ALL
Dads
Matter

Towards an Inclusive Vision for Father Involvement Initiatives in Canada

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The intent of this paper is to promote informed dialogue and debate. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of FIRA or of other researchers/collaborators associated with FIRA. Communications can be addressed to the author.

About the Author

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada has long had an international reputation as a country that welcomes diversity and supports equality. Nonetheless, there is a lack of coordinated, state-sponsored human service policy and program support for diverse populations of fathers/parents in this country. This lack is despite the fact that fathers and parents from socially, politically, legally and/or economically disadvantaged populations consistently report feeling like failures and/or that they lack any and all sense of entitlement to be a parent. Many experience sadness, confusion, frustration and anger about their lack of "success," the minimal control they have over their own lives, and their inability to provide and care for "all their relations" as they would like. Many also note that their reluctance to share their confusion, pain, sadness and sense of loss with family members, friends, counsellors and other human service providers is in part related to their shame at not measuring up to a relatively narrow, "responsible father" ideal. Their resulting feelings of being culturally invisible are exacerbated by highly stereotypical, discriminatory beliefs and attitudes towards members of disadvantaged populations in general and disadvantaged populations of fathers/parents in particular. While Canadians in general may welcome and even celebrate diversity, it is thus obviously a much more significant challenge to initiate human service policies and programs that address the diverse circumstances and social support needs of the fathers/ parents who live in this country.

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The following paper addresses the lack of coordinated support for diverse populations of fathers/parents in Canada by articulating a socially inclusive vision for father/parent involvement initiatives. The best/wise policy and program initiatives discussed throughout the paper illustrate that working towards a more socially inclusive ordering of society requires more than a willingness to engage in an ongoing dialogue that seeks to cultivate respect and appreciation for diversity. The case studies of Aboriginal, immigrant and refugee as well as gay, bisexual and trans-gendered father/parent involvement initiatives highlight that those responsible for initiating policies and programs must also be committed to challenging assimilationist thinking by supporting more just and equitable social, economic, legal and political processes and structures. They also indicate that socially inclusive father/parent involvement initiatives will seek to address the particular interpersonal, cultural, organizational, political and economic issues specific to the populations and communities being served.

... cultivating a strength-based, socially inclusive vision for positive father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives requires creative vision and shared commitment ...

Furthermore, the case studies bring to light that developing a socially inclusive vision for father/parent involvement in Canada requires confronting numerous interpersonal, cultural, organizational and socio-structural factors that contribute to power imbalance and social inequality within and between diverse populations and communities. As noted early on in the paper, addressing these factors requires critical analysis of the ways in which a wide variety of cultural assumptions surrounding men, masculinities, father/parenthood and community development hinder individuals, agencies, organizations and communities from developing policies and programs that promote positive father/parent involvement.

It is clear throughout the paper that cultivating a strength-based, socially inclusive vision for positive father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives requires creative vision and shared commitment to honouring the diverse backgrounds, experiences, gifts and insights of individual parents, families and communities throughout the country. It is also evident that when policy developers and program providers respect and seek to understand the character and dynamics of the communities they serve, they are better equipped to contribute to the development of socially inclusive father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives. Recommendations included at the end of the paper therefore highlight the need for:

1) increasing support throughout Canadian society for socially inclusive father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives among different levels of government, communities, media organizations, educational institutions, health-care facilities, non-governmental human service organizations, corporations and small businesses, and researchers;

2) raising awareness and positive interest within government and non-government organizations and agencies as well as communities throughout Canada in support of father/parent involvement initiatives; and

3) the development of socially inclusive policy and program initiatives by organizations, agencies and communities that work with and on behalf of fathers/parents from diverse populations in Canada.

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Clearly, there is overwhelming consensus among FIRA participants and others who work with and on behalf of fathers/parents in Canada that the development of a socially inclusive vision for father/parent involvement in all policy and program discussions requires vigilance and commitment to engaging in transformative, intercultural dialogue. Such dialogue will be inclusive and transformative to the extent that it is based on "insiders" as well as "outsiders" sharing a respect for the integrity of individuals, families and diverse communities as well as a commitment to cultivating natural and more formal networks of support in all types of families and communities. In order to promote the types of interpersonal, cultural and structural changes necessary to transform the roots of exclusion, the case studies suggest a number of ways in which it is possible to cultivate a deeper understanding of and appreciation for diversity by bringing together those in positions of social, economic, legal and/or political power with those who experience exclusion in social, economic, legal and/or political terms.

Few would dispute that there are many challenges faced by those committed to providing meaningful support for diverse populations of fathers/parents in Canada. Nonetheless, the case studies examined in this paper signify that socially inclusive father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives are possible to the extent that those involved honour the integrity and socially embedded, intimate character of relationships that men have with their children. The case studies also signify that while there is a lack of coordinated, state-sponsored human service policy and program support for diverse populations of fathers/parents in this country, there in nonetheless widespread support in Canada for a more socially inclusive approach to father/parent involvement initiatives. The hope shared by fathers/parents as well as those involved in positive father/parent involvement initiatives across the country is that such widespread support will continue to advance the development of policies and programs that are based upon the rather simple and straightforward idea that "all dads matter." The challenge, it seems, is for this rather basic idea to inform the Canadian public consciousness and the coordination of state-sponsored father/parent involvement initiatives to the extent that it informs the best/wise policy and program initiatives discussed throughout this paper.

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Introductory Remarks

All dads matter: it sounds quite simple and obvious. Most of us take for granted that fathers play an essential role in the lives of their children, families and communities. However, the phrase "all dads matter" is used here not as a "fatherhood statement," but as a call to develop a socially inclusive vision for father involvement policy and program initiatives in Canada. This means acknowledging that even though there is appreciation expressed once a year to those who have the privilege of being a father/parent, not all fathers/parents in this country are as "privileged" and publicly appreciated as others.[1] An inclusive vision for father/parent involvement initiatives therefore calls for policy and program developers to be responsive to the diverse experiences, circumstances and support needs of all fathers and parents in Canada.

That certain culturally, legally and/or economically disadvantaged fathers/parents may not seem to matter presents a critical challenge to researchers as well as public policy and program developers. While researchers are responsible to honour the diverse voices, experiences and insights of those they seek to understand, public officials and service providers are often quick to respond to calls for action by initiating policies and programs based on limited understanding of the problems they are attempting to address. As Gurr (2004: xxxvii) notes,

> Scholars writing on public policy can contribute to such inappropriate responses by the ways in which they go about calling for a redirection of public efforts. It is not uncommon for critics to condemn existing programs and policy while at the same time calling for new ones, in the touching faith that more spending and social experiments tomorrow will accomplish what yesterday's expensive and innovative programs failed to do. Research that adds to the understanding of the general process by which the social policy [and program] agenda in Canada is shaped could be most instructive.

Along with paying critical attention to the social processes and structures that shape social policies and programs, it is equally important that those involved in the study, development and delivery of father/parent involvement initiatives in Canada take into account the factors that contribute to the perspectives and experiences people

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[1] As discussed in more detail below, the use of the term fathers/parents in socially inclusive discussions is necessitated by individuals who do not necessarily self-identify as male (i.e. transsexual and trans-gendered).

have of fatherhood and fathering. For example, popular literature and mass media in Canada and the United States present a relatively homogeneous cultural message about what fatherhood means (LaRossa *et al.*, 2000).[2] This message, that fathers are white, married, middle-class, heterosexual, emotionally distant, and for the most part relationally challenged in their role as parent, reinforces on a daily basis not only a common cultural perspective on "fatherhood," but also who fathers are and how they actually behave in relation to their children (LaRossa *et al.*, 2000). A major shortcoming of these culturally hegemonic messages surrounding fatherhood is that they tend to ignore that each person's ethno-cultural background, sexual identity and orientation, religious upbringing, peer relations, size and location of community of origin, social class, educational experience, parents' marital status, and personal experience are deeply embedded in one's personal perspective on and attitude towards fatherhood and fathering. As the following discussion demonstrates, understanding the social embeddedness as well as honouring the uniqueness of relationships between men and their children is central to all best/wise policy and program initiatives for father/parent involvement. It is therefore critical that those who are committed to cultivating a socially inclusive vision for father involvement policy and program initiatives listen carefully to the stories of many different fathers/ parents. In order to encourage socially inclusive dialogue that brings coherence and hopeful direction to father/parent involvement initiatives in Canada, the following paper will therefore:

- Present a brief summary of international and Canadian developments in support of positive father involvement;

- Articulate a perspective on social inclusion that honours the diversity of personal experience and social circumstance evident in the lives of fathers throughout this country;

- Identify a number of key cultural and structural issues that have informed human service policy and program development in Canada;

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[2] The distinction made in the literature is between fatherhood as a set of cultural messages and fathering as a set of ongoing practices (LaRossa, 2000).

- Highlight a number of major cultural, political, legal, and socio-economic issues that bear on father/parent involvement discussions through examination of case studies involving aboriginal, immigrant, and gay, bisexual, transgendered and transsexual (GBT) fathers/parents in this country;

- Provide examples of best/wise policy and program initiatives that have sought to address these issues;

- Suggest directions for further research and propose recommendations for the development of an approach to father/parent involvement policies and programs that are socially inclusive in spirit as well as in practice.

International and Canadian Developments in Father Involvement Initiatives

In 2004, experts from around the world met in Oxford, England at the first United Nations World Summit on Fatherhood. Along with senior U.N. delegates, participants included experts from India, Russia, Brazil, the United States, Australia, Cameroon, Jamaica, Sweden, Israel, Turkey and Egypt. The goal of the summit was to develop a series of policy positions on how the promotion of involved fatherhood could aid child health and development and gender equality across the world.[3] In that same year, the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women called for governments and all other stakeholders to promote understanding and develop policies, programs and school curricula that encourage and maximize the positive involvement of fathers.[4]

Fortunately, over the past 40 years academics, policy researchers, human service providers and community activists have generated a wealth of information related to father involvement (Allen and Daly, 2006; Lero *et al.*, 2006). For example, research has found that men who are positively involved in their children's lives develop

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[3] The summit was organised by Fathers Direct, a charitable national information centre on fatherhood founded in England in 1999 to promote close and positive relationships between men and their children. See: http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=14andcID=102

[4] http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=14andcID=102

better communication skills (Doherty *et al.*, 1998), and tend to hold more positive and realistic attitudes towards marriage and parenting (Cowan and Cowan, 1992; Eggebean and Knoester, 2001; Lamb, 1997). Positively involved fathers develop the ability to contribute in positive ways to the building of healthy relationships throughout the family life cycle (Christiansen *et al.*, 2001; McBride and Rane, 1998 Pruett, 1997; Snarey, 1993), and report feeling both much closer to their family and a greater sense of responsibility towards their family and community (Bouchard and Lee, 2000; Cooksey and Fondell, 1996). In general, men who are positively involved in their children's lives feel more self-confident and effective as parents (DeLuccie, 1996), feel more intrinsically important to their children (Lamb, 1987), and express greater understanding and acceptance of their children (Almeida and Galambos, 1991).

While positive father involvement is personally and socially beneficial to men in many ways, it is equally beneficial to children and families. Research involving men and their children also indicate a strong correlation between positive father involvement and children's cognitive, emotional, relational and physical well-being (Summer *et al.*, 2001; Vogel *et al.*, 2003). From infancy through late adolescence, children whose fathers are positively involved in their lives have higher measures of cognitive functioning (Gadsden and Ray, 2003; McBride *et al.*, 2005; Nugent, 1991; Pederson *et al.*, 1979), think and feel much more positively about themselves and their educational and career achievements (Amato, 1994; Flouri, 2005; Furstenberg and Harris, 1993), relate better to peers (Dubowitz *et al.*, 2001; Ducharme, Doyle and Markiewicz, 2001), siblings (Volling and Belsky, 1992) and strangers (Biller, 1993), and are more likely to be healthy and experience fewer health related problems (Horn and Sylvester, 2002; Strauss and Knight, 1999). Moreover, research on child development has found a correlation between positive father involvement and less substance abuse among adolescents (Coombs and Landsverk, 1988), lower rates of delinquency (Zimmerman *et al.*, 1995), less drug use, truancy, and stealing (Barnes, 1984; Bronte-Tinkew, Moore and Carrano, 2006), less drinking (Harris *et al.*, 1991), and a lower frequency of acting out, disruptive behaviour, depression, and lying (Harris *et al.*, 1998; King and Sobolewski, 2006; Mosley and Thompson, 1995). Adolescents who identified strongly with their fathers are 80 per cent less likely to have been incarcerated than their peers and 75 per cent less likely to become unwed parents (Furstenberg and Harris, 1994; Metzler *et al.*, 1994). Research has also indicated that positive father involvement at an early is negatively related to socio-economic

disadvantage later in life, with children being less likely to experience homelessness, receive state benefits, or live in subsidized housing (Flouri, 2005).

The extent of father involvement research being carried on throughout the world, coupled with the U.N. summit, both lend credence to the view that support for positive father involvement initiatives has become, in Engle and Breaux' terms, "a global concern" (Engle and Breaux, 1998:1). Although the summit involved representatives from more than 50 nations, a number of countries have led the way in promoting father involvement over the past few decades by bringing together the resources of a wide variety of stakeholders from governmental, academic, business, and community contexts (Horn, 2002; Lamb, 1997; Lewis and Warin, 2001; Vogel *et al.*, 2003). Especially notable in this regard are research, policy and program developments in Sweden, Australia, and the United States.

