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Fathers and Child Welfare: Stories of Men's Everyday Life Experiences

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**Fathers and Child Welfare:
Stories of Men's Everyday Life Experiences**

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July, 2010

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Introduction

There is very little discussion about fathers in child welfare literature or practice. Missing from thought and action is an appropriate metaphor. Absent are considerations of who they are and how they might be engaged. They are marginalized in thinking about interventions and in considerations of what children need in their lives. Fathers are too often relegated to the background when families are engaged by child welfare authorities.

The earlier components of the Partnership for Children and Families program of research highlighted how little was known about fathers in families involved with child welfare services. They were acknowledged mainly as potential dangers to women and children. They were often defined in quite limited and negative terms by their women partners. They usually were not engaged with child welfare service providers, even if they lived with the mother and children. These descriptions of fathers by others resembled “cardboard cut outs” rather than real people.

If collecting of life stories from mothers involved with child welfare services (Cameron & Hoy, 2003) showed greater complexities and strengths than conventional images of these women, why should this not be the case for fathers? And could not our capacity to engage constructively with these men be increased by knowing more about how they perceived their lives and their child welfare involvements?

This report provides an overview of the findings about everyday living from 18 life stories collected from fathers involved with a Children’s Aid Society in Southern Ontario. We have endeavoured to find a productive compromise in presenting the men’s stories. On the one hand, we have included broad sections of the stories in the fathers’ words. This is not an efficient strategy for communicating research findings. However, in

this research, efficiency is a secondary consideration to maintaining a sense of these men as individuals with experiences and perspectives essential to understanding their reactions and actions. On the other hand, we have organized the discussion around common experiences for these men. We also consider the implications of these patterns for understanding and engaging fathers involved with child protection services.

Readers wanting to access to the 18 fathers' stories in their words without commentary from the authors can do so on the project's web site (www.wlu.ca/pcfproject). This is the best way to get a sense of these men as individuals. Individual stories may also be useful in introducing students to realities of child welfare.

One of the impetuses for this research was the profile of their partners provided by 16 mothers involved with child protection authorities in their life stories (Cameron & Hoy, 2003). To provide a point of comparison, we have included a brief overview of the main themes that emerged from the mothers' stories in this report.

This report begins with an overview of the image of fathers available in the child welfare literature. Then we provide a brief discussion of the research methods used for this study. The next section presents the main patterns abstracted from the 18 profiles of fathers' everyday living. The report concludes with a discussion of the service implications of these patterns.

Child Welfare Perspectives on Fathers

The English language child welfare literature between 1961 and 1989 focused on fathers as abuse perpetrators, missing from families and, to a lesser extent, as embattled single parents (Greif & Bailey, 1990). Images of fathers as providers and disciplinarians continue to be significant in the literature about families (Featherstone, 2003; Lamb,

2000). More recently, the way in which women and children are understood has impacted on fathering ideals (Pringle, 1998; Scourfield, 2003). In North America, the feminist and fatherhood movements have influenced how families and parenting are perceived.

In the social work literature, revisions to attachment theory have allowed for more diverse possibilities to be legitimated. No longer is the mother identified as the critical attachment figure for a child's healthy development. There is now a common perspective that a child needs to attach to one consistent adult, and, beyond this, benefits from a circle of adult support (Daniel & Taylor, 1999).

In theory, fathers are now understood to have a positive contribution to make to child development and to children's well being. This is considered to be true whether or not the father is living in the home (Eggebeen, 2002; Featherstone, 2003; Sonenstein, Malm & Billing, 2002). For example, several American studies have suggested that involvement by both custodial and non-custodial Black fathers benefit their children (Alston, 1982; Dunn, 1993; Earle & Lohmann, 1978; Sanders, 1996). In addition, children's attachment does not have to be to their biological father and other male figures can make significant contributions (Coley, 1998).

It is likely that a greater number of children have more engaged fathers than in previous decades (Eggebeen, 2002). There are more instances of shared parenting with the father taking on more responsibilities (Lupton, 1997). It is more common, if still far from the norm, for fathers to have primary parenting responsibilities (Daniel & Taylor, 1999). The number of custodial fathers is increasing in North America (Meyer & Garasky, 1993), having tripled in the United States from 1980 to 1997 (Single and Custodial fathers Network, 2005).

In the United States in 1999, 23% of children were living with their mothers without their fathers; the percentage was 52% for African Americans. About 30% of all American children were living with only one of their parents. Contrary to common perceptions, the majority of non-custodial fathers remained involved in child's life to some extent, though the level of involvement decreased over time (Sonenstein, Malm & Billing, 2002). In addition, Black fathers in the United States were more involved with their children than previously portrayed, maintaining connections even when they did not live with their children (Coles, 2002; Leashore, 1997; O'Donnell, 2001; Pringle, 1998).

Despite these shifts, fathers are still generally seen as a less essential than mothers for children (Daniel & Taylor, 1999; Lupton, 1997). Fathers also are seldom considered in light of the multiple roles inherent in fatherhood such as financial provider, teacher, mentor, nurturer, companion, and caregiver (Lamb, 2000; O'Donnell, 2001).

