**The “Education” of Young Fathers:**

Understanding and Addressing Their

Barriers to High School Completion

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Report for Terra Association of Edmonton\*

by

Dr. David Long©

The King’s University College

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\*With Appreciation for the Research Assistance of: Heather Bouwman, Cameron Edney, Britnee Frentz, John Kassien & Aileen Thornton

While this report is for public dissemination and discussion, please forward any requests for permission to reprint to the author. david.long@kingsu.ca**Introduction**

The purpose of the following report is to discuss the ways that a number of interpersonal, cultural and structural factors hinder young fathers from completing high school. It is clear that all young parents face a number of similar challenges in raising their child, particularly if they have not completed high school. We note, however, that while personal and public attitudes towards young parents are in general judgmental and stigmatizing, cultural expectations surrounding the *good* father have a number of significant consequences in the lives of young fathers. One consequence is that young fathers learn to view themselves as well as their relationship with and responsibilities toward their child and family quite differently than do young mothers. Our research also indicates that the support offered to young fathers and young mothers in their everyday lives and in relation to completing high school is quite different. In general, the overall lack of support that young fathers receive from family and friends, schools, and community and government agencies makes it very difficult for them to complete high school. Given the clear relationship between education, occupation and income, this has both short and long term negative consequences for their ability to support and care for their child and family as they would like.

Following a number of introductory comments on the “place” of young fathers in Canada and a brief outline of national and provincial high school completion and early school leaving rates, we focus discussion on some of the interpersonal, cultural and structural factors that negatively affect young fathers. While relevant literature is cited throughout this report, comments from participants in three separate groups of young parents provide insight into how young fathers and young mothers view the experiences and circumstances of young fathers, particularly in relation to high school completion. The report concludes with a number of recommendations for change in support of young fathers and their families.

**Overview of the “Place” of Young Fathers in Canada**

Most of us learn from very early on that fathers play an essential role in the lives of their children, families and communities. Messages in mass and social media, Father’s Day cards, community service announcements, and advertisements regularly remind Canadians how important dads are to family and community life. While there have been significant changes over time in relation to how fatherhood is viewed in Canada, there nonetheless continues to be a relatively clear and fairly exclusive set of cultural ideals that characterize the *good* father in this country as:

* white, heterosexual, and over 25
* happily married and residing with his biological child(ren)
* emotionally stable and physically healthy
* actively involved with his resident child(ren) on a daily basis
* well educated, occupationally stable, and able to provide for his family, and
* attentive to the developmental needs of his child from birth to 6 years of age

Males in Canada are socialized throughout their life to understand and conform to this *good* father ideal. Whether in their families and peer relationships or at their work, place of worship, child’s school, sporting and other public events or through mass and social media, the message is clear that a *young* father cannot be a *good* father. Consequently, Canadian fathers in their teens or early 20s live with the stigma of being a *young* father regardless how mature they may be, what level of education they may have, and whether or not they are able to financially support their family. Uneducated, underemployed and/or unemployed young fathers thus particularly struggle with the stigma of a being a young father. In general, the circumstances of most young fathers, coupled with the judgemental attitudes and lack of support they receive from others make it quite clear to them that being a *young* father makes them a *bad* father.

Broad cultural expectations surrounding fatherhood present an inescapable dilemma for young fathers in Canada, particularly that a *good* father must be over 25 years of age and financially stable. Young fathers are between the ages of 15 and 24, and the national average of 19 is slightly below the average age of the 94 young fathers served by Terra between March 2008 and September 2011.[[1]](#footnote-1) Young fathers also tend to be much more socially and economically vulnerable than fathers over the age of 25. Their economic vulnerability is understandable given that on average, young fathers in Canada complete fewer than 11 years of schooling and have an annual income of less than $20,000.[[2]](#footnote-2) These numbers are in line with those of the young fathers associated with Terra. Moreover, their unstable –or in many cases non-existent-- employment history, coupled with a lack of support and opportunities to advance their education means that most young fathers continue to live at or well below the poverty line. Although we did not examine ethnic background data of Terra young fathers in detail, census data strongly suggest that the education and income levels of the Registered First Nation young fathers associated with Terra are significantly lower than the averages listed above. National 2006 census data indicate that the median income of off-reserve First Nations males over 15 with Registered status was $18,732. Despite the fact that the 2006 census did not gather data that combined income and age, the extremely low levels of education and almost total lack of work experience of Registered First Nation males between the ages of 15-24 would undoubtedly result in their income being significantly less than the median income listed above. [[3]](#footnote-3)

The diverse group of young fathers who took part in this study all recognized that others view them as too young and immature to support even themselves, let alone a child and family. They also recognized that along with being relatively young, they lack the level of education required to secure a stable job with a decent income. After the following brief description of high school graduation and non-completion rates among the general population, we therefore move into a discussion of a number of interpersonal, cultural and structural factors that negatively affect the high school completion rates of young fathers.