Support for families and fathers has long been part of the traditions and policy histories of Sweden and other Scandinavian countries (Arnlaugh, 2002). Particularly in Sweden, efforts since the mid-1970s to support greater parental involvement have increasingly been framed in the context of work-life balance policies[5]. Along with reforms aimed at strengthening women's position in the labour market and at home, Sweden has sought to support families by giving both men and women the same rights and financial compensation to stay home and care for their children (Bekkengen, 1997). Along with developing generous parental leave policies, the Swedish government has partnered with community agencies, daycares and schools, and employers to develop policies and programs that enable Swedish fathers to be more actively involved in the early care of their children. For example, fathers are entitled to receive special training before their child is born, ten "daddy days" off work during the child's first month home, paid days off to care for a sick child or to visit their child's daycare or school, and extensive paid vacation (Haas and Hwang, 2005). Swedish parents are also entitled to share up to ten months of parental leave while receiving 80 per cent of their wages (Plantin, Manson and Kearney, 2003). These and other family and father friendly policies and programs have bolstered support for expressions of gender equality throughout Sweden. Specifically, they have provided

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[5] http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/lp/spila/wlb/16sweden.shtml

equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for Swedish women and men not only to become economically independent, but also to receive concrete support that enables them to care for their children as they would like (Bekkengen, 1997). Longitudinal studies have found that a significant proportion of Swedish fathers do take advantage of "daddy days" and parental leave policies in order to share parenting responsibilities (Haas and Hwang, 2005). However, it is not entirely clear how effective such policies are in encouraging men to remain involved in the day to day care of their children after they return to full-time work. Nonetheless, Haas and Hwang (2005) assert that efforts by governmental and community agencies to expand the definition of a good father to include both direct involvement in childcare and close relations with ones children do appear to be making a positive difference in the attitudes and behaviours of Swedish fathers.

A similar degree of attention to research-informed, father involvement policy and program development in the United States was formalised in 1995 when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) established the National Fatherhood Initiative. Later that year, HHS established The Department Working Group to provide co-ordinated leadership on responsible fatherhood initiatives[6] in the U.S with representatives from other government departments, community agencies, academics and other stakeholders. In contrast to Sweden, however, state-sponsored father involvement initiatives in the U.S. have tended to focus on addressing problems associated with absent fathers and low-income families. These include problems in school (Horn and Sylvester, 2002), psychological, emotional, and behavioural problems in a variety of interpersonal contexts (Horn and Sylvester, 2002; Park, 1996; Pfiffner, McBurnett, and Rathouze, 2001; Carlson, 2006) and risks associated with promiscuous, delinquent, and criminal behaviour (DeMuth and Brown, 2004; Ellis *et al.*, 2003; Horn and Sylvester, 2002). A number of major governmental policy and program initiatives developed in response to the "absent father/low income problem" over the past 30 years include: Partners for Fragile Families, Strengthening the Role of Non-Custodial Fathers, Welfare Reform through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program, Abstinence Education, Involving Fathers in Early Head Start, Helping Fathers in the Criminal

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[6] http://www.fatherhood.org/history.asp

Justice System, Promoting Safe and Stable Families, Access and Visitation Programs, Strategies to Promote Marriage, Healthy Start, and Reducing Family Violence. Along with these and many other initiatives that seek to address problems associated with father involvement in the U.S., HHS also works directly and in collaboration with other federal agencies, universities, private foundations and community-based organizations to gather information on father involvement in the U.S. and to improve research and evaluation mechanisms related to family formation and fathering[7].

There is similar evidence of long-standing government support in Australia. During the mid-1990s, the Family and Children's Services Branch of the Australian Government established the Department of Men and Family Relationships Services (MFRS). The mandate of MFRS is to work with men and assist them in developing policies and programs that help men manage a range of relationship issues with partners, ex-partners and children.[8] MFRS also sponsors conferences and forums, including the National Men and Family Relationship Forum in 2007.[9] The purpose of the 2007 forum, entitled "Change is Happening," was to highlight the range of services that have developed across Australia as well as bring together policy and program developers interested in new developments in programs for men and families. The Australian government has also funded a number of longitudinal studies of relevance to fathering. The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey explores many dimensions of work and family life among diverse populations in Australia, including relationships and parenting, as well as personal attitudes, health and subjective well-being.[10] The Growing Up in Australia project is part of a longitudinal study of Australian children, and includes examination of the impacts and influences of fathers in relation to their children (Sanson *et al.*, 2002). One of the main purposes of the Growing Up in Australia project is to bolster understanding of the changes that occur in father's involvement with their children across major life transitions, including separation, remarriage, and

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[7] http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/index.shtml

[8] In 2006, the University of Newcastle launched a website to develop a National Framework For Father-Inclusive Practice. See: www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/efathers/includingfathers

[9] www.mfrn.net.au.

[10] http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/

changes in employment status (Sanson *et al.*, 2002). Separate though related to this project is a longitudinal study of Indigenous children designed to provide data for the development of policies and programs that would improve the life chances of Indigenous people in general and Indigenous children in particular.[11] Lastly, Mensline Australia offers a fathering program for rural and remote fathers with children under the age of seven years. The program provides long-term support for dads through: (1) strategies such as communication and negotiation skills to improve relationships with children, parents and third parties; (2) referrals to other programs in local communities; (3) opportunities for an ongoing call-back support program; and (4) positive strategies for dealing with parenting skills and relationships.[12]

Despite widespread recognition of the many positive as well as preventive benefits of positive father involvement policies and programs, until recently there has been little focused attention directed towards policy and program support for men with children in Canada. Not surprisingly, even less critical attention had been paid to identifying the ways in which existing policies and programs may privilege the social support needs of certain populations of fathers and ignore those of others. In 2003, the first national initiative promoting the comprehensive study of policy and program initiatives for father involvement in Canada was established at the University of Guelph.[13] The Father Involvement Research Alliance (FIRA) invited researchers, government and human service agency representatives, and fathers/parents from diverse populations and communities across Canada to explore father involvement in Canada and to propose suggestions for policy and program initiatives.

Along with working towards the development of a number of "general principles" for father involvement policy and program initiatives in the country,[14] FIRA established a number of research clusters involving scholars and practitioners to examine father/

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[11] Fact Sheet #10 - Support for Indigenous People. www.atsia.gov.au/facts/old/fs_cdep10.pdf

[12] http://www.menslineaus.org.au/

[13] FIRA is a Community/University Research Alliance (CURA) project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The specific goal of CURA projects is to mobilize different kinds of knowledge within communities by forging relationships between university researchers and community organizations and agencies. See their website at: http://www.fira.uoguelph.ca//ABOUT/index.htm

[14] http://www.fira.uoguelph.ca/News/ViewNews.cfm?news_ID=45

parent involvement issues within particular populations. Specifically, the seven clusters included Indigenous, immigrant, new, separated and divorced, fathers with special needs children, young, as well as gay, bisexual, transgendered and transsexual (GBT) fathers/parents.[15] Although research results from these clusters highlight a number of similar experiences and issues faced by fathers/parents in all populations, the significant differences both within and between populations clearly suggest the value of developing a socially inclusive perspective on father/parent involvement.

Given the complexity of the father/parent landscape in Canada, the following discussion focuses attention on social inclusion issues for Indigenous, immigrant and refugee as well as GBT fathers/parents. Although any population of fathers/parents could have been included in our analysis, these three populations were chosen because of the unique confluence of political, economic, cultural and legal issues facing individuals from these populations.[16] This is not to ignore that fathers/parents from different backgrounds and in a wide variety of circumstances have many common experiences in relation to their children. Nonetheless, as the following analysis illustrates, many policies and programs developed on behalf of Aboriginal, immigrant and GBT fathers/parents in Canada reflect three unique visions for father/parent involvement initiatives in this country, visions that are, respectively, community, settlement and personal identity/individual rights-oriented.

Basically, a socially inclusive approach to providing support for fathers/parents in Canada requires a new way of thinking about who these men are, what father/parenthood actually means to them, and what challenges and obstacles they face in being positively involved in the lives of their children. It also requires addressing a number of questions that are fundamental to any socially inclusive analysis of father/parent involvement policies and programs, including:

- are there particular groups or populations of fathers/parents that tend to be supported by father involvement policy and program initiatives in Canada?

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[15] http://www.fira.uoguelph.ca/News/ViewNews.cfm?news_ID=45

[16] Taking into account the diverse socio-cultural, political, economic and legal issues facing the other populations of fathers/parents listed above would also contribute to quite different visions for F/PII.

- what are the dominant cultural assumptions and expectations surrounding fatherhood and fathering that inform these initiatives?

- are there populations of fathers/parents whose personal and social support needs have not been served well by these initiatives?

- in what ways do dominant cultural assumptions and expectations surrounding fatherhood and fathering hinder the development of more inclusive father/parent involvement initiatives?

- in what ways do interpersonal, organizational, community, legal, political, and economic factors also affect the design and delivery of father/parent involvement initiatives for different populations of fathers/parents in Canada?

- what would socially inclusive policy and program initiatives for father/parent involvement in Canada look like?

In general, high-level discussions about the concept of social inclusion tend to involve those who speak from positions of political, economic, legal and socio-cultural privilege (Luxton, 2005; Shakir, 2005). Consequently, it would seem to follow that policy and program initiatives would for the most part ignore and/or discount the particular needs and circumstances of certain populations of fathers/parents, particularly those who are excluded from discussions by virtue of being disadvantaged in some way. The diverse initiatives discussed in this paper indicate that in fact there is much more than abstract dialogue and support for the principle of social inclusion as it applies to father involvement in this country. Indeed, ongoing change in support of a wide variety of fatherhood involvement initiatives in this and other countries is engendered in part by the global development of a much more generous and varied ethno-cultural understanding of what fatherhood means and how men from different backgrounds and in diverse circumstances actually experience and behave in relation to their children. It is also the case that many father involvement conversations are being directed by groups of fathers/parents who see themselves in a non-privileged position.[17] From the perspective of those

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[17] For example, the international organization Fathers 4 Justice is "a cross section of concerned citizens who recognize the bias and injustice in the current family law where children are used as prizes. F4J is committed to Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA) and from time to time, civil disobedience, as part of its Twin Track strategy of publicity and political pressure." http://www.fathers-4-justice-canada.ca/.

committed to socially inclusive father involvement (FI) dialogue and action, all such developments are important since they challenge assumptions and arrangements that confirm the status quo. The three case studies examined in this paper in part illustrate the benefits that socially inclusive FI policies and programs bring to society in general and fathers/parents, families and communities in particular. They also indicate how and why a socially inclusive approach to father involvement policy and program initiatives must be informed by the diverse perspectives, questions and insights of individual fathers/parents and other members of their families and communities (Esté and Clarke, 2000; Long, 2006).

Commitment to the principles of social inclusion will also undoubtedly contribute at times to volatile FI dialogue and perhaps even divisive activity. Indeed, some may argue that commitment to social inclusion will contribute to both incoherence of vision as well as the inability to develop consensus around FI policies and programs that are sensitive to the needs and circumstances of diverse populations of fathers/parents. They may also regard the apparent lack of a coherent vision for FI policies and programs as proof that there is little policy and program support for diverse populations of fathers/parents in Canada.[18] As we see in the discussion that follows, this is clearly not the case. There are many programs and services offered in communities throughout the country by a wide variety of government, community-based, non-profit and charitable agencies and organizations that support positive father involvement.[19] The lack of public profile for many programs, particularly those delivered by schools, businesses and religious and other community-based organizations is due more to inadequate funding and the absence of national, provincial, and even municipal co-ordinating bodies than it is to poor promotion by program providers (Sadiq, 2004). Consequently, an important goal of FIRA is to develop a comprehensive father involvement network by forging relationships

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[18] For a more detailed inventory of legislation, policies and programs specific to each of the FIRA research cluster groups see Lero et al. (2006). A complete version of the inventory is available at: http://www.fira.uoguelph.ca/pdf/executive_summary/PolicyInventory-May2006-draft.pdf

[19] Ironically, the number of FI programs for fathers/parents in disadvantaged positions discovered by FIRA researchers suggest that in some respects it seems easier to attract these "types" of fathers to FI programs than it is to attract fathers from the dominant category. This raises the rather provocative question of what factors might contribute to fathers from the dominant category being at a disadvantage in relation to FI policy and program initiatives. Some of these factors are highlighted in the policy and program recommendation section at the end of this paper.

between university researchers, policy and program developers, and members of diverse organizations and communities throughout Canada.[20] What is emerging through the collective efforts of FIRA participants is a picture of positive father involvement policy and program initiatives that can be seen as anything but idiosyncratic or isolated. A more inclusive vision of father involvement initiatives will therefore enable us to see each and every policy, project, and program initiative as part of an emerging and sustained movement of those who are committed to enhancing support for the positive involvement of men with their children in this country. The challenge, it seems, is for the general public as well as legislative, policy and program developers to view each of these developments as important and beneficial to all parents and children in Canada. As the following discussion suggests, only a truly transformative perspective on social inclusion will enable this to happen.

Social Inclusion in Canada

A number of significant social, political and legal developments in Canada over the past forty years have altered the social architecture of fatherhood in this country. A few of the more significant developments discussed in this paper include cultural shifts in the definitions of men, masculinities and fatherhood, fundamental changes to relations involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada, developments in immigration and refugee settlement policies and programs, as well as recent amendments to human rights legislation supporting GLBT rights in general and same-sex marriage in particular. These and many other social and political developments have significantly raised public awareness around the challenge of initiating and maintaining support for social diversity in this country.

It should therefore not be surprising that academics and social policy and program developers adopted the concept of social inclusion when it emerged in the mid-1990s, for by encapsulating a number of cherished Canadian values[21] it seemed to support a vision for this country that many people living in Canada would be able to understand and welcome (Luxton, 2005; Richmond, 2005; Shakir, 2005). Nonetheless,

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[20]   For complete information visit the FIRA website at: http://www.fira.uoguelph.ca/Home/

[21]   For complete information visit the FIRA website at: http://www.fira.uoguelph.ca/Home/

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Shakir (2005) cautions against taking for granted that those who use the language of inclusion are necessarily committed to its fundamental principles of embracing diversity and pursuing social, economic, legal and political justice. She asserts that even the most well-intentioned social and economic policies and programs can hinder and in many cases even prevent certain individuals, groups and whole populations from being included. Furthermore, the important question raised by Shakir (2005:207) is: "included in what?" Shakir (2005) notes that an assimilationist vision of social inclusion focuses primarily on removing the cultural, legal and/or economic barriers that prevent certain individuals, groups and populations from receiving all the privileges of citizenship. Not only does this perspective take for granted that there is something fundamentally right about being in "the centre," it also presupposes that the goal of inclusion is to expand the centre to include those who are willing to pursue some predetermined version of "the good life."

