



## Meeting a Community's Growing Need to Serve Fathers

### Organization profile

The mission of The Parenting Network is “to strengthen parenting and to prevent child abuse.” The Parenting Network was established as a project of the Junior League of Milwaukee in 1976, and was incorporated as Parents Anonymous in 1977. In 1996, its name changed to The Parenting Network, reflecting the value of collaborative relationships as well as its commitment to strength-based, positive connections to families and to parent leadership.

Today, the agency serves families in the greater Milwaukee area through a continuum of prevention programs that are provided:

- In Homes - Home visiting and case management services for any family in need.
- In Schools - Healthy relationship education to prevent sexual violence and teen pregnancy; parenting education for expectant and parenting teens.
- In the Community - Confidential Parent Helpline and a wide variety of parenting education and support classes and groups developed for specific parenting populations at sites throughout Milwaukee County.

### The Challenge

As The Parenting Network began to provide services across Milwaukee and collaborated with Head Starts, the Children's Trust Fund, courts, the child welfare system, and other community-based organizations, they saw a great need for additional services to meet the needs of fathers, as more and more fathers were coming forward and asking for help. More “systems” in the community were recognizing the critical role that fathers play in children's lives, but there were few programs available to help them. The increasing frequency of single mother homes added to the urgency of providing help for fathers.

Internally, The Parenting Network was finding that funding for fatherhood services was very hard to come by and, in a field comprised mostly of women, they had a challenge in finding male facilitators to deliver fatherhood programs to the dads they sought to help.

### The Solution

The Parenting Network turned to NFI to provide the father-specific programs that were needed to address the issues they faced both in their community and internally as an organization.

To boost its “Dads Matter” program, staff of The Parenting Network received training from NFI on the 24/7 Dad® and InsideOut Dad® curricula. NFI's training showed The Parenting Network not only how to deliver the “nuts and bolts” of the program, but also how to identify a good facilitator and how to recruit and retain dads in the program.

The Parenting Network now offers [24/7 Dad®](#) to groups of fathers throughout the year. They are particularly fond of the flexibility offered by 24/7 Dad® to meet needs of the groups they serve. It can be offered over a variety of time periods and provides “openings” for creative facilitators to put their own personal touch on the class. Currently, the facilitator of the 24/7 Dad® classes is a dad who once went through the program himself at The Parenting Network's facility.

The Parenting Network also values the [InsideOut Dad](#)<sup>®</sup> program because it addresses the unique needs of dads while being incarcerated – it is not a generic parenting program, but is designed for fathers. Also, given the importance of keeping mothers involved, The Parenting Network values how InsideOut Dad<sup>®</sup> helps fathers navigate relationship challenges that are often the case when a father is incarcerated.

### **Benefits**

One of The Parenting Network's main goals is to prevent child abuse and neglect and strengthen families. Before they began running fatherhood programs, they felt they were sorely missing the male perspective on solving these problems. Today, they believe NFI's fatherhood programs lend credibility to their family strengthening work, because they are truly serving the whole family now, not just mothers and children.

Internally, with NFI's help, they have created a culture that supports fathers, which in turn is able to respond to the culture in their city of dads wanting help. They are now sending a message to both moms and dads about the importance of father involvement for the well-being of their city's children.

### **Products and Services They Used**

- The Parenting Network received [training](#) on both the 24/7 Dad<sup>®</sup> and InsideOut Dad<sup>®</sup> curricula.
- The Parenting Network uses the [24/7 Dad](#)<sup>®</sup> curriculum and Fathering Handbooks.
- The Parenting Network uses the [InsideOut Dad](#)<sup>®</sup> curriculum and Fathering Handbooks.

### **Services Provided by Other Groups or Companies**

The Parenting Network gets referrals (dads who will take part in their programs) from courts, the child welfare system, and other community-based organizations in Milwaukee.

Its Parent Helpline, a 24/7 phone line offering support to parents, also refers fathers to their program.

Additionally, on-staff counselors refer dads to the fatherhood program.