**Early High School Leaving, Completion and Non-completion**

It is an understatement to say that the high school years are challenging for many youth, and as Table 1 indicates a proportion of eligible students in Alberta did not complete high school in 2009/2010. We also see in Table 1 that graduation rates improve significantly when students aged 20-24 are included in the total.

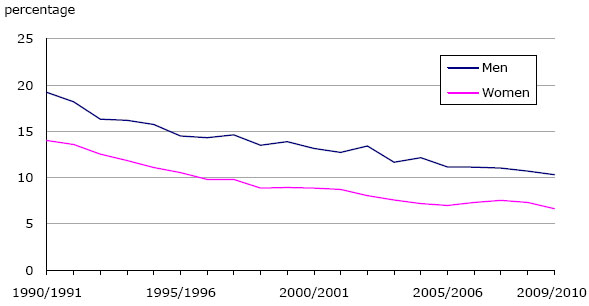
**Table 1 - Alberta high school graduation status by age and percent, 2009/2010[[4]](#footnote-4)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Graduation Status | 16-17 years | 18-19 years | 20-24 years |
| High school graduate | 5.6 | 73.7 | 89.0 |
| Not a HSl graduate, attending school | 90.1 | 15.9 | 1.4 |
| Not a HS graduate, not attending school | 4.3 | 10.4 | 9.5 |

That completion rates increase when 20-24 year olds are included in the total indicates the importance of differentiating between early high school leaving and non-completion of high school since a large number of students who leave high school early for reasons other than having a child often return. Male students typically cite poor wages and their lack of employability as reasons for returning, though many also say they felt more alone and isolated outside of school than they thought they would.[[5]](#footnote-5)

There are of course as many reasons why students leave high school as there are reasons why they return. Interestingly, while overall high school graduation rates increase significantly when the 20-24 age group is included, female students overall are more likely than males to complete high school. As we see in Chart 1, there was a steady and quite significant difference between the dropout rates of males and females in Canada between the years of 1990-2010. The steady decline in the national dropout rate for males from 19% to just over 10% between the years 1990-2010 also meant there was an equally steady increase in their high school completion rates.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Chart 1 – Early School Leaving rate in Canada, population aged 20 to 24, by sex, 1990 to 2010[[7]](#footnote-7)**



Unfortunately, individual schools, school boards and ministries of education do not gather and publish information on the social characteristics of students who do not graduate from high school. Neither do they consistently keep track of the reasons why certain groups of students do not complete grade 12.[[8]](#footnote-8) However, a number of studies on early school leaving indicate that while the majority of all early school leavers typically report “school related reasons” such as boredom and bad relationships with education professionals, there is a noticeable gender difference in the reasons given by other students who leave high school early. In one study, young females were found to be four times more likely to cite personal and family reasons (pregnancy, childcare, marriage and/or family problems) than young males, while two times as many young males reported that they left school early because they preferred work to school or they had to work to support themselves and/or their family.[[9]](#footnote-9) Despite the lack of information on why 27-30% of males in Alberta do not finish high school in any given year, it is clear that young fathers in this province are a particularly at risk group for not completing high school.[[10]](#footnote-10) As noted in the following section, this is in large part the result of a number of interpersonal, cultural and structural factors quite outside of their control that negatively affect many areas of their lives.

**Personal Relationship Challenges**

Despite the many challenges they face, the young fathers we spoke with did not want to blame anyone else for their circumstances. They said that at times they felt badly about some of the choices they had made and the lack of money and direction in their lives, and that all they wanted to do was to take care of their child and family as best they could. As one focus group participant stated: “I didn’t even know my dad and so things was pretty tough at times for our family. But I don’t really think about that anymore. It’s my life and I’m trying my best to make things good for my little girls and our family.” Young father focus group participants also mentioned that they sometimes felt confused and frustrated about the negative attitudes many people had about them and the lack of support they received from others. It was clear that how they felt about their lives was greatly affected by the people who were closest to them. Typical were the comments of one young father who noted that:

I was real excited when we heard we was having a baby. But her parents kicked her out of the house because they didn’t want nothing to do with us, so we got a place together. Then she moved back in with them after she had the baby and I hardly ever get to see my son or her. I want us to be together, and it sucks that there’s not much I can do since I’m pretty sure her parents turned her totally against me.