In contrast, those who support a fundamentally transformative, liberating vision of social inclusion recognize that by definition it contests any particular notion of "the good life." A vision that is truly inclusive seeks to ensure that people with different values, attitudes, life circumstances and wisdom have equal opportunity to participate in the social, political and economic transformation of society (Munck, 2005; Richmond and Saloojee, 2005). In this light, the work of the Laidlaw Foundation has made a significant contribution to social inclusion dialogue in Canada. Richmond and Saloojee (2005) introduce their discussion of "Social Inclusion as Policy" by asking a number of fundamental questions about the evolution of social inclusion in relation to policy, whether or not people are working with a common definition of the concept, and what the concept of social inclusion means for issues such as the racialization of poverty. These are in line with Munck's (2005) questions of what a transformative, socially inclusive approach to globalization and its discontents would mean in practice, and how it would be achieved. Although many ideas and initiatives relating to social inclusion in Canada have their roots in similar dialogue and activity in France and England, Richmond and Saloojee (2005) provide proper focus to dialogue on social inclusion dialogue in Canada by asking which theories and practices are most relevant in developing a made-in-Canada version of social inclusion that is relevant to policy. This question draws attention to the fact that although there are certain universal principles to social inclusion as a general, dynamic process,

it is a process that has quite distinct policy and program implications in different political, economic and cultural contexts.

Along with being rooted in practice that recognizes and respects diversity, a progressive and policy-relevant version of social inclusion must also bear the mark of many different voices. To achieve this, Richmond and Saloojee (2005:31) assert that socially inclusive policy must:

- deal with the structural roots of exclusion;
- be rooted in community (self-)organization and mobilization;
- be transformative.

A truly inclusive approach to social policy and program development must therefore result in real, applied policy changes that transform exclusive perspectives and practices into inclusive ones. Accordingly, discussions of social inclusion must engage the concept of social exclusion since, as Sen (2000) argues, social exclusion draws attention to "the multidimensionality of deprivation and its emphasis on relational processes rather than the individual." Similarly, Madanipour *et al.* (1998:22) define social exclusion as

> a multidimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes.

The question, then, is what factors and processes contribute to certain groups and populations in society being excluded, fully or partially, from the social, economic, political or cultural systems that determine the social integration of a person in society. (Walker and Walker, 1997)

Particularly during the 1970s, social inclusion initiatives that emerged in both Europe and the U.S. sought to address societal conditions that prevented people in relatively disadvantaged circumstances from having greater economic control over their lives. One of the main reasons for this was that, particularly in Europe, much social inclusion dialogue focussed on societal conditions that promoted economic exclusion (Peace, 2001). As Richmond (2005) notes, however, examining the structural

factors that contribute to economic exclusion provides limited insight into the socio-cultural dimensions of exclusion and ignores the processes required to promote social inclusion.

One could argue that social inclusion and exclusion are two sides of the same conceptual coin, and that it doesn't matter who initiates the dialogue or where the dialogue starts as long as the result is a more inclusive society. In some respects this is true, for both opposition to social exclusion as well as support for social inclusion can emerge from within the ideological framework and experience of those who are dominant or dominated. But increased attention to social inclusion over the past 30 years suggests that there may be an important difference between the two terms. Early social exclusion research and writing in Europe and the United States acknowledged a variety of factors that hindered social inclusion (Peace, 2001), although for the most part it represented the voice and experience of those already in positions of social, economic, political and intellectual privilege (Shakir, 2005). In contrast, more recent developments in support of social inclusion cultivate a transformative "dialogue of difference" by inviting critical questions that emerge from the unique insights of many different voices (Long and LaFrance, 2004). The value of exploring the multi-dimensional character of social inclusion from the perspective of many different voices is that it prevents a perspective of inclusion as assimilation, since inclusion must, by its nature, change what is at the centre (Saloojee, 2005). As Munck (2005:10) notes:

Social inclusion assumes that existing social relations, institutions and cultural practices must be transformed to accommodate everyone. It implies that the centre must be reconfigured to encompass the practices of those from the margins. . . . Great care must be taken to ensure that policies aimed at integration do not result in assimilation.

Social policies and programs that are truly inclusive will therefore seek to address the fullness of the social, legal and political as well as economic experiences, circumstances and perspectives of those whom they are intended to serve. For Richmond and Saloojee (2005), this means ensuring that inclusive policy and program initiatives link poverty and economic vulnerability with other sources of exclusion such as racism, disability, rejection of difference and historic oppression. Gilbert (2003:3) asserts that such efforts will contribute to solidarity and the forging of

alliances "among those who have been marginalized and alter the more conventional concern about bringing the 'outsider' in, leading to an examination of into what the marginalized and vulnerable are being included."

Those who are committed to cultivating a mutually respectful dialogue of difference will also need to acknowledge that there is often disagreement within particular communities and populations in relation to what socially inclusive father/parent involvement policies and programs would look like and how they should be developed. In other words, while there may appear to be similarities as well as obvious differences between those who are privileged and those who are not, it is important to acknowledge that disadvantaged populations are by no means homogeneous (Ferris *et al.* 2005; Tyyksa, 2005). That members of particular communities and populations can and do have very different experiences, perspectives and needs suggests that efforts to cultivate an inclusive dialogue of difference will be an ongoing challenge for even the most inclusive of organizations, communities and societies. Before discussing examples of the ways in which father/parent involvement policy and program developers seek to address similarities as well as diversity within and between the three populations examined, we discuss a number of key issues and concepts that have informed social policy and human service program delivery in Canada.

The Social and Political Context of Father Involvement Policies and Programs

Developments in Canada that continue to hinder support for social programming in general and father involvement initiatives in particular emerged during the mid-1990s with the introduction of the Canadian Health and Social Transfer (Vanier Institute of the Family, 2006). The transfer was an expression of the government's long-standing agenda, begun in the mid 1970s, to focus on deficit and debt reduction rather than on building and funding infrastructure that would support social programs and benefits (IRPP, 2003). Not only did this lead to funding cuts for a wide range of social programs but, together with the termination of the Canada Assistance Plan, it lessened federal responsibility in providing leadership and the articulation of national standards and goals with respect to services and programs for individuals

and families in need (Asselin, 2001). Federal and provincial government policy and program initiatives increasingly called upon communities, organizations and individuals to develop capacities that would enable them to adapt to changing social and economic conditions. Even though policy statements expressed support for the "building of individual, organizational and community capacities," the very funding that would enable people to adapt was steadily reduced (IRPP, 2003:18). Reduction in funding, coupled with increased policy directives for community organizations to mobilise resources more efficiently and effectively, continues to challenge all human service organizations, including those committed to addressing the human support needs of fathers from socially and economically disadvantaged populations (Omdivar and Richmond: 2005). Overall, this devolution of the federal government's role in providing leadership has contributed not only to more variability in social policies and programs, but also to less visible accountability in relation to the provision and use of funds.

Although social inclusion became somewhat of a guiding principle during the 1990s for many Canadian politicians, policy makers, academics and program providers, it is clear that the concept of social inclusion can and does mean different things to different people (Richmond and Saloojee, 2005). Specifically, those who regard social inclusion as a mechanism to achieve stability and integration have a very different vision than those who view it as a process that welcomes difference and social transformation. In order to clarify the perspective on social inclusion adopted in this discussion, it is necessary to outline the meaning of a number of concepts and developments that have a bearing on socially inclusive dialogue and activity.

Inreach, Cultural Competence, and Intercultural Dialogue and Activity

Two concepts that can inform socially inclusive father/parent involvement policy and program dialogue and action are inreach and cultural competence. Unlike its colonising, mission-oriented counterpart, outreach, the concept of inreach implies a different attitude and approach to the development of intercultural relations. Outreach is an approach to offering help or support to "others" who appear from the outside to be disadvantaged, marginal, or somehow "lost." Although outreach

is a popular approach for certain types of religious mission work, the term is also commonly applied to the activities of other groups and organizations in a wide variety of contexts. Cross-cultural volunteer agencies, post-secondary educational institutions, and human service organizations also incorporate outreach into their vocabulary as a way of communicating their attitude towards the populations and people with whom they work (Davis and MacDonald, 1997). In each context, the assumptions and meaning of the term, as well as the negative effects it can and often does have in the lives of "others," are largely the same. This is with good reason, since only those with the right kind of economic, cultural, political and social capital at their disposal are interested in and able to engage in outreach. While cultural awareness and sensitivity-training programs provide a certain degree of understanding, they often fail to emphasize that the design and delivery of human service policies and programs need to be informed/transformed continually by input from those they are meant to serve.

Inreach cultivates respectful and mutually beneficial relationships (Long, 2006). It does so by paying critical attention to interpersonal, cultural and socio-structural factors that contribute to power imbalances and inequality. Inreach challenges participants to engage in critical self-reflection while listening to others. Consequently, it cultivates a liberating approach to developing cultural competence by inviting people to engage in open, safe dialogue that values the talents, contributions and support networks of all participants. Since cultural competence means having the capacity to function effectively in different contexts and with different populations, the development of cultural competence will involve:

> The integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people in specific standards, policies, practices and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services, thereby producing better outcomes. [22]

Developing cultural competence through inreach therefore challenges a number of outreach assumptions, including: (1) that "others" are in need of help and support from outsiders who have a degree of material, economic or ideological power over them, and

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[22] US Centers for Disease Control and Protection http://www.edcnpin.org/scripts/population/culture.asp

(2) that outsiders with a certain degree of power do not need any help or support from those they define as "other." In contrast, inreach assumes that all human relationships involve privileged encounters that deserve to be respected and validated.

One of the benefits of inreach is that it contributes to genuinely intercultural dialogue and understanding. In contrast to an ethnocentric, outreach-based approach to developing cultural competence that seeks to prepare those from a dominant culture to work sensitively within "other" cultural contexts, intercultural dialogue is based on the belief that:

> While each culture draws from its own roots, it must not fail to blossom when crossing other cultures. It (intercultural dialogue) isn't a matter of identifying and safeguarding every culture in isolation, but rather of revitalizing them in order to avoid segregation and cultural entrenchment and prevent conflict (UNESCO, 2006).[23]

Intercultural dialogue and activity are based on a fundamental respect for differences as well as for everyone's right to live according to his or her own beliefs, values, customs and normative ways (AFS, 2006).[24] By privileging the diverse experiences, insights, and cultural ways of all participants equally, intercultural dialogue and activity contribute in positive ways to a socially inclusive de/reconstruction of society. Intercultural dialogue also acknowledges that culture is as much a dynamic process as it is an informal means by which small and large groups of people learn to share and build a sense of community. As participants learn how others live and make sense of their own lives, long-held stereotypes and misunderstandings are challenged and transformed. Before considering the extent to which this perspective is evident in policy and program initiatives for fathers/parents in three diverse populations, we briefly discuss a number of larger cultural contexts in which human service policies and programs in Canada are situated. The first involves prevailing cultural assumptions about men, masculinities, and the gendered arena that hinders men in general and fathers/parents from diverse backgrounds in particular from seeking out and/or receiving the support they need. The second cultural context is the largely

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[23] http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=11406andURL_DO=DO_TOPICandURL_SECTION=201.html

[24] http://www.afs.org/AFSI/

taken for granted world of assumptions, beliefs, attitudes and normative expectations surrounding fatherhood in Canadian society.

Father Involvement Initiatives and the "Problem" with Men

Charting an inclusive course for father involvement policy and program initiatives in Canada requires viewing them in the context of the cultural and structural place of men and fathers/parents in this country. It is now commonplace to assume that males, like females, internalize from a very young age a set of gender-based social relations that are personally and socially oppressive (Kaufman, 1987). Beginning in the early 1970s, pro-feminist research centred on a critique of the traditional male gender role (Connell, 1987; Pleck and Sawyer, 1974). Since then, many have argued that men's ability to develop and express a wide range of personality traits and social skills in relation to others has been severely compromised by their socialization within the very systems of domination that men are said to control (Franklin, 1988; Lorber, 1994; Zernike, 1998). As Kaufman (1987:13) notes:

> Masculinity is power. But masculinity is terrifyingly fragile because it does not really exist in the sense that we are led to think it exists, that is, as a biological reality – something real we have inside ourselves. It exists as ideology; it exists as scripted behaviour; it exists within "gendered" relationships.

Kaufman (1993) also asserts that a worthwhile consequence of men's studies was raised awareness that many areas of men's lives remained misunderstood and/or unexamined. One area that has been particularly misunderstood and unexamined is that of men's help-seeking behaviour.

The prevailing cultural assumption that men are much less likely than women to seek help from human service providers and health professionals is supported by research on men's help-seeking behaviour (Addis and Mahalik, 2003; Husaini, Moore, and Cain, 1994; Statistics Canada, 2001). One reason given for this is that women have more practical reasons for being in contact with health professionals (Bryant, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2001). It is also argued that gender socialization cultivates different propensities towards help-seeking behaviour (Frank, 2000; Rosenfeld, 2002; Waldron, 1994). While females are "encouraged" through norms of femininity to develop

supportive relationships, the norms of masculinity actively discourage males from doing so (Addis and Mahalik, 2003; Kaufmann, 1993).

