Children going long periods of time without seeing their fathers on a regular, predictable basis and in a positive setting. **This is against all research that provides evidence that the continuing presence of an involved dad, sooner than later, is the key to life long involvement with greater opportunity for children.**

2) A family's limited financial resources are wasted in several ways.

3) Lawyers and Judges appear to be out of touch with the reality facing separated families. Penalties/Fees/Fines that are punitive/not a deterrent/excessive charge.

4) Judges who are autocratic. Lawyers representing FRO who are confrontational and not solution oriented.

5) Systemic processes that should be removed from the courts and dealt with in a quasi-judicial process. Please see attached paper on the Family Responsibility Office (FRO) on our web site www.kidsndad.com.

The current system is simply, frightening! This is an observation from an individual who is moderate in his approach to almost all matters.

The scary part of all this is the lack of passion to make changes that are needed. Lawyers appear to fear their own fraternity and their code of ethics (politeness) often costs clients \$1000's in postponed or adjourned court dates. **There is an indifference to these costs that weigh heavily on families. It doesn't matter who it hits individually, the reality is that it devastates the collective family i.e. fewer resources for everyone.**

Depression:

K&D's founder has experienced at a personal level and through the trials and tribulations of our clients the impact of the separation process that leads to spiraling rates of depression for all parties, but especially dads. Hopefully everyone involved in this Report has been reading the recent Globe & Mail series on depression. I have also included the Vanier Study on Depression and Separation and Divorce (June 2007).

When the Vanier study was published in June 2007 K&D expected a flurry of activities, proposals, announcements to attack a very specific, identified problem. Instead the last year has been marked by silence. I am going to deal with dads only from this study because their illness often leads to:

- 1) Productivity loss for employers;
- 2) Short or Long term leaves of absences;
- 3) Increased cost to company benefit plans; temporary training or retraining costs;
- 4) Increased health care costs to the taxpayer;
- 5) Related problems- higher level of conflicts; addiction issues and subsequent negative outcomes; increased court costs and related losses;
- 6) Personal costs/burdens to families- grandparents, loss of relationships; etc.
- 7) Human costs to how our society looks at itself;
- 8) FRO ARREARS; PERSONAL BANKRUPTCY

Separated fathers are 6x's more likely to suffer from depression than fathers living in an intact family and twice or more the rates of depression for separated mothers.

It is explained by two main reasons:

- 1) Most dads relied on their intact family for support; loss of family (as he knows it) leads to depression..**
- 2) Most dads are living without their children on a regular basis.**

One would be hard pressed not to recognize the connection between poverty and separated families.

Social Services, Political System and the Legal Process:

Kids & Dad Shared Support has become disillusioned by the failure of all three players who profess to exist for the welfare of those in need, of creating a just society with strong families, and to provide a process that is built on fairness and justice.

Everyone that is employed in these systems has an honorable mandate to hang their hat on. Good intentions are not enough. Thousands of children across this province suffer the consequences of failed good intentions, every day, month and year. The consequences go on often for their lifetime.

K&D fears that these meetings are again about empty strategies and paying lip service or simply a commitment again about good intentions. K&D has tried desperately to raise the profile of separated families through featured op-ed articles in the K.W. RECORD; Roger's Television: Farwell Live programming, community events and building community ties; etc.

Yet for all of our efforts and the unique character of our agency, not a SINGLE politician has approached us to help them understand what many observers call the social crisis of our day, namely, FATHERLESSNESS and all of its related negative outcomes.

Family and Children's Services have never asked us to speak about or to help them understand the needs of separated dads; no legal forum (lawyers, police, judges) has spoken to us about the needs of our families.

Good intentions are not enough and K&D is dismayed by the lack of curiosity of so many agencies with the mandate and influence to do good.

In closing, I am reminded of a phrase by Martin Luther King that captures the moment that for 10 years has eluded us and resulted in 300,000 Canadian children growing up with a distant or missing dad and thousands of dads and grandparents suffering from the loss of their children and grandchildren.

King called for 'the fierce urgency of now'. In other words our families cannot tolerate continued indifference for time is not on the side of those 300,000 children.

This writer has often identified the problem as our collective failure to be 'against silence' and to give voice (our passion) to support separated families to find their way to the light.

Let us hope that this new initiative is about the 'urgency of now' and supporting the whole family to find the way to that 'light'.

Mr. Lillie is available to all those who want to speak out in their own way, now!
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