Interestingly, while the young fathers in general talked quite positively about the mother of their child, participants in the young mother’s focus group had very few positive things to say about the father of their child. Group members agreed with the young mother who responded to the question of how she viewed the young father of her child by stating:

Ya, things are pretty tough for the three of us, which is why I’m at school trying to make a decent life for me and my daughter. As for him (the young dad), he’s just totally immature and only thinks about himself. For the first year after we had the kid, he would just say to me “you have to stay home and feed the kid anyway, so I might as well go out.” He says he tries to find work, but I don’t see it and we don’t have much money.

Whether or not the perceptions of this young mother and the other group members accurately capture how most young fathers think and behave, it was clear that each of them viewed the young fathers in their lives is a largely negative and unsupportive way.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The young fathers in the parenting and focus groups also mentioned that they no longer hung around with any of the friends they knew in school. They recognized that their lives had changed significantly, and as one young father said, “I’m just not interested in partying all the time anymore, so my friends aren’t really interested in hanging around with me either.” Most men develop work related friendships after graduating from school, though this of course does not happen if one is unemployed or if one’s work is temporary and part-time. The lack of close friendships in young father’s lives is significant for they all wished they knew more young fathers or males their age that could identify with their experiences. They did mention that they had appreciated connecting with the young fathers they had met through Terra and that it was helpful to hear from others who were experiencing the same challenges they were. Still, they noted that it was often difficult to maintain friendships with other young fathers. Their ages and backgrounds were quite varied and all of them lived and worked in different parts of the city. Consequently, they did not necessarily have much in common beyond their experience of fathering, and even those who did connect found it costly to get around and often quite inconvenient to get together.

Along with having a lack of supportive personal relationships, young fathers must also overcome the cultural, socio-economic and educational background of the family and community in which they grew up. Research clearly indicates that the socio-economic status (SES) of a child’s family tends to be perpetuated in their own life as they grow up.[[12]](#footnote-12) The prevalence of lower income levels in the lives of young fathers and young mothers is both statistically significant and well documented. For example, in their examination of several communities within the Alberta Capital Health Region, Preddy et al (2005) found a strong inverse relationship between median family income and teen birth rates.[[13]](#footnote-13) The teen birth rate of 42.5 births per 1,000 females aged 15-19 in the low income community of Eastwood was much higher than in the much more affluent community of St. Albert. While the median family income in St. Albert was twice that of Eastwood, the birth rate for females aged 15-19 in St. Albert during 2004 was a comparatively low 5.7 births per 1,000.

As the data in Table 2 indicate,**[[14]](#footnote-14)** a child that grows up in poverty with one or two parents with little or no formal education is much less likely to graduate from high school than a child raised by parents that are well educated and financially secure. Children who leave school early are also much more likely than those who graduate to have lived with a single parent or no parents prior to leaving. While the data in Table 2 is not specific to young fathers, it does shed light on some of the factors that contribute to the likelihood that they will leave school early and live in poverty. Most significantly, it indicates that there is a close relationship between the socio-economic status and education of young fathers and their parents.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 2: Characteristics of High School Leavers and Graduates (Percent of total)** | | |
|  | *Leavers* | *Graduates* |
| Live with a single parent or no parents | 38 | 17 |
| Parental education is low | 45 | 32 |
| Father works in blue collar job | 55 | 40 |
| Father is unemployed | 14 | 7 |

There is also a disproportionately high percentage of young, First Nation fathers in Canada. In 2005, 11% of First Nation males in Canada between the ages of 15-24 were young fathers, compared to 3% for the non-Aboriginal population. The majority of First Nation young fathers grow up in communities marked by extremely low levels of income and formal education. Noël and Larocque[[15]](#footnote-15) recognize that the relatively impoverished circumstances of many First Nation children reflect in part the lack of formal education and full time employment among adults in their communities. However, they argue that disproportionately low levels of education and income as well as high rates of unemployment in many First Nation communities are systemic problems with deep, Colonial roots.[[16]](#footnote-16) Needless to say, having to address the complex history of relations between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian state presents a tremendous challenge to those committed to supporting First Nations young fathers in ways that help increase their high school completion rates.

**Cultural and Structural Challenges**

It is clearly not just in their close personal relationships that young fathers receive relatively little support. Indeed, recent research on men’s health indicates that males of most any age are much less likely than females to ask for help and/or receive support.[[17]](#footnote-17) Despite the fact that females benefit from widespread cultural and structural support for their help seeking behavior, males are by and large blamed for their apparently biological tendency to “go it alone.” However, the young fathers we spoke to mentioned that they often felt so overwhelmed and confused that they didn’t know who to ask or where to look for help. Rather than explaining the (lack of) help seeking behavior of these and other young fathers simply in terms of them being too young and immature to build supportive, intimate relationships, it is clear that cultural and structural factors also hinder them from asking for and receiving the support they both need and want.