Despite the fact that the concept of "male friendly" human services has been around since the 1970s, researchers have continued to focus narrowly on the question, "Why don't men ask for help?" Consequently, research into policy and program support for men continues to be informed by the assumption that health and relationship "problems" experienced by men have primarily to do with men's biologically and/or socially constructed inability to ask for the help they need. That men are viewed as "relationally deficient" is evident in questions that researchers ask in relation to men's help-seeking behaviour, such as: why do many men have difficulty asking for help? how are masculinity norms, stereotypes, and ideologies related to help-seeking behaviour? and how can health care professionals integrate an understanding of social norms and ideologies about masculinity into their analysis of men's use of health services? (Addis and Mahalik, 2003:5). The assumption that men's inability to ask for help is the main obstacle to men receiving the help they need is the foundation upon which the deficit-focussed approach to men's help-seeking behaviour is built and maintained. In order to address "the problem" of men's comparatively low rates of help-seeking behaviour, health professionals and others who work with men are therefore trained and encouraged to help men learn how to ask for help (Addis and Mahalik, 2003).

It is important to note, however, that the phrase "obstacles to men's help-seeking behaviour" can and does have multiple meanings. For Addis and Mahalik (2003:5), it refers to the psychological characteristics and internalized cultural messages surrounding maleness and masculinity which hinder men from asking for help. In contrast, obstacles to men's help-seeking behaviour can also refer to the ways that human-service policies and programs fail to take into account how men view their lives and relate to others (Long, 2004b). This alternative perspective on men's help-seeking behaviour is a strength-based model which assumes that men experience relationships and express themselves in ways that they value and understand, ways that may well differ from women's. Moreover, as Boyd (1996: xv) notes:

> Just as it is important to recognize that men's experience is not identical with human experience, so it is also important to appreciate that the experiences of all men are not the same. At different times, in different places and cultures,

in different social and economic classes within the same culture, men have
experienced their lives differently and have lived under different norms of
appropriate behaviour.

Rather than focusing narrowly on why men don't ask for help, this alternative model
focuses attention on the much broader question of why certain groups of men don't
get certain kinds of support and help that they need (Long, 2006; Roer-Strier *et al.*,
2005). Both approaches to men's help-seeking behaviour acknowledge that men's (lack
of) help-seeking behaviour can be understood in terms of psychological character
traits and internalized, socially constructed attitudes and expectations. However, the
strength-based approach also draws attention to cultural and structural factors that
hinder men from different populations receiving certain kinds of support, including
gender bias in the development of social policy and program initiatives. A number of
brief examples illustrate the benefits of viewing men's help-seeking behaviour from
a perspective that seeks to validate and understand the diverse circumstances and
experiences of males.

Respondents to both an enviroscan of human services in Edmonton, Alberta and
a national study on men's health in Canada overwhelmingly agreed that cultural,
organizational and governmental support for men has not kept up with the many
changes and challenges in men's lives (Long, 2004b; Long, 2005b). Respondents
also expressed confidence that many male clients would benefit greatly if their
experience as males were taken into account in the development and delivery
of health-related policies, programs and services. Ball and George (2006) as well
as Shimona *et al.* (2006) reported similar findings from their research involving
Aboriginal and immigrant/refugee fathers respectively. Along with identifying a
number of significant problems in men's service delivery in general and support
services for fathers in particular, participants in these studies offered numerous
recommendations for positive change in the development and delivery of more
"male friendly" human service policies and programs.[25]

Another recent example of the benefits of developing an alternative perspective
on men's relationships and help-seeking behavior is Edmonton's Men's Wellness
Forum (Long, 2006). The EMWF provided opportunity for policy developers and

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[25]   A number of these recommendations are included in the concluding section of this paper.

human service providers to learn, discuss and share information about best/wise practices in the delivery of programs to a number of male populations that included street-involved, aboriginal, immigrant, as well as gay, bisexual, transsexual and transgendered (GBT) men. The nine-month planning process that led up to the EMWF fostered unique connections by facilitating dialogue which involved a wide variety of stakeholders. Forum organizers and community members agreed that it was essential to draw upon the strengths, insights and natural social support networks of men in the selected target populations throughout the planning process. This inclusive approach to dialogue and planning enabled participants to see the value of drawing on the experiences and insights of diverse populations of men in the community at various stages in the development of human service policies and programs. Forum organizers did not ignore that men in disadvantaged situations often face numerous personal, interpersonal, cultural, and structural obstacles to positive involvement in their family and community relationships. Indeed, the forum brought to light the many ways in which men in general and men from certain populations in particular are at a disadvantage in relation to the human service system. The strength-based, capacity building focus of the EMWF nonetheless provided participants with an alternative perspective on how to understand and receive as well as offer positive policy and program support in relation to men.

These and many other similar initiatives across the country illustrate that developing a socially inclusive vision of father involvement in Canada requires a fundamentally new way of thinking about men in this society.[26] The timing for this kind of shift in thinking seems right, since it is evident that men's lives, as well as the countless cultural representations of men and masculinities, have "come a long way" since the days when father knew best. While mass media has represented masculinity in terms of increased possibility, self-indulgence, and sexual objectification, it has at times also told stories that resist identification with such traits (Gardiner, 2000). During the past forty to fifty years, mass media and other instruments of popular culture in the West have helped to challenge certain taken for granted images of "the family man" by altering the ways in which the roles of men in general and fathers in particular have been understood and portrayed (LaRossa *et al.*, 2000). While the responsible father of the past was defined largely in terms of his ability to care and provide for his family

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[26] An outline of the overall vision of FIRA and descriptions of the research clusters can be found on the FIRA website at: http://www.fira.uoguelph.ca/Home/

(Coltrane, 2007), it is increasingly the case that the traditional father knows best image of the 1950s has given way to images and story lines involving "dads" in a wide variety of marital, cultural, ethnic and economic circumstances.

Still lingering in the background and sometimes even the foreground of cultural representations and expectations of the family man, however, is the spectre of the absent father that took hold during the industrial revolution when the mass of fathers in many Western countries left their homes to work in factories (LaRossa *et al.*, 2000). Commentators such as Blankenhorn (1995) and Popenoe (1998) assert that throughout the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the apparent tendency had been for fathers to be emotionally disconnected from their children's lives. Initiatives supporting more "responsible fathering" have therefore called upon fathers to become much more emotionally connected to as well as actively involved in the lives of their children. But what it meant for fathers living in different, particularly disadvantaged circumstances to be responsibly involved in the lives of their children remained unclear. What was clear was that responsible fathers continued to be measured against a number of largely negative, highly Western, and rather constricting cultural images and ideals. Essentially, the normative characteristics of the responsible father are that he is

- emotionally strong and physically healthy,
- white, heterosexual, economically secure, married and over 20,
- willing and able to protect and provide for his child(ren)
- paying particular attention to the developmental needs of his children from birth to 6 years of age,
- actively involved with his resident child(ren) on a daily basis.

Men's studies and father involvement research from the early 1970s into the late 1990s, particularly in the U.S., often focussed for a variety of reasons on problems associated with the absent father, notably on how and why the father's daily absence from the home had resulted in the loss of a realistic model of how to be a man (Christiansen and Palkovitz, 2001; *Doherty et al.*, 1998; Fasteau, 1974; Pleck, 1987), as well as on the ways in which his absence contributed to all sorts of personal, familial, and social problems. Consequently, U.S. FI policies and programs have focussed to a

great extent on father absence and desertion, particularly among low-income, Black, inner-city families. The narrowness of this focus has been exacerbated by U.S. policies that, by restricting welfare to lone-parent families, have done little in the way of supporting poor families and helping them stay together.[27]

That this deficit view of father involvement continues to inform U.S. father involvement initiatives is not surprising, for although representations of fathers in popular culture have become more broad and diverse, general attitudes and expectations surrounding male gender roles in general and the roles and behaviours of fathers in particular remain rather traditional and culturally narrow (Coltrane, 2007). Around Father's Day throughout North America, there are numerous community service announcements and advertisements encouraging the public to "show dad we care." However, the images shown of dad and the stories told about him present a quite narrow picture of what dad looks like and how he lives his life. By ignoring the experiences and circumstances of Indigenous, immigrant, GBT, and other fathers/parents in socially, legally and/or economically disadvantaged positions, the North American cultures of masculinities and fatherhood leave many fathers/parents out of the picture. This discounting of a significant proportion of fathers/parents limits our understanding of why and how father involvement policies and programs need to change and develop. Along with preventing us from being able to see similar as well as diverse needs of fathers/parents in this country, narrowly defined images of men in general and fathers/parents in particular contribute to a significant gap between "fatherhood statements" found in social policy initiatives and the actual experiences, circumstances and support needs of diverse groups of fathers/parents.

Support for diverse populations of fathers/parents thus requires that we pay attention to how and why current human service policies and programs tend to ignore or discount fathers from certain populations or in particular life circumstances (Lero *et al.*, 2006). This means acknowledging the ways in which father involvement policies and programs are informed by normative assumptions and cultural stereotypes that hinder certain groups/populations of fathers and parents from receiving the support they need to be positively involved in the lives of their children. Acknowledging

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[27] http://www.urban.org/publications/310263.html

diversity among fathers/parents in Canada bolsters the argument that a socially inclusive vision for father involvement initiatives must include the insights, perspectives, and activities of individuals, organizations, and communities that are out of the cultural and structural mainstream (Long, 2005a). As is evident in the following three case studies, there are many ways of responding to the diverse social support needs of fathers/parents in Canada. Each and every initiative therefore also provides support for the view that more widespread adoption of an intercultural, socially inclusive approach to father/parent involvement would transform the social architecture of fatherhood in Canada in many positive ways.

Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives, Experiences and Best/ Wise Initiatives: A Community-oriented Vision for Father Involvement

The culture of fatherhood, from a mainstream perspective, posits that families essentially exist in isolation of one another, and that parents and children experience their lives and relationships in highly individualistic terms. Programs that support positive father/parent involvement from this perspective thus tend to focus on developing the relationship skills of fathers in order to enhance their positive interactions with their children (Doherty *et al.,* 1998; Pruett, 1997). Although there is obviously merit in fathers learning how to engage positively with their children, this primarily individualistic perspective is largely Western in nature. In contrast, best/wise father involvement initiatives from the perspective of Indigenous peoples tend to view father/child, family and community relationships as sacred gifts that all members of a community are responsible to care for and cultivate (Ball and George, 2006; Waterfall, 2003).

As discussed below, the healing, community-oriented vision embodied in countless social, political, legal and economic initiatives involving Aboriginal people in Canada over the past forty years represents their response to the devastating effects of hundreds of years of colonization (Long, 2004). FI initiatives by and on behalf of Indigenous people thus pose an important challenge to non-Indigenous visions, for if Aboriginal fathers as well as their families and communities are to experience hope, initiatives must address the sources and effects of colonization from a perspective that

honours the need for individual, familial, communal and societal healing (Ball and George, 2006). Analysis of the historical and current circumstances of many Aboriginal people in Canada, as well as the policy and program initiatives discussed below, are therefore framed within a perspective that sees the healthy involvement of Aboriginal fathers in the lives of their children as part of a much larger healing process involving Aboriginal individuals, families and communities throughout the country.

The Political and Cultural Context of a Community-Oriented Vision for Indigenous Father Involvement Initiatives

In 1996, the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was presented to parliament. RCAP commissioners heard many stories of the ways in which colonization had not only undermined, but had virtually torn apart the interpersonal, cultural and structural fabric of Aboriginal communities throughout Canada. A few of the more destructive expressions of colonization that directly affected Aboriginal family life included: Indian Act legislation that controlled virtually every aspect of the lives of Aboriginal people from birth to death, residential schools that removed Aboriginal children from their families and communities, and child welfare policies and practices that favoured the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities and their placement with non-Aboriginal families (RCAP, 1996). In response, the policy discussion section of the RCAP final report begins:

> . . . with a focus on the family because it is our conviction that much of the failure of responsibility that contributes to the current imbalance and distress in Aboriginal life centres on the family. Let us clarify at the outset that the failure of responsibility that we seek to understand and correct is not a failure of Aboriginal families. Rather, it is a failure of public policy to recognize and respect Aboriginal culture and family systems and to ensure a just distribution of the wealth and power of this land so that Aboriginal nations, communities and families can provide for themselves and determine how best to pursue a good life (RCAP, 1996).

Many people before and after the final report of the RCAP was released asserted that minor tinkering with legislation and/or social policies and programs will do little

to address the root causes of exclusion and racism that have become normalized through the Indian Act and hundreds of years of colonization (Blackstock, 2003). As representatives from the Nechi Institute (1988:4) noted:

> Attempting to heal isolated Aboriginal individuals apart from their family and their community cannot heal abuse and other imbalances of life. To get to the root cause of abuse and neglect, the entire system that allowed it to occur must be restored to balance. This means that the accumulated hurt of generations, carried to our families and our communities, needs to be released through a healing process.

Exactly what this healing process ought to look like for Aboriginal fathers, families, and communities remains open to discussion and debate. A common idea expressed by RCAP interveners is that resources and social change efforts should be directed towards community-based programs and initiatives that are responsive to the diversity of experience and circumstance between as well as within Aboriginal communities (Ferris *et al.*, 2005).[28] As Saulis (2003:291) notes,

> It is important to underscore that social policy decision-making in the Aboriginal process is rooted in the perceptions of the people in the communities, and that they play an active role in interpreting, priority-setting, and evaluating the directions of policy. It is not a process isolated from people and located in the bureaucracy, as we see in the mainstream process.

