

## 2009 Absentee Father Conference Final Document

While we have found a myriad of causes that have directly and indirectly affected the state of absentee fathers in our community and the scale of the problem is substantial our resolve must not waver. There is a historical correlation between high unemployment and high absentee father rates in all communities. As we have experienced greater levels of unemployment than the society as a whole this disparity has played out in a gradual degradation of our family structure as more and more of our men have deserted their families. This continued diminishing of our males in the family has placed an undue strain on our women, our extended families and institutions as they have tried to sustain and pass on traditional values and skills. The African American community had a rich heritage of craftsmen and entrepreneurs at its height and this was done for the most part for males through the imparting of skills from one father to his son. As more and more men were lost to unemployment and disillusionment many of these skills and morals were not transferred to future generations. When we include the harmful effects of alcoholism, drug abuse, and self defeating behaviors it creates a toxic mix that has poisoned so many of our families.

If we are to have a lasting impact on the healing of the African American family and the reengagement of fathers to their children there has to be an economic component that addresses the marginalization of the black worker in America. It is an historical fact that men without jobs often times view themselves as burdens and will leave their families. Many times they are viewed as irresponsible by society and failures to themselves. While unemployment does not fully explain or justify the state of the black male and his children it is a major component that must be addressed if we are to become a nation of true equality for all of our children and citizens.

We have attempted to document the many causes of this epidemic however I am afraid that often times we merely catalogued its symptoms. It appears that there are as many causes as there are absentee fathers, but there are some patterns that I believe we have been able to identify. There has been a deep injury done to the African American family that has never fully been addressed and as a result we have continued to perpetuate certain behaviors that have been counter-productive to the success of raising our children. Instead of passing along the lessons of studiousness and hard-work, as we had done for most of our history in America we have recently begun to pass along a legacy of futility. We believe that education is vital to all members of the African American family. For while education has not always proven to provide equal financial compensation it is still the great equalizer in that with knowledge you can recognize the strategy being used against you and you can then rationally determine a choice of action. Education must become the top priority in the African American community if we are to remain viable in this country. We

can no longer afford to overindulge our children's fantasies of becoming athletes, entertainers, or lottery winners.

While the causes and symptoms may be numerous our goal is a simple one. How do we develop children that are healthy and successful? Many of these children are broken and will require our full commitment as persons, as organizations, and as a community. Research has shown that if we are to have any lasting impact in the lives of these children we must intervene early and with all the resources we can muster. We should begin to address the problems of crime, drug and alcohol abuse, educational failure, and teen pregnancy in a holistic way. Instead of our organizations transforming our people we have allowed the people to conform us to the "crisis mentality". We are so busy putting out fires that we have lost the ability to step back and take a strategic view of the problems we are facing. It is our hope that we as a community can begin to develop these strategic plans to address this enormous problem.

We must begin to heal the wound in the African American family through love, support, and forgiveness. We as a community must begin the process of reaching out to these damaged men and boys where they are. We must come out from behind the desks, the counters, and the pulpits and engage these men in relationships that are not based in shame but in mercy. We must never forget that these are our sons, our brothers, and our fathers. We do not believe in one weekend we have solved a problem that has festered for generations, but the important step we believe we have taken is that we have begun a conversation, a conversation that must continue with more voices and more ideas. Because this problem permeates so many levels of our community it will take the input of many different people with diverse skills to reach each of these levels. We invite you or your organization to get involved in this conversation with us. While we have outlined some steps they will require the involvement of our entire community to have any impact.

As we become a nation of more female headed households more and more of our children will face the real possibility of growing up without the financial, spiritual and emotional guidance of their fathers and this we must not allow to happen. Regardless of whether the government or the larger society chooses to support our efforts the black community can no longer be excused for refusing to act. These are our children that are being deserted. I can't tell you the times I have gone to meet with young black men and listened to their anger and their pain towards their fathers. They have every right to be angry you see when they were young and needed a father to protect, support, and encourage them no one was there. Not only was there no one there but no one came and no one seemed to care.

We do not believe that our list of next steps is comprehensive or complete. They are merely a starting point where we can all rally and get started. Many of the steps we

recommend are already available in some form or another, our hope is that through coordination and collaboration we can bring the full weight of our convictions to bear on this issue that is causing so much pain in our community. If you would like to join the conversation and are ready to do more than talk please contact ReEngage to be added to the mailing list for future meetings and events.

Signed,

Rodney Knott  
Executive Director  
ReEngage, Inc.

Linwood Tauheed  
Ph.D. in Economics/Social Science  
University of Missouri-Kansas City

Congressman Emanuel Cleaver  
Missouri's Fifth District  
House of Representatives

Councilwoman Sharon Saunders Brooks  
3<sup>rd</sup> District Kansas City  
City of Kansas City

Councilwoman Cindy Circo  
5<sup>th</sup> District at-Large Kansas City  
City of Kansas City

Gerald Douglas  
Family Self Sufficiency Specialist  
Housing Authority of Kansas City

E. Thomas Copeland Jr., Ph.D.  
Adjunct Faculty  
Webster University

Ursula Copeland  
Program Manager  
KCMO Health Department

George W. Norman  
Western District Administrator  
Missouri Dept. of Mental Health

Jeffrey D. Zimmerman  
Attorney at Law  
Zimmerman Law Firm

Evelyn Givens  
Mid America Regional Council  
Director Head Start

John Samuels  
Aim4Peace  
City of Kansas City

Father David Paisius  
Executive Director  
Reconciliation Services

Reverend Kevin Snow  
Clergy Pastor  
Community Christian Church

Gary Dumas  
Director  
Man2Man

Minister Vincent Muhammad  
Minister  
The Nation of Islam

Patricia Williams  
Aim4Peace  
City of Kansas City

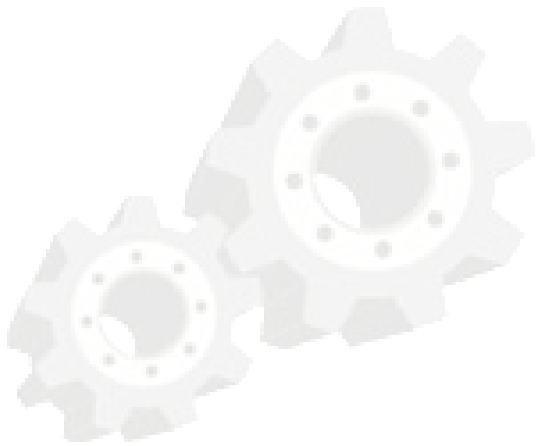
Charles Harris  
Father  
Kansas City

Dorothy Chaney  
Parent Outreach  
Kansas City School District

Angela Turner  
Student  
University of Kansas City-Missouri

Gayle Lee  
Senior Principal  
De La Salle Academy

Cynthia Morris  
Administrator  
ReEngage, Inc.



ReEngage Inc.

# ACTIONS

- Awareness – Alert our community to the enormity and seriousness of this epidemic.
- Communication – Enhance communication between members and organizations in the community concerning this epidemic.
- Transformation – Transform how the community and organizations view this epidemic and our role in its perpetuation or elimination.
- Implementation – Begin to implement strategies and steps community-wide to address this epidemic.
- Outreach – Begin outreach efforts to our black men to begin the healing process and reengaging them into the lives of their children.
- Natural – It is natural for children to have involvement with both their parents. It is not just black children or white children, it is human children. All human children do better with the support and guidance of both parents.
- Support – Begin to provide support for the family as a complete unit and not as separate entities estranged from one another.