Traditional norms of masculinity certainly discourage males in our society from asking for help. However, many of the values, beliefs and attitudes underlying these norms prevent support from ever being offered to males. Specifically, deeply embedded stereotypical beliefs and negative attitudes towards young fathers hinder the development of government and community supports for them by perpetuating a lack of public awareness, understanding and acceptance of their actual experiences and circumstances. In other words, the lack of social policy, program and community service support available to young fathers also reflects the “place” of young fathers in the minds and hearts of those in position to support them.[[18]](#footnote-18) Traditional attitudes and norms of masculinity are still prevalent throughout our society, and they reflect as well as perpetuate the same kind of “gender blindness and bias” among policy makers and human service providers as they do among the general societal population.

Nowhere is such gender blindness and bias more evident than in the language used to discuss the experiences and support needs of “pregnant and parenting teens.” For example, a recent study commissioned by Terra to examine funding obstacles affecting the high school completion rates of young mothers was titled *Improving High School Completion Rates of Pregnant and Parenting Teens: Paths to Financial Assistance*.[[19]](#footnote-19) Although the title implies that the report examines the relationship between financial assistance to pregnant/parenting teens and high school completion rates, the report focused solely on the experiences, circumstances and financial support needs of young *female* parents. Moreover, although the authors of the study argue that there are significant problems in the funding criteria for *teen parents*, their findings and recommendations apply strictly to teen mothers. Staff from Terra and other parent support organizations noted that the use of more inclusive “parenting” language is intentional and quite common in policy and program documents as well as among service providers within as well as outside their organization. They also noted that despite the positive developments that the commitment to inclusive language reflects, most policies, programs and resources for young *parents* are in fact directed towards young mothers. This was of little surprise to the participants in the young fathers focus group, for they all felt that most programs, services and financial support for “young parents” are designed and delivered with the experiences and needs of young mothers in mind.[[20]](#footnote-20) They also felt it should be much clearer whether funding and program support applies strictly to young mothers, young fathers, or to young parents.

Not surprisingly, the challenges associated with providing support services and programs for young fathers are very similar to challenges associated with helping them complete high school. As noted in a recent evaluation of the services and programs that Terra provides for young fathers,

More than 75% of the young dads require service in emotional support, parenting, finances and basic needs….However, other needs are also present, some of which are service intensive and which add stress to life such as: education and employment, relationships, child custody and access, legal needs, family violence and addictions. The young dads all have multiple needs when they first come to Terra, even though a dad may come with only one expressed need. [[21]](#footnote-21)

Despite having to address the multiple support needs of young fathers with limited resources, the reliance of community agencies such as Terra on external funding means that a significant proportion of their time and resources must be devoted to convincing government and other community partners about their need for both core operational funding as well as financial assistance for special initiatives. It might well be said that most community service agencies are also faced with having to make a choice between delivering established programs and services for “culturally acceptable” client populations such as women and children or developing unique and innovative programs for a group of culturally invisible young men with complex and pressing needs. Even though Terra and other community service agencies understand the needs of young fathers quite well, the lack of government funding and community resources available to them significantly limits their ability to offer young fathers the kinds of support they need.

In all, unsupportive personal relationships, socio-economically disadvantaged family backgrounds, negative cultural attitudes towards young fathers, as well as the overall lack of government and community service support make it extremely difficult for young fathers to deal successfully with the many challenges in their lives, let alone earn their high school diploma. As noted in the following section, the very culture and structure of high schools also present young fathers with a number of significant challenges and even obstacles on the path to graduation.

## High School Challenges

Most high school students are at an age in which they experience significant changes and uncertainty in many areas of their lives. For young parents, the many challenges associated with being a teenager are coupled with the challenges of being responsible to care for their child. Clearly, being responsible to raise a child does not fit easily with being a high school student, particularly since the primary functions of high schools are to educate and provide certain types of entertainment, physical activities as well as basic life and career counselling support to those who are themselves just emerging from their childhood.[[22]](#footnote-22)

High schools in Canada have changed in many different ways since the late 1960s, particularly as they have been encouraged by government and community stakeholders to become more socially inclusive. Innovative educational programs and services have been designed to address the strengths, needs and interests of students with different learning skills and levels of ability. Students and staff have also been encouraged to welcome and support students from all over the world with diverse ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations. The social, financial and material resources available to high schools are of course limited, which means that their main organizational purpose and structure must focus on meeting the educational needs and providing support for basic personal issues experienced by “the average” teenager between the ages of 15-19. It would therefore appear at least on one level that it is simply the lack of available resources and expertise that prevents high schools from supporting young fathers since their financial and social support needs clearly extend beyond those of the “average” teenager.