An indigenous, community-based approach also takes into account that those most likely to intervene in the lives of community members will be paraprofessional and non-professional volunteers, many of whom are Aboriginal people who are sensitive to the cultures and communities of the people they serve (Council for Yukon Indians, 1992). While there appears to be growing support throughout Canada for community-based Aboriginal father involvement initiatives, the number of Aboriginal fathers and families living on reserve or in rural communities has steadily decreased over the past thirty years (Peters, 2000). Not only does differential funding and availability of services on and off reserve pose a challenge to policy and program developers, so

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[28] Since the mid-1960s, increasing numbers of Aboriginal people have asserted that nothing short of violent protest and confrontation will effect meaningful change (Long, 2003).

too does the movement of Aboriginal people between reserve and urban contexts.[29] Depending on how one views community, this may or may not present a significant obstacle in the development of socially inclusive father involvement policies and programs. Although urban and non-urban Aboriginal people live in very different social, political and geographic contexts, those who understand community identity in terms of a connection to one's heritage and people recognize that both family and community are experienced and cultivated in a wide variety of social contexts as well as geographic locations (King, 1992).[30]

Certainly urban areas present unique challenges to Indigenous people and particularly to the survival of their cultures, families and communities. As Peters (2000:255) notes, these challenges come in part because of the difficulty in maintaining many traditional sources of Aboriginal culture, including contact with the land, Elders, Aboriginal languages, and spiritual ceremonies. Consequently, regardless of whether Aboriginal people live on reserve or in an urban setting, whether they live in a settled community or are highly mobile, father involvement policies and programs that are inclusive will seek to honour their experience and spiritual understanding of the sacred, symbiotic relationship between community and individual identity.

Involving Aboriginal fathers in the design and in many cases delivery of services and programs, therefore, not only benefits them as individuals in relation to their children. From a community-oriented perspective, it more importantly enables participants to become an integral part of family and community healing. This type of holistic, community-oriented vision is evident in the work of Weechi-it-te-win Family Services (WFS) in B.C. The de-centralised, bi-cultural approach to policy and program development and delivery supported by WFS is based on the principle that:

> Aboriginal people are in the best position to make decisions regarding Aboriginal children. A decentralized approach ensures respect for each community and

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[29] The focus of this paper is on First Nation program and policy development. Taking into account the diversity between, as well as within First Nation, non-treaty, Métis, and Inuit peoples and communities obviously adds a great deal of complexity to dialogue surrounding socially inclusive policy and program development.

[30] Margaret King, Saskatoon Urban Treaty Indians, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Public Hearing, 28 October 1992, pp.146-147.

> honours the differences in each family and community . . . While there is collective effort to ensure the agency's legal mandate is met, decentralization recognizes that there are many ways of achieving this and accommodates the fact that communities advance at different paces (Ferris *et al.*, 2005:13).

There are many reasons that communities advance at different paces, not the least of which is the extent to which colonization has left its imprint. Supporting bi-cultural service provision therefore enables the communities that WFS works with to develop the types of services and resources needed to "remove imposed Western-based theories of child welfare management and practice from the communities and mitigating the forces of assimilation still in operation" (Ferris *et al.*, 2005:13) Social programs initiated by and for community members are developed with the realization that services must be adapted to address current experiences and circumstances as well as contribute to the ongoing development of an Indigenous, community-oriented vision for fathers, families and communities as a whole. In this respect, Indigenous father involvement programs and services that bring healing and hope will therefore not only provide a safe context in which Aboriginal fathers are invited to share their stories; such initiatives will also include a wide variety of stakeholders from within and outside of Aboriginal communities who are committed to healing and positive growth.

For example, Ball and George (2006:2) found that the men who took part in the father support groups in their study experienced hope primarily because someone wanted to listen to their story. In the words of one father, it was important "just to be able to tell our stories, to shine some light on the struggle that some of us Aboriginal men have to learn what it means to be fathers and how to stay connected with our children."

The stories told by more than 80 participants highlighted the diversity among these Aboriginal fathers with respect to family composition, numbers of children, relationships to children, partner relationships, co-parenting arrangements, extended family involvements, mobility, education, employment and housing. The researchers also gained insight into how the participants see their roles in relation to their children, what they would like their role as father to be, and what challenges they face in their role as father.

The stated goals of their study included: generating demographic information on Aboriginal fathers; producing guidelines for outreach, support and education for Indigenous fathers; identifying steps that practitioners can take to create spaces and opportunities in community-based programs for fathers to be involved in meaningful and rewarding ways with their children; producing training resources, advocacy materials and recommendations for service providers; and informing community policies as well as recommending reform of regional and national policies (Ball and George, 2006). The project therefore not only supported the view that Indigenous father involvement policies and programs need to be developed at the community level, it more importantly supported and validated participants by giving them an opportunity to contribute to their own personal healing as well as the healing and health of their community. The study also found that the visibility of Aboriginal fathers was increased in a variety of contexts through the community-university partnerships, presentations, workshops, and reports developed out of their project. Indeed, positive representations of Aboriginal and other disadvantaged populations is an important element of socially inclusive dialogue and activity, for as Peters (2000:260-261) notes, "making Aboriginal people more visible in urban landscapes would signal that they have a valued place in contemporary urban areas."

Obstacles to healing and support for Aboriginal fathers, families and communities thus reflect more than a lack of political will or access to resources. According to Blackstock (2003), a key obstacle is also the lack of deeply spiritual understanding about Aboriginal community life from the perspective of community members. Consequently, developing an Indigenous, communally-oriented vision also requires acknowledging that an "over-reliance on terms such as Aboriginal, Native, Indigenous often leads to policies that fail to respond adequately to the significant cultural and contextual diversity amongst peoples and nations" (Blackstock, 2003:2-3). For Aboriginal peoples in Canada to live as distinct peoples, socially inclusive dialogue and activity must increase awareness of how countless expressions of racism perpetuate inequality and conflict within and between Aboriginal communities, as well as between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in the country.

As noted earlier, transformative, socially inclusive policy and program initiatives must be developed through a process of inreach that invites insider understanding of the experiences and circumstances faced by the individuals, families and communities

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they are intended to serve. The question is, how do non-Aboriginal policy and program developers gain understanding of the circumstances and social support needs of Aboriginal families and communities in general, and of Aboriginal fathers in particular? Although opinions differ on the legitimacy and right of non-Aboriginal scholars to investigate and tell the stories of life in Aboriginal communities (Heavy Head, 2006; Long and Lafrance, 2004; MacPherson, 2006), there is growing consensus that "if solutions are going to work, they have to be made by, and within, the community, however that community may be defined" (Frank, 1993:17). Nonetheless, the road to devolution of government-Aboriginal relations is proving to be long and rocky. That many do not support an Indigenous perspective on community and program development is not surprising to Waterfall (2003:53), who notes that in the area of human service provision:

> The Eurocentric social work processes of intake, case recording, clinical assessment, clinical treatment such as individual, group and family therapy, referral, and the termination of case files have become the hegemonic and taken for granted way of managing Native social work practices and native social welfare systems. Indeed Eurocentric assumptions about what counts as legitimate case recording and accountability procedures are very operative in what has otherwise been defined as a unique Native cultural perspective (Quoted from Swinomish Tribal Mental Health Project, 1991).

While Aboriginal communities face numerous external cultural and structural obstacles to healing, their internal socio-political dynamics can also negatively affect their capacity to address conflict and promote positive change (Long and Fox, 2000; Salée, 2006). In many respects this is a consequence of there being two value systems at work in Native communities, one being rooted in traditional, spiritually-based cultural practices and the other having been imposed by the colonial state (Waterfall, 2003). The result for many Aboriginal women and men has been that they have often had to be satisfied with programs and services which at best have served to meet their most basic needs and at worst have ignored the needs of some altogether (Ball and George, 2006; Silman, 1987). A key issue for father involvement initiatives in Aboriginal communities is therefore the need to promote the healing of relationships between community members as well as between "outsiders" and the community as a whole.

Accordingly, the development and delivery of socially inclusive policies and programs for Aboriginal fathers depends upon stakeholders within and outside of Aboriginal communities addressing a number of fundamental questions, including: (1) Who controls the funding necessary to support the development and delivery of programs that will bring healing and hope to Aboriginal fathers, families and communities? (2) What beliefs and values inform the design and delivery of these programs? and, perhaps most importantly, (3) To what extent will the spiritual, social, and material needs of diverse individuals, families and communities be met? Some are optimistic that the healing will continue, while Blackstock (2003) is somewhat more guarded:

> After almost 20 years of working in this field I am convinced that sustained social well being for First Nations children, youth and families will only be achieved if there is a recognition of community self-determination and an investment in sustainable community development, of which child and youth well being are critical considerations. To date, the reality in many First Nations communities is that social development is based on whatever targeted social programs government decides to fund – not whatever the First Nations community determines would be helpful and how it could be most respectfully and sustainably resourced.

It follows for Blackstock (2003) that the fundamental obstacle to healing and hope for Aboriginal fathers, families and communities is the lack of control by Aboriginal people over their own lives. Accordingly, the contribution that positive Aboriginal father involvement initiatives can make to the growth of healthy individuals and communities depends on dialogue that is initiated and maintained by Aboriginal fathers and "all their relations." As we note in the following section, there are some general similarities between Aboriginal and immigrant/refugee fathers. Nonetheless, an inclusive approach to father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives will also seek to honour the distinct vision that has developed around the unique personal and social support needs that have grown out of the experiences of men in these populations.

Immigrant and Refugee Experiences, Perspectives and Best/Wise Initiatives: A Settlement-oriented Vision of Father Involvement

Significant and steady increases in the number of immigrants coming to Canada over the past thirty years, as well as the growing number of countries from which immigrants and refugees have originated, have contributed to the increase in social support needs for immigrant fathers in this country (Esté, 2006). Similar to other fathers, Immigrant and refugee men face a number of general issues related to parenting as well as the challenges associated with maintaining familial authority and ensuring economic security for their families. Unlike other populations of fathers, however, immigrant and refugee men face a number of unique and challenging settlement issues.

Whether one chooses or is forced to emigrate, the experience of moving one's family to a new country is a challenging and daunting undertaking. While many individuals and families adjust and function fairly well, the settlement experience can be a very difficult and even life-long process for many immigrants and refugees. It can increase feelings of stress, powerlessness, frustration and anger, all of which may contribute to or exacerbate a variety of problems within families (Tyyksa, 2005). For example, although family violence exists in all communities, many newcomers face particular challenges that significantly increase the risk of violence and family breakdown. In the following section, we discuss some key cultural and structural obstacles in the settlement experience of immigrant and refugee fathers, as well as a number of best/wise policy and program initiatives designed to facilitate their successful settlement into Canadian life.

The Political and Cultural Context of a Settlement-Oriented Vision for Immigrant and Refugee Father Involvement Initiatives

Canada's active, open immigration and refugee admission policy agenda has long contributed to immigration being "an enduring feature of Canada's policy milieu" (George, 2003:145). From its origins to the present day, Canadian immigration policy has been closely tied to economic policy and the need for human resources. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Canada was seeking immigrants to maintain the British character of the young country, to settle and farm the land out west, and to build railroads; today it is actively recruiting immigrants with high-tech skills (Omidvar and Richmond, 2005). Economic and political pressures led to the most recent amendments to the Immigration Act in 1993 with the introduction of the categories of family class, refugee, and independent immigrants (George, 2003). As research on immigrant settlement patterns suggests, with increased diversity comes increased challenges to those who are committed to developing socially inclusive policy and program initiatives for immigrant and refugee fathers, families and communities in this country (Esté, 2006).

Even though Canada's longstanding multicultural agenda has sought to honour and celebrate ethnic diversity, immigrants and refugees continue to bring a host of cultural assumptions and practices related to fathering and family life that may or may not mesh with more established mainstream attitudes and practices (Esté *et al.*, 2006). A primary objective of government and community-sponsored Immigrant Settlement Agencies (ISAs), therefore, is to help immigrant and refugee individuals and families integrate successfully into Canadian society. According to Kage (1962:165), integration is

> a gradual process by which new residents become active participants in the economic, social, civic, cultural and spiritual affairs of a new homeland. It is a dynamic process in which values are enriched through mutual acquaintance, accommodation and understanding. It is a process in which both the migrants and their compatriots find an opportunity to make their own distinctive contributions.

As hopeful as the process of becoming integrated into the life of a host country may sound, George (2003) notes that the settlement experience of immigrants and

refugees is not necessarily enriching in a positive way. Research indicates that the settlement experience of diverse populations of immigrants and refugees is actually quite unsettling, since they often experience discrimination and prejudice very early in their settlement experience. Moreover, in the case of visible minorities, the feeling of being unsettled can be a lifelong experience (Richmond and Omidvar, 2003). Not fitting into the mainstream picture of the "responsible, North American father" can contribute in many ways to an even greater sense of dislocation, isolation and exclusion for immigrant and refugee fathers and their children. Numerous other stressors also contribute to the need that immigrant and refugee fathers have for social and material support.[31] These include the financial and psychological consequences of unemployment or chronic underemployment, feelings of social isolation, the challenge of men asking for help from female service providers coupled with a lack of comfort on the part of female service providers in working with immigrant men, role-reversal challenges as fathers may be forced through family and economic circumstance to be more active in child-rearing than was practised in their own culture, and trauma induced by war and enforced refugee status (Esté, 2006).

Since the early 1990s, integration of immigrants and refugees in Canada has been virtually synonymous with the concept of successful settlement. Although successful settlement is the ideal, those who work with and on behalf of immigrants and refugees recognise that particular circumstances and stressors associated with settlement can easily threaten the healthy functioning of immigrant and refugee families and communities (FSA, 2000). For example, adapting to a new environment can affect a parent's ability to exercise authority and discipline in their family (Tyyksa, 2005). Moreover, when parents are faced with having to adjust to a dominant cultural setting that is at odds with the cultural ways of their country of origin, it can be difficult to establish proper boundaries that provide grounding and a degree of security for family members. Immigrant and refugee fathers facing these and other challenges often report feeling isolated and uncertain in relation to changing parental roles and family dynamics, particularly when they lack the kind of familial and community support they had prior to coming to Canada (Tyyksa, 2005).

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[31] Much of the material in this section is adapted from Esté (2006). .