However, there are other reasons from a more critical perspective as to why young fathers do not receive attention or support in high schools. Limited resources are dedicated towards the development of services and programs for the more visible and culturally acceptable student groups and populations. Terra staff reported that during the past few years a number of their young mothers and fathers had been informed by counsellors from various high schools that they needed to find another place to go to school. Some might argue that such incidents merely reflect the actions and attitudes of a small minority of high school counsellors. However, a more broad and critical view would acknowledge that negative public attitudes, combined with the lack of awareness surrounding the strengths, experiences and needs of young fathers contributes to the stigma associated with being a young father. The result is that young fathers, both individually and collectively, remain invisible within high schools. That they will remain invisible is unfortunately ensured by a number of administrative procedures and practices. For one, most high schools in Canada do not collect very much if any data on the ethnic or socio-economic composition of their students, what their students do after leaving school early or graduating, or social changes in their communities and society that affect schools and students either directly or indirectly.[[23]](#footnote-23) In other words, most high schools devote very little effort and resources to understanding themselves or their students, particularly in relation to the changing character of the society in which they operate. The invisibility of young fathers in high schools is thus perpetuated not simply due to a lack of resources, but by a lack of awareness and vision, particularly on the part of educational administrators who are in a position to support them and effect positive change on their behalf.[[24]](#footnote-24)

There is some government funding available to young fathers who want to complete high school, although funding opportunities are relatively limited and the criteria for eligibility are both narrow and variable depending on the age and financial status of the applicant.[[25]](#footnote-25)[[26]](#footnote-26) The main financial aid programs for young parents in Alberta are Employment Insurance, Alberta Works,[[27]](#footnote-27) the Advancing Futures Bursary[[28]](#footnote-28) and funding through Child and Youth Services.[[29]](#footnote-29) The challenge for young fathers is that each program has different and often quite stringent eligibility requirements including the applicant’s age, sex, where the applicant lives (especially for First Nation applicants), and the amount of days the applicant has been out of high school and working.[[30]](#footnote-30) The young fathers in our focus groups noted that even finding information on funding support programs is a challenge. The difficulty of knowing where to look for support, coupled with the fact that age-related eligibility criteria for funding are rather tight means that the “windows of opportunity” for young fathers to apply for support are quite small. This is a particular challenge for young fathers, who unlike pregnant teen females are not “officially” eligible for government support as a young parent until after their child is born. Moreover, those who did apply for government funding after becoming fathers mentioned that they would have given up looking had it not been for the support and help of Terra.

While all of the young fathers we spoke to recognized the importance of having a high school education, a number of them felt somewhat trapped in a situation of “damned if I do and damned if I don't.” They mentioned that any time spent upgrading their education would make it even more difficult to work in order to financially support their family. A number of young fathers also mentioned that it seemed that most employment benefits do not benefit them at all. Even the young fathers who were working noted that they either didn’t work enough hours to qualify for even the most basic benefits or they simply could not afford to take time off work. None of them were aware of any employer sponsored programs that would support them getting their high school diploma or a vocational certificate. This seemed to contribute even more to their frustration about not being able to financially support their family. As one young father stated,

“I want to go back to school and plan on it. However, it's really hard, you know? Now I realize a lot of things in life is hard. And I have heard there are some programs to help me go back to school. But, I mean, having a child, you know, I wouldn't be able to get anywhere with visitation and being a role model in my daughter's life while going to an adult high school and living in a rooming house working a $7 an hour job.

Without sufficient financial support, it is simply not feasible for most young fathers to even consider pursuing their high school diploma. Moreover, it is extremely difficult for most young fathers to see graduating from high school as little more than a thoroughly unrealistic cultural expectation if they do not have the kind of personal and social support required to address the many challenging issues they face every day of their lives.

**Concluding Remarks**

Most of the young fathers associated with Terra between 2008 -2011 left school between the ages of 14 and 17. Consequently, they all lacked enough formal education and the social capital[[31]](#footnote-31) necessary to secure stable and financially rewarding employment. Indeed, the lack of education, stable income and social support left a number of these young fathers in Canada feeling not only that they had little hope of ever being a *good* father, but also that they would remain relatively invisible, non-contributing members of society. Given the abundant evidence that education, occupational stability and income are closely related, it follows that initiatives that address obstacles to high school completion will increase the ability of young fathers to provide stable and sufficient financial support to their families. As this report suggests, however, completing high school is but one of the many challenges faced by young fathers.

It was evident in many of the comments made by young father focus group participants that their perspective on life had changed quite dramatically after they had become fathers. Their experience of fathering had made them much more aware of not only their added responsibilities but also their need for support. They also felt quite strongly that the help and support they had received from Terra had given them some hope and positive direction. Our research also indicates that the minimal support that they and most other young fathers receive from family, peers, high schools, social service agencies and government funding agencies makes completing high school little more than a distant hope for them. While financial assistance to pursue their high school diploma would undoubtedly make it easier for some young fathers to attend school, it is clear that different levels and types of personal, cultural and structural support before, during and after they become a father would help address a number of much more basic and pressing needs in their lives. Certainly more attention to building collaborative working relations between government, business and community stakeholders on behalf of young fathers would provide them with more stable support and greater chance for “educational success.” As the young fathers in our study help us to see, however, meaningful social change requires as well as reflects a fundamental shift in perspective. In other words, the lives of young fathers in our midst will be transformed in positive and hopeful ways to the extent that people willingly embrace a strength-based perspective on males in general and young fathers in particular.

As noted throughout this report, deficit-based thinking insists that people blame young fathers for their choices, circumstances and problems. Shifting to a perspective that seeks to understand and affirm their strengths will both challenge and enable us to move away from the type of thinking that focuses primarily on their deficits, limitations and problems. Comments by the young fathers in our study indicated that they were well aware of how deficit-based thinking both reflected and maintained their “place” in society. While the shift to a strength-based perspective would undoubtedly not result in an immediate and significant increase in the high school graduation rates of young fathers in our society, our research indicates that it would help cultivate more positive public awareness and understanding about their experiences, gifts, and resilience. Our research also suggests that it would help to shed a different, more hopeful kind of light on the challenges they experience due to negative cultural attitudes and stereotypes, unsupportive personal relationships, and by the minimal and largely piecemeal support they receive from government, business and community service agencies. The young fathers in this study were very clear that they would like to see increased support for a strength-based approach to how others view and treat them. Indeed, their involvement in this study led them to become as convinced as the researchers that widespread acceptance of a strength-based perspective would eventually result in more and more young fathers being able to support and care for their child and family as they would like.

**Recommendations**[[32]](#footnote-32)

Although many of the following recommendations apply to young fathers with diverse needs and in a wide variety of personal, familiar, and social circumstances, for purposes of organization they are divided into two sections. The first group of select recommendations focus on raising positive awareness around the perspectives, experiences, strengths and needs of young fathers. The second group of recommendations propose a number of ways to increase governmental and community stakeholder support for more “young father friendly” policies, programs, services and resources as well as to promote more effective use by young fathers of the resources available to them. If implemented, they would provide positive and hopeful direction to young fathers in the community as well as those that support them.

1. **Government, business and community stakeholders will raise awareness and promote positive change in relation to the lives of young fathers to the extent that they support efforts to:**

* help identify and challenge the stigma and stereotypes associated with young fathers
* remove anti-male stereotyping and denigration of young fathers in the minds of human service providers and members of the community at large
* promote positive messages about young fathers and challenge mass and social media images and messages that tend to denigrate them
* promote “awareness raising” campaigns that highlight the many positive contributions of young fathers from diverse backgrounds in our society
* promote the development and creative public dissemination of positive messages about the strengths, experiences, contributions and needs of young fathers
* promote awareness and understanding among human services staff and managers as well as school administrators and community members on male issues in general and issues relevant to young fathers in particular
* identify and raise public awareness on the ways that young fathers experience disadvantage due to a complex interplay of personal, interpersonal, cultural, and structural (legal, political, economic, etc.) factors
* advertise services and resources available to young fathers through the development of interagency human service networks
* provide more visible access to positive messages about the experiences and contributions of young fathers in a wide array of public venues and spaces including: schools, health care facilities, shopping malls, sports venues, workplaces, and other public facilities as well as in the informal places where young men would see these messages such as washrooms, lunchrooms, sports bars, transit stations, locker rooms, etc.
* support more public education in schools, churches, community organizations, businesses, and social as well as mass media on positive as well as challenging issues in the lives of men in general and young fathers in particular
* develop strategies to effectively disseminate information in high schools on resources and support programs for young male students in general and young fathers in particular
* support the development of a community-sponsored, practically-focused website dedicated to young fathers and their families

1. **The lives of young fathers and their relationships with their children will improve and perhaps flourish to the extent that government and community stakeholders:**