The hope of first-generation immigrants to make a better life for themselves and their families is also often met with the harsh reality of being unemployed or chronically underemployed (Esté, 2006). Although federal and provincial government policies prioritize helping immigrants and refugees find gainful employment, even highly educated immigrants and refugees experience higher rates of unemployment than the general population (Tyyska, 2005). Not surprisingly, immigrant and refugee men who are skilled and/or well educated are particularly vulnerable to mental health problems when they are unable to obtain gainful, satisfying employment (Omidvar and Richmond, 2005). As is common among non-immigrant men in the general population, depression among immigrant and refugee fathers undoubtedly often remains undetected due to gendered barriers in the human services (Esté, 2006; Long, 2005). Unfortunately, few immigrant settlement workers are equipped to provide support to those whose experience of "becoming settled" is not only economically inadequate, but also emotionally debilitating and personally humiliating.

Despite the many obstacles to successful settlement that their clients face, service providers who work with immigrant and refugee fathers report that their clients regularly express feelings of being proud and intimately connected to their children (Shimona *et al.*, 2000; Tyyska, 2005) According to Shimona *et al.* (2006), common goals in programs for immigrant and refugee fathers therefore include:

- providing fathers with an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings about being able to transmit their own cultural values;

- providing a context for fathers to examine the impact of culture conflict on children and their families;

- assisting fathers in learning how to address the negative impact of culture conflict in their own lives and the lives of their children and families;

- providing opportunities for fathers to learn about universal as well as culture-specific values related to children and child-rearing (Shimona *et al.*, 2000:3).

The question is: to what extent can the pursuit of these program goals ensure that the diverse father involvement needs of immigrant and refugee men are met? There would seem to be hope, for surveys of immigrant and refugee fathers indicate their

belief, at least early in their settlement experience, that they will some day build a better life for their families (Tyyska, 2005). Much like other fathers, immigrant and refugee fathers feel responsible for providing for their family. They want to ensure that their children receive a good education, are safe and secure, and that they have the opportunity to succeed in their chosen field of endeavour (CCR, 1998). The program goals listed above would seem to address these basic concerns, and research involving immigrant and refugee fathers has found that the stress associated with the settlement process is reduced when they have strong family and community support (Tyyska, 2005). Consequently, best/wise practice father support programs will facilitate successful settlement by helping immigrant and refugee men to reflect critically on their place as fathers in a new setting, enable them to develop certain intercultural and relationship skills, and help them to build healthy relationships by cultivating natural networks of support.

Nonetheless, the fact is that many immigrant and refugee fathers quickly experience cultural, organizational and societal issues that impact their ability to care for their child(ren) as they would like. Cultural differences, prejudice and discrimination at work and in their communities, service providers who tend to be more attentive to the plight of women and children, unfamiliarity with everyday aspects of life in Canadian society, and the lack of individual and community capacity-building support services hinder immigrant and refugee men from becoming successfully settled and positively involved in the lives of their children (Esté, 2006). Obviously, immigrant and refugee fathers need a wide variety of services to support positive involvement with their children at various stages of the settlement process and throughout their family life cycle. Much like programs and services that need to be developed for fathers in other disadvantaged populations, however, immigrant and refugee fathers need far more support than they can get from programs that merely enhance their relational skills. Those involved in the development of father involvement policy and program initiatives also need to ask in what ways an immigrant or refugee father's ability to be "optimally and responsibly" involved (however that is defined and measured) may be a result of discriminatory attitudes and practices that inform policy and program development. Although federal policies and programs appear to endorse support for the successful settlement of immigrants and refugees, major funding cuts and imposed restructuring of health and social services by government since the early 1990s have limited the ability of community-

based agencies to address these questions meaningfully (Asselin, 2001; FSA, 2000). Indeed, since the mid-1990s many community-based providers of settlement services, particularly the smaller ethno-specific agencies, have been forced to curtail their services drastically or close their doors altogether (Omidvar and Richmond, 2005).

Federal government policy response to the settlement needs of immigrants and refugees is primarily addressed in Citizenship and Immigration Canada's (CIC) Immigration Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP). Their stated mission[32] is to build a stronger Canada by:

- enabling the migration of temporary and permanent residents to meet the social, economic and cultural needs of communities across Canada;
- contributing to the management of international migration, including refugee protection;
- screening newcomers to help protect the health, safety and security of Canadians;
- supporting the successful integration of newcomers; and
- promoting Canadian citizenship.

In order to support the successful integration of newcomers, CIC funds and administers a number of provincially administered settlement and resettlement programs. These include programs that fund the delivery of direct services to immigrants, join newcomers with volunteers who are familiar with Canadian ways, provide language instruction, and provide income support to government-assisted refugees. Along with providing support for direct service delivery to immigrants and refugees, the CIC also seeks to build the capacities of those working within the immigrant and refugee service system.

According to the Canadian Council of Refugees (1998:25), this response by the federal government to newcomers

> reflects the characteristic Canadian balance of self-sufficiency, state support, and voluntary community endeavour. Individuals are expected to make their own

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[32] http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/research/evaluation/isap/intro.html

efforts to bridge the gaps between "new" and "old" Canadians. The government is expected to provide basic social services, to offer at least a minimal social safety net and to promote a healthy society. Communities are expected to organize, through volunteer effort, to respond to the priorities they identify.

Although government programs and services are essential to successful settlement, Sadiq (2004) suggests that the variety of needs that newcomers have are better served by community-based, ethno-specific ISAs that provide culturally and linguistically sensitive services. He notes, however, that ISAs can take either an adaptive or a transformative approach to immigrant service delivery (Geronimo 2000; Sadiq, 2004.). Adaptive service delivery works within a highly bureaucratized newcomer settlement system, which means that programs and services are administered by provincial government departments on the basis of efficiency, agency collaboration, and purchase-of-service agreements. In contrast, core agency funding and collaboration between government agencies and immigrant as well as refugee communities embody a transformative approach to human service delivery. The transformative approach includes: the building of coalitions and mutual capacity-building relations between human service agencies and community groups; civic engagement and community development involving members of diverse immigrant and refugee populations; advocacy and political mobilization on behalf of immigrant and refugee rights and needs; ongoing evaluation of settlement experiences and goals by organizational representatives and community participants; and the cultivating of relations with others engaged in broader movements for social change (Sadiq, 2004). Specifically, those committed to a transformative approach learn to pay critical attention to power relations between funders, agencies and community members in order to ensure equitable offering of programs and services, equitable access to programs and services, and the democratic participation of newcomer communities (Sadiq, 2004). Transformative activities often address cultural as well as systemic barriers to equity and access within settlement services and between funders and ISAs.

According to the CCR (1998), a transformative approach to best/wise practice in service provision is based on commitment to a number of core organizational values including: inclusion, client empowerment, user-defined services, a holistic approach to program and service delivery, respect for the individual, cultural sensitivity, community development, collaboration, accountability, orientation towards positive change, and reliability. Much like policy guidelines in other human service areas, the

apparently gender-neutral character of these core values can contribute to a lack of attention to issues that specifically affect immigrant and refugee men (Long, 2005). As is the case with human services in general, programs and services for immigrant and refugee families are most often designed and delivered with the support and settlement needs of women and children in mind (Esté, 2006; Long, 2005). While having guiding principles that are gender neutral is in some respects beneficial, it can also hinder policy developers and service providers from attending to the specific needs of immigrant and refugee men in general and fathers in particular.

The ability of formal and informal settlement agencies to respond to the diverse and changing needs of the immigrant and refugee fathers in their community is a significant factor in determining whether or not these men and their families settle successfully. Societal institutions and organizations such as schools, hospitals, police, justice systems, religious organizations, media, and government departments also play a key role in facilitating settlement to the extent that they honour the diverse and often culturally specific needs of newly arrived and established immigrants and refugees (Omidvar and Richmond, 2005). While human service organizations can adopt a transformative approach to service provision, their effectiveness in contributing to socially inclusive father involvement policy and program initiatives is also dependent on the willingness of government and other sectors of society to listen carefully to the needs of immigrant and refugee fathers, their families, and other members of the communities in which they reside. Undoubtedly, this will result in some challenging discussions. Along with the number of significant differences between the perspectives of non-immigrant government agency representatives and members of immigrant and refugee communities, these communities are anything but homogeneous (Esté, 2006; Lamb, 2005). Social class, religious and ethnic background, educational and employment status, and the political/legal status of community members are just a few of the many factors that contribute to differences in experience, social circumstance, and perspective within immigrant and refugee communities that may appear "from the outside" to be homogeneous (i.e., visible minority).

Accordingly, ISAs and other community organizations often direct a significant portion of their resources toward addressing the stereotypical attitudes among the general population that have a significant impact on successful settlement. The

importance of challenging misinformed or stereotypical public perceptions and attitudes about immigrant and refugee people is primarily why most refugee and immigrant-serving organizations view public education and anti-racism awareness-raising as essential parts of their mandate (CCR, 1998). Core government funding for ISAs and other community organizations, when made available, enables such organizations to be flexible enough to identify and publicise in positive ways the diverse and constantly changing support needs of immigrant and refugee fathers in their community. In many cases, government and other non-immigrant community service agencies have developed successful partnerships with community-based ISAs in promoting positive messages about the character and contributions of diverse populations of immigrants and refugees. Developing such partnerships would bolster support for more socially inclusive, community-based policy and program initiatives for immigrant and refugee individuals and families. It does so by drawing greater attention to the similar as well as unique father involvement needs of diverse populations of immigrant and refugee fathers throughout Canada.

The focus of federal government policies is another determining factor in the successful settlement of immigrant and refugee fathers. Understandably, policy and program developers tend to focus on areas of immediate personal need in the lives of immigrants and refugees: addictions, family violence, underachieving/delinquent children, as well as unemployment or underemployment. Successful settlement, however, depends upon a connection being made between these "private troubles" and societal conditions that contribute to the relative disadvantage experienced by many immigrant and refugee fathers in Canada (Gilbert, 2003). Socially inclusive father involvement policies and programs for immigrants and refugees promote mutual respect, the value of diversity, and the potential for new forms of citizen participation and engagement which enhance feelings of security and a sense of belonging. In contrast, federal and provincial policies that keep families separated, delay permanent status or leave individuals, families and communities feeling isolated as well as socially and/or economically disadvantaged make settlement difficult or even impossible (CCR, 1998).

A number of analysts assert that direct core funding of ISAs is therefore necessary if they are to serve the diverse needs of newcomers (FSA, 2000; Geronimo, 2000; Sadiq, 2004). They argue that widespread adoption of a transformative approach to ISA

development and program delivery through the establishment or re-instatement of core funding would enable more settlement agencies to maintain continuity of service provision, relocate when required, and establish job security for settlement service workers (FSA, 2000; Sadiq, 2004). Core funding would also enable agencies to offer competitive salaries, benefits and working conditions in order to attract and retain highly qualified personnel who are able to deliver high-quality services to immigrant and refugee fathers (FSA, 2000). A more long-term positive effect of this may be to make human service provision, particularly in the area of immigrant settlement services, an attractive educational and career option for young immigrant and refugee men (Long, 2005).

The question of how ISAs and other human service organizations should respond to the support needs of diverse populations of immigrant and refugee fathers is not easy in the face of substantial cultural and structural obstacles to successful settlement. Much like responses to promote father involvement initiatives for other diverse populations, socially inclusive policies and programs for immigrant and refugee men need to honour as well as address their unique experiences and circumstances. According to Omidvar and Richmond (2005:176), it is only through a commitment to intercultural dialogue and action that policy and program initiatives will include:

> the development of mechanisms to directly include the voices of leaders (and fathers) from the immigrant and refugee communities in the definition and monitoring of settlement policies (Omidvar and Richmond, 2005:176).

Inclusive father involvement policy and program initiatives for immigrant and refugee men in Canada will also necessarily be informed, and possibly transformed, by input from the immigrant and refugee men they are intended to serve. They will provide hopeful support and direction to these men, their families and their communities to the extent that they honour familial and ethno-cultural origins while at the same time helping those involved to more successfully navigate the challenging experience of settling in a new country. As we see in the following section, many of the FI experiences of our third group of "fathers" are challenging for significantly different reasons.

Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgendered (GBT) Perspectives and Best/Wise Initiatives: A Personal Identity/Individual Rights-oriented Vision of Father/Parent Involvement

Throughout Canadian history, gay, bisexual, transsexual and transgendered (GBT) individuals have grown up in families and communities, established long-lasting, committed intimate relationships, and sometimes become parents. In the past, many GBT individuals who had children in the context of a heterosexual relationship did not disclose their sexual identity for fear of losing their children (Epstein and Duggan, 2006). To a certain extent, this has changed as cultural, political and legal developments in Canada over the past thirty years or so have altered social attitudes and perceptions surrounding intimate and familial relationships involving GBT individuals. Gay and bisexual men as well as transsexual and transgendered individuals who take an active role in rearing their children or consider becoming parents also reflect a more general shift in gender attitudes and role expectations for men. As we note in the discussion that follows, however, developing and implementing best/wise practice initiatives in support of father/ parent involvement for GBT individuals[33] continues to be challenged by a lack of widespread cultural, organizational and institutional support for their individual, parental, and familial rights.

Although there have been a number of recent significant legislative and policy changes in support of same sex marriage and GBT rights,[34] these changes have not removed many of the personal, cultural and socially structured barriers to support that GBT individuals, couples and families face. Given the lack of status that GBT rights have historically had in our country, it should not be surprising that many father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives promoted by supporters of GBT fathers/parents reflect a personal identity/individual rights-oriented vision. In fact, this population of individuals has not been part of marriage and family discourse in Canada until quite recently, perhaps in large part because GBT

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[33] http://www.samesexmarriage.ca/evolution/timeline.htm

[34] For a listing and description of a wide variety of court cases related to GBT rights go to: http://www.egale.ca/index.asp?lang=Eandmenu=62

individuals and families pose a significant challenge to traditional, hetero-normative notions of masculinity, fatherhood and family life in Canada (O'Neill, 2003). Hearing that GBT individuals want to become or already are parents challenges a number of hetero-normative assumptions related to "father"hood and family life in Canada. As we note below, that GBT individuals and couples can be found in all ethno-cultural populations further complicates efforts to support positive father involvement in this country. Consequently, although the profoundly relational quality of family life may in some respects seem to be at odds with a personal identity/individual rights-oriented vision for father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives, discussions of social inclusion must invite the personal, family and community support needs of this population of fathers/parents into the dialogue.