* seek to understand and strengthen both natural as well as more formal networks of support for young fathers in the community, particularly in high schools
* meaningfully involve young fathers in the development of policies, programs, services and resources for young fathers
* involve a wide variety of governmental, human service, academic and community stakeholders in ongoing assessment of community strengths and needs
* partner with universities in supporting community-based action research projects that promote a strengthening of relationships between young fathers and their children
* encourage leadership from business in support of young fathers (financial support for services and resources, advertising of services for male employees, support for educational upgrading and vocation training, etc.)
* develop collaborative working relations and networks involving various levels of government, schools and community organizations that engage youth in general rather than engaging those that focus on “at risk” youth
* actively promote informal networking, peer support counselling, self-help groups and counselling resources for young fathers in high schools and throughout the community
* work together to clarify the benefits of stable, core funding for community-based organizations and initiatives that support young fathers and seek to strengthen their families
* develop mechanisms to provide substantial enough financial support for young fathers to complete high school or enrol in vocational training programs
* develop policies that support the offering of financial subsidies for young father program participants
* creatively advertise financial subsidies available to young father program participants
* develop practical and playful recruitment strategies for young father support groups
* develop policies and programs that engage the everyday experiences and “practical” worldview of young fathers develop and promote programs that build on the personal, social and economic capacities of the young fathers they serve
* support the development of activity-based programs where young fathers from diverse populations can interact with their own children as well as with other young fathers and their children
* provide young father support programs that are specific to the ages of children, the stages of the family life cycle, and the marital status of each young father
* develop programs and services for young fathers that include recreational activities and flexible schedules
* develop resources that provide practical tips to help young fathers understand and deal with challenges associated with parenting and their intimate relationships
* provide a 24 hour help line and establish a website that offers counselling support, information, and referral services

**Appendix 1 Funding Options and Criteria (as of May, 2011)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Program: | Regular Employment Insurance | Maternal or Paternal Employment Insurance | Alberta Employment and Immigration Alberta Works - Learner’s Benefits | Alberta Children and Youth Services Advancing Futures Bursary | Alberta Employment and Immigration Alberta Works – Not Expected to Work | Alberta Children and Youth Services |
| Criteria: | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Paid into the Employment Insurance account | | x |  |  |  |  |  |
| Pregnant, recently given birth, adopting a child, or caring for a newborn | |  | x |  |  |  |  |
| Regular weekly earnings decreased by more than 40%; accumulated 600 insured hours in the last 52 weeks or since last claim | |  | x |  |  |  |  |
| 18 and older | | x |  | x |  | x | x |
| Out of regular *Kindergarten-Grade 12 (K-12)*  school system for minimum of 12 consecutive months | |  |  | x |  |  |  |
| Alberta resident | | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Under 16 | |  |  |  |  |  | x - maybe |
| Not receiving income support from other sources ie: Employment Insurance | |  |  | x |  |  |  |
|  | Program: | Regular Employment Insurance | Maternal or Paternal Employment Insurance | Alberta Employment and Immigration Alberta Works - Learner’s Benefits | Alberta Children and Youth Services Advancing Futures Bursary | Alberta Employment and Immigration Alberta Works – Not Expected to Work | Alberta Children and Youth Services |
| Criteria: | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Teens who are 16 or 17 years old and pregnant | |  |  |  |  |  | x - maybe |
| Teens who are 16 and 17 years old and parenting | |  |  | x - maybe |  |  | x - maybe |
| Teens who are 18 years old and parenting must work less than 20 hours per week | |  |  | x |  |  |  |
| Living on Reserve | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Attending School on Reserve | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Leaving On Reserve School for Off Reserve School | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Not Canadian Citizen or Permanent Resident who is still under sponsorship | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Receiving Employment Insurance | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Savings exceeded threshold | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Program: | Regular Employment Insurance | Maternal or Paternal Employment Insurance | Alberta Employment and Immigration Alberta Works - Learner’s Benefits | Alberta Children and Youth Services Advancing Futures Bursary | Alberta Employment and Immigration Alberta Works – Not Expected to Work | Alberta Children and Youth Services |
| Criteria: | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Partner’s income exceeds threshold | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Whether pregnant or parenting, Terra clients under 16 | |  |  |  |  |  | x-maybe |
| Pregnant 16 and 17 year olds who are not ‘at risk’ | |  |  |  |  |  | x - maybe |
| Living Independently – Must be assessed by Alberta Children and Youth Services and a Letter of Recommendation issued | |  |  | x |  |  |  |
| Living with Partner who is Under 18 – Clients under the age of 18 living with a partner or spouse under the age of 18 | |  |  | x |  |  |  |
| Pregnant 18 and 19 year olds qualify if they have been out of school for 12 consecutive months and are working fewer than 20 hours per week | |  |  | x |  |  |  |
| Employed or employable and able to sustain full-time employment in the competitive labour market | |  |  | x |  | x |  |
| Able to participate in an educational or training program leading to employment in the competitive labour market | |  |  |  |  | x |  |
|  | Program: | Regular Employment Insurance | Maternal or Paternal Employment Insurance | Alberta Employment and Immigration Alberta Works - Learner’s Benefits | Alberta Children and Youth Services Advancing Futures Bursary | Alberta Employment and Immigration Alberta Works – Not Expected to Work | Alberta Children and Youth Services |
| Criteria: | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| able to be employed but temporarily unavailable for employment because of a health problem of six months duration or less | |  |  |  |  | x |  |
| or responsible for the care of a child under 12 months of age | |  |  | x |  |  |  |
| not expected to be capable of sustaining full-time employment in the competitive labour market | |  |  | x |  |  |  |
| Have been in the care or custody of Alberta Children and Youth Services for a minimum of 546 days during the age of 13 to 22 years | |  |  |  |  | x |  |
| Are pursuing studies in a Government of Alberta recognized educational program. The 546-day requirement and age requirements are not subject to Program Manager discretion. | |  |  |  |  | x |  |

1. Howell, Janet (2011) *Summary Final Evaluation Report: Young Dads Services,* Edmonton: Terra. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://fira.ca/cms/documents/50/Young\_Fathers.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Retrieved on July 18, 2011 from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2009001/article/10864-eng.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Retrieved on July 14, 2011 from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2010004/article/11360-eng.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Retrieved on July 14, 2011 from: <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/cs/sp/hrsd/prc/publications/research/2000-000063/page06.shtml> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Although the scope of this report does not allow for in-depth analysis of different population groups, it should not be ignored that the high school non-completion rate of First Nation males over 25 in 2005 was 61%. Retrieved on July 18, 2011 from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2009001/article/10864-eng.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Retrieved on May 10, 2011 from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2010004/article/11339-eng.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Levin, Benjamin Reforming Secondary Education *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy,* Issue #1, May, 1995 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Bowlby, J.W., & McMullen, K. (2002). *At a Crossroads: First Results for the 18 to 20-Year-old Cohort of the Youth in Transition Survey*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada. (Catalogue no. RH64-12/2002E-IN) 2002 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Retrieved on July 18, 2011 from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2009001/article/10864-eng.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. While other researchers have found similar views expressed by young fathers and mothers, care must be taken in over-generalizing from our findings given the relatively small and non-random samples in our focus and young parenting groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Retrieved on May 10, 2011 from: <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/cs/sp/hrsd/prc/publications/research/2000-000063/page06.shtml>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Preddy G.N., P. Lightfoot, J. Edwards, N. Fraser-Lee and A. Brown. 2005. *How Healthy are We? A report of the Medical Officer of Health.* Capital Health, Edmonton. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Adapted from: <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/cs/sp/hrsd/prc/publications/research/2000-000063/page06.shtml>. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Retrieved on April 1, 2011 from: <http://www.cccg.umontreal.ca/RC19/PDF/Noel-A_Rc192009.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Retrieved on July 15, 2011 from: <http://report.hcom.ca/factors/social-factors/young-parenthood/#fn31> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For a more extended discussion on men’s help seeking behavior see: Long, David (2008) *All Dads Matter: towards a socially inclusive vision for father involvement in Canada*. Guelph: FIRA. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Howell, A. (2011:31) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Mondor, A. (2009). Improving High School Completion Rates of Pregnant and Parenting Teens: Paths to Financial Assistance. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For a critical analysis of challenges associated with the delivery and use of “father friendly” services see: Long, 2008 (cited above). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Howell, A. (2011:19) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The one high school in Edmonton specifically dedicated to the educational success of young parents is Braemar School, although its educational programs and support services are only offered to pregnant or parenting teen mothers. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Levin, Benjamin (1995) Reforming Secondary Education *Canadian Jurnal of Educational Administration and Policy,* Issue #1, May, 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Howell, A. (2011:30). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Mondor, A. (2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Appendix 1 for a chart containing a complete listing of programs and criteria of eligibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. http://www.gov.ab.ca/servicealberta/lowerincomeguide/LowerIncomeGuide.txt [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/915.cfm [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/787.cfm [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/foreign\_workers/ei\_tfw/ceie\_tfw.shtml [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. A basic definition of social capital is the set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permit cooperation among them and that each member can benefit from personally, socially and economically. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For an insightful evaluation and list of recommendations on services for young dads services see Howell, 2011. Many of the recommendations contained in Howell’s report complement those that are outlined below, although Howell’s recommendations are fairly program specific. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)