The Political and Cultural Context of a Personal Identity/Individual Rights-oriented Vision for GBT Father/Parent Involvement Initiatives

Recent Canadian social attitude surveys indicate that there is now slight majority support for same-sex marriage in this country, though historically this has not been the case. For example, in 1975 only 28 per cent of Canadians expressed support for the rights of same-sex individuals. In 1999, a mere 6 years prior to the Civil Marriage Act being passed in the House of Commons by a vote of 158 to 133, members of parliament had voted 216 to 55 in favour of preserving the legal definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman.[35] That same year, a British Columbia Human Rights Commission poll found that gays and lesbians were the least tolerated minority group in the province (O'Neill, 2003). Despite increased tolerance for diversity over the past thirty years in Canada, there has continued to be somewhat uneven support for the rights of non-heterosexual people and same-sex marriage in this country. While a 1996 Angus Reid poll reported that 51 per cent of survey respondents opposed same-sex marriage, social surveys from a variety of sources since 1999 have consistently found that between 52 per cent and 54 per cent of respondents are in favour of same-sex marriage (Bibby, 2005; Jenkins, 2004). Survey

[35] Chronology: same sex marriage (http://www.Canada.com.national/story.html.id=41a2afbb-5124-4527-8627-3af8aa1919de)

reports indicating that there are now almost twice as many unconditional supporters of same sex marriage as there are vigorous opponents (Jenkins, 2004) also tend to highlight increased tolerance and support for GBT rights and same-sex marriage. Nonetheless, a significant percentage of Canadians, particularly those above 35 years of age, continues to be opposed to gay rights and same-sex marriage. Those who oppose marital and family rights for same-sex individuals tend to hold certain attitudes and beliefs that view heterosexuality as not only normative, but also as the only valid sexual orientation.[36] Such beliefs and attitudes also tend to be bolstered by a number of stereotypical myths surrounding intimate and familial relationships involving GBT individuals.[37] Interesting in all of this is that social attitude surveys have all but ignored the question of whether respondents would extend their support for the right of GBT adults to marry whomever they like to the right of GBT adults to raise children.[38]

As is the case with all other areas of social life, mass media plays a significant role in maintaining as well as altering public perceptions and attitudes surrounding the relationship between sexual identity and family life (O'Neill, 2003). And although the diversity of (especially late-night) television programming provides a broad range of storylines having to do with sexual identity, the hetero-normative character of mass media and popular culture contributes to the perpetuation of distorted images and negative attitudes towards GBT individuals, couples and families. According to O'Neill (2003:132):

> Gay men, and lesbians to a lesser extent, are portrayed as relatively wealthy, youthful, white, middle class, and able bodied. Gay men in particular are presented as being unencumbered by family responsibilities and focusing mainly on achieving sexual and social satisfaction. In reality, there is diversity within the gay population with respect to race/ethnicity, age, social class, physical and intellectual ability, and

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[36] See for example: Vote Marriage Canada (http://lifesite.net/bdn/2006/dec/06120804.html) and Focus on the Family (http://www.fotf.ca)

[37] The myths as well as references to research that challenges and/or refutes them can be found on the Family Pride Website at: http://www.familypride.org/site/pp.asp?c=bhKPI7PFImEandb=39248.

[38] This is important since there are a number of highly discriminatory beliefs and attitudes towards GBT individuals that directly bear on whether they are seen as "suitable" parents. http://www.familypride.org/site/pp.asp?c=bhKPI7PFImEandb=39248.

religion, and many gay men and lesbians are caring for their children as well as supporting aging parents.

Media images of bisexual, transsexual and transgendered individuals and couples are even more distorted – when they are presented at all. The effects of such "cultural invisibility" were highlighted in a recent study involving gay fathers in Canada (Epstein and Duggan, 2006). Participants reported that not only was there an almost total lack of support programs and services for gay fathers in Canada, but they also experienced an overwhelming sense that most people in Canada, including policy and program developers, don't even seem to know they exist. Further, although there are many personal reasons that GBT individuals decide not to become parents, one of the more significant of these has to do with their feeling a lack of entitlement. According to Epstein and Duggan (2006:2):

> Many give up the desire to parent when they "come out" and are impacted by negative stereotypes about gay men and parenting. For men without children, this lack of entitlement can be increased by lack of available information about the options to gay men to become parents. Some participants who had children in heterosexual contexts spoke about how hopeless they feel about gaining access to their children through the court system. Some allow their former female partners to dictate when and where they can see their children, for fear of going to court and losing what access they do have.

Despite shifts in attitudes that indicate growing support, or at least tolerance for diverse sexual identities in Canada, denial of the rights of GBT individuals has until quite recently been institutionally supported through laws that have granted particular rights, privileges and benefits only to people in heterosexual relationships, particularly legally married partners (O'Neill, 2003). As O'Brien and Weir (1995) note, having to fight against the lack of recognition for their basic individual rights can have significant legal, economic, emotional and relational consequences. Still, many years of lobbying through the courts of public opinion and justice by same-sex rights supporters has made it more possible for GBT individuals to become parents who are open about their sexual identities.[39] Structural changes contributing to this have included sexual orientation being added to the both the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as the Human Rights Acts of provinces and territories

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[39] http://www.fsatoronto.com/programs/dks/broch_parentingoptions.html#1

across Canada. Legislative and policy-related change paved the way between 2003 and 2005 for the legalization of same sex marriage in provinces and territories throughout Canada. Such changes to Canadian law and social policy affirm Bibby's (2005) suggestion that the "gay marriage debate" has brought into question more than what is legal as defined by Canada's constitution; it has brought to the fore discussions of how inclusive Canadians want the concept of marriage to be.[40] Moreover, although the conjugal rights and privileges of LGBT individuals have been the focal point in much of the public discussion and debate surrounding same sex marriage, changes to federal and provincial legislation and policy have gradually addressed concerns related to everything from workers' compensation to health, relocation, pension and survivor benefits, to property rights and division of assets, to adoption and family maintenance.[41] In terms of adoption, provincial legislation in New Brunswick recently came into line with legislation in most other provinces when a provincial human rights Board of Inquiry issued a decision that a partner in a same-sex relationship can adopt the other partner's child and be named as one of its parents on the birth registration document.[42] Contentious though they may be, such sweeping legislative changes have significant implications for the development of policy and program initiatives at the community level that support the involvement of GBT fathers/parents in the lives of their children.

Most importantly, debate surrounding the cultural and legal status of unions involving GBT individuals does not discount the fact that even though their numbers may be relatively small compared to heterosexual unions, there are a significant number of GBT individuals who desire to form families. The 2001 census, which was the first to provide data on same-sex partnerships, reported a total of 34,200 same-sex common-law couples. Of these, 15 per cent of female same-sex couples were living with children compared to 3 per cent of male same-sex couples (Statistics Canada, 2002). In many cases, one or both members of same-sex couples have children from a previous marriage or relationship. In certain instances they become parents through fostering or adoption. However, unlike many heterosexual families in which children are the biological offspring of both parents, GBT families always have at least one

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[40] For a full discussion of Bibby's study see: http://www.vifamily.ca/newsroom/press_jan_25_05.html

[41] An extended chronology of these changes can be found at http://www/egale.ca/index.asp?item=468

[42] http://www/egale.ca/index.asp?item=468

non-biological parent. According to O'Neill (2003), the result is a lack of social and legal recognition for the parental status of GBT individuals.

Opposition to marital and familial rights of GBT individuals not only affects their legal status as parents. It also affects the physical, psychological and relational aspects of their lives. In health and social service systems where there is much competition for scarce resources, decisions on what types of policies and programs ought to be developed are most certainly affected by discriminatory beliefs and attitudes towards same-sex individuals (O'Neill, 2003). A study by the Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition found that barriers to accessing basic health care included fear of real or perceived homophobia as well as homo-, trans-, or hetero-sexism among health care providers, lack of public awareness of GLBTI issues, lack of recognition that GLBTI people comprise many diverse communities, and discomfort within health-care communities about referring GLBTI patients to specialists and other community resources (CRHC, 2004).[43] Moreover, same-sex individuals, couples and families have needs that are specifically related to attitudes towards their sexual identity (CRHC, 2004). These can include the need for help in coping with discrimination and harassment, integrating their sexuality into their lives and developing a positive identity, and establishing and maintaining supportive relationships (O'Neill, 2003).

When differences of sexual identity and orientation are not overtly and comprehensively addressed in organizational policies, hetero-sexist assumptions can and do subtly shape policies and practices.[44] Cultural sensitivity training of heterosexual individuals who work in government as well as mainstream health and social service agencies may encourage policy developers and service providers to tolerate diversity and support universal human rights. While such training would be beneficial, it does not guarantee the development and implementation of socially inclusive policies and programs that support the health and social support needs of GBT individuals, couples, and families.[45] For example, most social service agencies

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[43] http://www.rainbowhealth.ca/english/improving.html

[44] The information used in this paragraph is drawn from O'Neill, 2003.

[45] While most government agencies and community service organizations offer various forms of "cultural sensitivity and diversity training," their focus is almost exclusively on ethnic issues. It is rather telling, for example, that the concerns and contributions of GLBT individuals were only included by one of the five municipalities that participated in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities 2005 "Inclusive Cities Project."

do not collect information on the sexual identity or orientation of their clients. The result is that client care records do not contain the type of information that could be used to promote changes in organizational policies and services that respect the rights and acknowledge the experiences of GBT individuals or couples. A positive step in addressing the lack of attention to sexual orientation in mainstream social services would be to collect data on the sexual orientation of their clients. This would at least help service providers to see that GBT people are among the regular clients of their agencies. It would also mean that GBT individuals would be more likely to become involved in the systematic review of more mainstream father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives. As the work of Family Service Associations in Toronto and Vancouver illustrates, it is possible for there to be positive, mutual capacity building relations between mainstream agencies and community-based social service organizations developed by gay and lesbian community members.[46] A socially inclusive approach could also help cultivate partnerships between GBT organizations and non-gay government and community organizations that focus on countering discrimination to address the cultural and organizational effects of hetero-sexism.

Where organizational support for GLBT rights is overtly included in organizational policies and practices, the results can be quite significant and beneficial. For example, since 1985 Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) local union leaders have been taking an oath of office that includes a non-discrimination pledge, and long before same-sex benefits became law, the CAW negotiated with employers on behalf of employees for same-sex benefits.[47] It also holds biannual national and regional "Working with Pride" conferences and has LGBT caucuses throughout the country. Organizations such as the Halton Organization for Pride and Education offer workshops for agencies to increase understanding and awareness of the causes of homophobia and the importance of intervention and advocacy. Workshops also serve to build capacity within the work environment to challenge homophobia and heterosexism as well as to support acceptance of and appreciation for diversity. Lastly, many leading child welfare and health organizations in the U.S. and Canada have issued statements declaring that there are essentially no differences between the children of gay or

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[46] http://www.fsatoronto.com/programs/dks/broch_parentingoptions.html#1, http://www.fsgv.ca/index.html

[47] http://www.caw.ca/whatwedo/pride/statement.asp

lesbian parents and the children of heterosexual parents in terms of psychosocial development, gender identity or sexual orientation.[48]

As noted earlier, recent legislative and policy changes have removed some of the barriers that have hindered or prevented GBT individuals and couples from becoming parents. Still, there is relatively little policy and program support for GBT community-based father and parent involvement initiatives on the part of the federal or provincial governments as well as non-GBT human service agencies in this country (O'Neill, 2003).[49] Lack of core funding for community-based GBT organizations also significantly affects decisions about program and service provision. Coupled with what are at best "tolerant" attitudes towards the rights of GBT individuals and families, lack of funding means that what little money these agencies do receive has to be directed towards relatively high-profile, perhaps slightly more publicly acceptable issues such as AIDS awareness campaigns.

Despite this relative lack of support for the rights of GBT individuals, couples and families, there has long been organized, grass-roots support for GBT fathers/parents in communities across Canada. National organizations such as PFLAG, EGALE, and the Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition have sought to raise public awareness around GLBT issues that bear on individual health and GLBT family life.[50] Moreover, these national level organizations often work in concert with provincial and municipal "Pride" focussed agencies and departments in developing information and resources for organizations and individuals in their communities. For example, Family Services of Greater Vancouver and the David Kelley LGBT Counselling Program in Toronto provide a variety of service options for LGBT people who prefer to consult with a gay or lesbian therapist. Typical of grass-roots community organizing is the LGBT Parenting Network.[51] This network, which is comprised of LGBT parents, is a project

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[48] These include: the American Psychological Association (1986), the Child Welfare League of America (1988), the American Academy of Pediatrics (2002), the American Academy of Physicians (2002) and the Canadian Psychological Association (2003).

[49] Different federal and provincial responsibilities in supporting marriage and family life complicate the matter, as is evident in the fact that most provinces had to be forced by the courts to recognize marital and parental rights of same sex couples. http://www.Canada.com.national/story.html.id=41a2afbb-5124-4527-8627-3af8aa1919de

[50] http://www.pflag.org/, http://www.egale.ca/, http://www.rainbowhealth.ca/,

[51] http://www.fsatoronto.com/programs/lgbtparenting.html

of the Family Services Association of Toronto and provides a wide variety of personal and professional resources, information, and support to LGBT parents and their families. Most importantly, the LGBT Parenting Network seeks to build and maintain a supportive community of people committed to sharing information and advocating for one another's rights in a variety of contexts.

Possibly more than any other category of fathers, GBT fathers/parents provide a significant challenge to those committed to the development of socially inclusive father involvement initiatives. Being that the central focus of such initiatives is on "father" involvement, all individuals who do not self-identify as monogamous, heterosexual men are categorically excluded from the start. The challenge to develop socially inclusive father involvement policy and program initiatives that are responsive to the support needs of GBT individuals, couples and families is particularly acute in smaller communities and rural contexts; this is evident in the fact that GBT support services in general and services related to "fathering" in particular are found almost exclusively in large urban settings. This highlights the importance of paying critical attention to how assumptions underlying such basic concepts as father, men, and family can all too easily lead policy and program developers to ignore completely the social support needs of certain people (O'Neill, 2003) This is particularly the case in small, homogeneous communities and rural contexts. GBT individuals from Aboriginal, immigrant and refugee, and other disadvantaged populations experience multiple levels of discrimination when government, the public and other members of their communities do not fully support individuals and couples that are "other" than heterosexual.[52] For example, European colonization gradually all but eradicated Aboriginal traditions that honoured the gifts and place of Two Spirit[53] people in most communities.[54] For those committed to a socially inclusive vision of father/

[52] For example, it was not until February 2007 that Citizenship and Immigration Canada's website acknowledged a policy change that indicated acceptance of all legal marriages involving immigrants that had been performed outside of Canada. http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/sponsor/familymembers.html#sponsoring

[53] Unlike Western conceptions of gay, bisexual, transgendered, etc. that are identified with one's sexual orientation, the Aboriginal concept of Two Spirit goes much deeper into spiritual, gender, and a wide variety of social roles. http://www.allnationshope.ca/resource%20files/2%20Spirit%20pamphlet.pdf

[54] As a consequence, mainstream society as well as most Aboriginal communities now have little or no knowledge about or place for Two Spirit traditions and people http://www.allnationshope.ca/resource%20files/2%20Spirit%20pamphlet.pdf

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parent involvement, the cultural and structural marginalization of GBT individuals throughout Canada is regrettable given that:

> There have always been people (and families) who do not fit with traditional notions. Some GBT people parent in couples, some are single parents, and some share parenting with others where there is trust but not a romantic relationship. GBT parents, like most parents, love and want the best for their children. They struggle with the same issues all parents struggle with such as finances, daycare, schools, childrearing, etc.[55]

The predominantly hetero-normative culture of Canada has contributed to the interpersonal and cultural invisibility of GBT fathers/parents as well as the historical discounting of their most basic individual, marital and parental rights – despite the fact that they experience many of the same parental and familial issues as other fathers. In response, many GBT father/parent involvement initiatives have been animated by a personal identity/individual rights-oriented vision. This vision challenges interpersonal, cultural, legal and political barriers that exclude GBT individuals from receiving proper support as individuals and as fathers/parents. In a variety of ways, GBT father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives fundamentally challenge traditional, taken-for-granted forms of support for traditional, taken-for-granted types of families. They do so by supporting a view of men, masculinities, fatherhood and families that is flexible, diverse and inclusive. Social attitude surveys indicate that some regard the personal identity/individual rights-oriented vision of GBT father/parent involvement initiatives to be at odds with a more traditional, socially focused vision of family and community. As research and GBT father/parent involvement program evaluations clearly indicate, however, GBT father/parents who feel supported often experience a strong sense of entitlement and hope for the first time in their lives. This contributes to both their individual health and well-being as well as to the health and well-being of their children, families and communities: two fundamental goals of all socially inclusive father/parent involvement initiatives.

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[55] Adapted from FSA brochures at http://www.fsatoronto.com/programs/dks/broch_parentingoptions.html

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Canada has long had an international reputation as a country that welcomes diversity and supports equality (Canadian Social Trends, 2000). Nonetheless, the lack of co-ordinated, state-sponsored policy and program support for diverse populations of fathers/parents in the country indicates that there are many who are far less privileged and "equal" than others. Fathers and parents from socially, politically, legally and/or economically disadvantaged populations consistently report that they feel like failures and/or that they lack any and all sense of entitlement to be a parent (Ball and George, 2006; Epstein and Duggan, 2006; Esté, 2006). Many experience sadness, confusion, frustration and anger about their lack of "success," the minimal control they have over their own lives, and their inability to provide and care for their children and others they are related to as they would like. Many also note that their reluctance to share their confusion, pain, sadness and sense of loss with service providers is in part related to their shame at not measuring up to a relatively narrow, "responsible father" ideal. Their relative cultural invisibility is exacerbated by highly stereotypical, discriminatory beliefs and attitudes towards members of "disadvantaged" populations in general and disadvantaged populations of fathers/parents in particular. While Canadians presumably find it easy to celebrate diversity, it is obviously much more of a challenge for policy and program developers to understand and address the diverse circumstances and social support needs of the fathers/parents who live throughout the country.

The following policy and program recommendations in support of a socially inclusive vision for father/parent involvement initiatives have been gleaned from the best/wise policy and program development ideas and practices of a wide variety of individuals, agencies, organizations and communities. Together, they illustrate that working towards a more socially inclusive ordering of society requires more than being willing to engage in an ongoing dialogue of difference that seeks to cultivate respect and appreciation for diversity. It also requires that those responsible for initiating policies and programs be committed to challenging fundamentally assimilationist thinking by supporting the ongoing development of more just and equitable social, economic, legal and political processes and structures. As father/parent involvement issues are evident in many different contexts and at a variety of levels, socially inclusive initiatives will seek to address the particular interpersonal, cultural, organizational, political and economic issues specific to the populations

and communities being served. Although many of the following recommendations apply to fathers/parents with diverse needs and in a wide variety of personal, familial, and social circumstances, for purposes of organization they are divided into three different sections. The first section addresses the general concern to develop increased governmental and public support for socially inclusive father involvement policy and program initiatives. The second section presents recommendations related to raising public awareness around father/parent involvement. The third section includes socially inclusive policy and program recommendations that will contribute to organizations, agencies and communities becoming more father/parent friendly.

1 There will be increased support throughout Canadian society for socially inclusive father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives to the extent that different levels of government, communities, media organizations, educational institutions, health care facilities, non-governmental human service organizations, corporations and small businesses and/or researchers:

- acknowledge the stigma and stereotypes associated with membership in socially disadvantaged populations;

- acknowledge that many father/parents in Canada experience disadvantage due to a complex interplay of personal, interpersonal, cultural and structural (legal, political, economic, etc.) factors;

- express zero tolerance for negative stereotyping of males in media, school curricula, program advertising, etc.;

- promote more positive messages in advertising about the roles and contributions of fathers/parents;

- promote positive, culturally appropriate messages about individuals from diverse populations living, playing and working together;

- use positive humour in advertising services and programs for fathers/parents;

- develop more positive messages about the roles and contributions of diverse fathers/parents in schools, health facilities, shopping malls sports venues, workplaces and other public facilities;

- support more public education on men's and father's issues in schools, media, churches and businesses which emphasizes the positive contributions of men and fathers/parents in families, community, and society;

- provide more visible access to information about services and resources for fathers/parents in health care facilities, at schools, on community bulletin boards, on service organization websites, at places of employment, etc.;

- make sure that human service resource and referral information is placed in the informal places where men gather and/or would see it such as washrooms, lunchrooms, sports bars, hallways, coatrooms, locker rooms, etc.;

- develop and promote programs throughout school systems for boys/men who may or may not be fathers/parents;

- support the development of a government-sponsored, practically-focussed men's and father/parent website;

- actively support the development of government legislation and policy that acknowledges diversity in the experiences, perspectives and needs of men in general and fathers/parents from different populations in particular;

- help clarify the benefits of stable, core funding of community-based organizations and initiatives that seek to strengthen families and communities by promoting positive father/parent involvement;

- support longitudinal research studies that gather information on the behaviours of fathers/parent in diverse populations and social categories;

- support community-based action research projects that strengthen the relationships between fathers/parent and their children as well as families and communities by providing concrete policy and program recommendations;

- encourage more leadership from business in support of fathers/parents (financial support for services, advertising of services for male employees, development of male and family friendly employee support programs, flexible work schedules, promotion of support programs for families, etc.);

- invite more collaboration and sharing of resources between human service organizations and business;

- encourage educational and vocational institutions to promote actively human service delivery by and for men as an important and valid career direction;

- support the development of aggressive recruitment strategies for male service providers;

- actively demand more government core funding for community-based, human service organizations that offer programs and services to specific populations and community members;

- support the development of a government-sponsored website dedicated to positive father/parent involvement;

- support the development of multi-service, community-based organizations

- establish ongoing, action research relationships involving researchers and community members that result in positive social change in the lives of fathers/parents and communities;

- popularize the results of research that bear on issues related to father/parent involvement related, including their personal health and well-being as well as their contribution to the health and well-being of their children, partners, families, and communities;

- improve the way in which father/parent involvement is measured and understood by supporting diverse data gathering methods and research designs;

- encourage the development of policy and program-specific action research involving a wide variety of stakeholders.

2 Government and non-government organizations and agencies as well as communities throughout Canada will raise awareness and positive interest in issues and programs related to father/parent involvement to the extent that they:

- enable diverse individuals, families and communities to take responsibility for changes which will affect their own lives;
- invite direction and assistance from community leaders and seek to understand and strengthen community support networks;
- involve fathers/parents at every stage of policy and program development;
- develop practical and aggressive recruitment strategies for potential clients;
- creatively promote available resources and referral information in male-friendly places (shelters, sports bars, athletic clubs, businesses, bathhouses, workplaces);
- actively promote informal networking and self-help groups for fathers/parents in the community;
- provide informal places for men to meet as well as informal support groups for fathers/parents;
- offer flexible scheduling of times for services and programs;
- offer recreational activities as a component of programs and services;
- offer activity-based programs where fathers/parents from diverse populations can interact playfully and constructively with their children;
- offer support groups and other resources that provide practical tips for dealing with relationships;
- provide father support programs that are specific to the ages of children, the stages of the family life cycle, and the marital status of fathers/parents;
- provide a 24-hour men's crisis line that offers counselling support, information, and referral services.

3

Organizations, agencies and communities that work with and on behalf of fathers/parents from diverse populations in Canada will develop socially inclusive father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives to the extent that they:

- involve policy developers, service providers, and fathers/parents from different populations and communities in critical, self-reflexive, intercultural dialogue;

- involve a wide variety of governmental, human service, academic and community stakeholders in ongoing assessment of community needs as well as rigorous policy and program evaluation;

- invite community members to be more involved in the planning and implementation of human service policies and programs;

- provide more education of staff, managers and community members on male issues in general and father/parent related issues in particular;

- remove anti-male stereotyping and denigration of male pain in the minds of human service providers and members of the community at large;

- actively commit to developing anti-racist and anti-homosexual policies and programs;

- actively recruit more male service providers, particularly from the diverse populations and communities they serve;

- develop and implement a philosophy of "inreach";

- develop and promote strength-based programs that build on the personal, social and economic capacities of the fathers/parents they serve;

- develop positive messages about men and fathers/parents in program advertising;

- aggressively advertise services to fathers/parents throughout their human service networks;

- support and actively promote the offering of subsidies for program participants;

- decorate waiting and meeting rooms in light of the male client's experiences, perspectives and interests;

- develop policies and programs that engage men's "practical" world-view.

The select recommendations listed above support a strength-based, socially inclusive vision for developing positive father involvement policy and program initiatives in Canada. Such an approach requires creative vision and shared commitment to honouring the diverse backgrounds, experiences, gifts and insights of individual parents, families and communities throughout the country (Long, 2005). Clearly, there is overwhelming consensus among FIRA participants and others who work with and on behalf of fathers/parents in Canada that much greater attention needs to be given to the development of such a vision in father/parent involvement policy and program discussions.[57] There is also agreement that only transformative, intercultural dialogue will enable those involved to understand the factors that encourage or discourage diverse populations of fathers/parents from seeking out and receiving the support they want and need.[58] Such dialogue will be inclusive and transformative to the extent that it is based on "insiders" as well as "outsiders" sharing a basic respect for the integrity and autonomy of individuals as well as diverse communities (Richmond and Saloojee, 2005).

Those committed to this type of socially inclusive vision will inevitably be confronted by the many interpersonal, cultural, organizational and socio-structural factors that contribute to power imbalance and social inequality within and between diverse peoples and communities. Nonetheless, it is clear that when policy developers and program providers respect and seek to understand the character and dynamics of the communities they serve, they are better equipped to contribute to the development of socially inclusive father/parent involvement policy and program initiatives. In order to promote the types of cultural and structural changes necessary to transform the roots of exclusion, socially inclusive dialogue and activity must cultivate an appreciative understanding of diversity by bringing those in positions of social,

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[57] http://www.fira.uoguelph.ca/Home/

[58] http://www.fira.uoguelph.ca/Home/

economic, legal and/or political power together with those who experience exclusion in social, economic, legal and/or political terms. Such dialogue will also involve critical self-reflection on the ways in which a wide variety of cultural assumptions surrounding men, masculinities, father/parenthood, and community development hinder individuals, agencies, organisations and communities from developing policies and programs that better enable fathers/parents to be positively involved in the lives of their children, families and communities.

Certainly there are many challenges to providing meaningful support for fathers/parents in Canada. Nonetheless, supportive, socially inclusive father/parent involvement initiatives are possible to the extent that those involved in policy and program development honour the integrity and socially embedded, intimate character of relationships that men have with their children. This paper suggests that there is widespread support for a more socially inclusive approach to father/parent involvement initiatives in Canada. But as those involved in current initiatives across the country attest, the respect for difference and promise of equality enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms has not materialized for many fathers/parents in this country. Their hope, which is shared by fathers/parents throughout Canada, is that many more people will listen carefully to the stories of the fathers/parents in their lives. Doing so would contribute to the growth and development of a socially inclusive vision for positive father/parent involvement in Canada. Most importantly, the policy and program initiatives that develop out of truly inclusive, intercultural dialogue and action will benefit not only the personal and relational health and well-being of individual fathers/parents, but also the overall relational health and well-being of their children, families and communities. What fathers/parents in Canada ask towards this end is that others acknowledge the simple and quite obvious insight that "all dads matter."

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