In addition, these perspectives on fathering have been substantially based on perceptions of Caucasian middle class men (Featherstone, 2003). Economic privilege impacts on options for fathering and how fathers see themselves (Hudspeth, 2003). Relatively little attention has been paid to understanding the circumstances of poor fathers or those from different cultural backgrounds (Devault, Lacharie, Ouellet & Forget, 2003).

Child welfare educational textbooks provide very little information about the nature and importance of fathering. Indeed, a review of six child welfare textbooks¹

¹ These are:

Beckett, C. (2003). *Child Protection: An Introduction*. London: Sage
Crosson-Tower, C. (2002). *Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
Crosson-Tower, C. (2004). *Exploring Child Welfare: A practice perspective*. Boston: Pearson
May-Chahal, C. and Coleman, S. (2003). *Safeguarding children and young people*. London: Routledge.
Rycus, J. and Hughes, C. (1998). *Field Guide to Child Welfare (Vols. 1-4)*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

published between 1998 and 2003 found that fathers generally are not given specific attention. References to parents are common perhaps implying that there should be a commitment to working with both parents (Scourfield, 2003; O'Donnell, 2001).

However, the gender neutral term 'parent' conceals ample evidence that child welfare interventions typically focus on mothers and mothering (Daniel & Taylor, 1999; D'Cruz, 2001; Freymond, 2003; Scourfield, 2003; Swift, 1995). Only one of the six texts had a focused discussion about fathers, noting the invisibility of fathers in child welfare and the skewing of parental responsibility towards mothers (Shireman (2003).

A review of four child welfare/ family social work journals² over the period 1999-2004 revealed a total of seven studies on the topic of fatherhood. Two articles discussing the involvement of fathers in placement decisions appeared in *Child Welfare* in 2001 (Franck, 2001; O'Donnell, 2001). There were four articles, one focusing on teen fathers and the other three on the effect of father involvement on children's health, in the *Child and Youth Services Review* (1999-2004). One article in the *Journal of Family Social Work* explored the issue of parenting education for incarcerated fathers.

Not surprisingly, as was true with the literature about mothers (Freymond & Cameron, 2007), most of the available research about fathers involved with child protection authorities focuses on their limitations. They are described as having higher rates of poverty and unemployment than fathers in the general population. They are portrayed in terms of their personal emotional challenges, difficulties in their partner relationships, and criminal or delinquent activities (Devault & Gratton, 2003; DiLionardi,

Shireman, J. (2003) *Critical Issues in Child Welfare*. New York: Columbia University Press

² These included *Child Welfare* (January/February 2002 to January/February 2005); *International Journal of Child and Family Welfare* (March 2002 to March 2005); *Children and Youth Services Review* (January 1999 to June 2005), and the *Journal of Family Social Work* (2001 to 2004).

1993; Eamon & Kopels, 2004; Featherstone, 2003; Gavin et al, 2002; Hamer, 1997; Lazar, Sagi & Fraser, 1991; O'Hagan, 1997; Scourfield, 2001, 2003).

Black Americans fathers engaged with their child protection systems are characterized by a greater likelihood of being non-resident fathers, higher rates of co-habitation rather than marriage, and more multigenerational households than their Caucasian counterparts (Eggebeen, 2002). These men are seen as reluctant to engage with child protection service providers. Adolescent fathers in particular were described as adverse to seeking out assistance, in part because of their understanding that Black fathers were seen as being abusive and irresponsible (O'Donnell, 2001).

A significant number of non-custodial fathers in the United States involved with child protection services have been described as being incarcerated, homeless, and/or abusing substances (Greif & Zuravin, 1989 cited in Sonenstein, Malm & Billing, 2002; Hairston, 1998; McMahon, 2003). Young fathers involved with American child protection have been portrayed as having limited finances and parenting skills, problems succeeding in school or work, and conflicted relationships with their partners (Brown, 1983; Chadiha, 1995; Hendricks, Montgomery & Fullilove, 1984).

In the United Kingdom, according to Featherstone (2003), twice the number of children involved with child welfare protection services compared to the overall population are not living with both birthparents (80% versus 38%), and more than three times the proportion live in reconstituted families (28% versus 8%). More fathers (approximately one fifth) move out, although they tend to be replaced by another man. The proportion of single fathers caring for children involved with child welfare compares with the national average in the United Kingdom.

A few authors pointed out that, despite such difficulties, a considerable number of fathers involved with child protection authorities maintained involvement with their children whether they lived together or not (Hendricks, 1983; Perloff & Buckner, 1996). However, overall, considerations of these fathers' strengths and potential contributions to their children's and families' well being were essentially absent from the child welfare literature. In addition, this literature provides little sense of these men's lives other than the existence of a limited set of problems.

Historically, the Anglo-American child protection focus has been on mothers and mothering (Cameron & Freymond, 2006; Cameron, Coady & Adams, 2007; Franck, 2001; Swift, 1995; Sonenstein, Malm & Billing, 2002; Swift & Callahan, 2006). While some shifts in emphasis have been noted (Sonenstein, Malm & Billing, 2002), there is overall little involvement with fathers (O'Donnell, 2001).

Men tend to be emotionally and physically avoided by child protection service providers (Daniel & Taylor, 1999; D'Cruz, 2001; Lazar, Sagi & Fraser, 1991; O'Hagan, 1997). Male partners can be viewed by child protection service providers as transient and interchangeable (Marshall, English & Stewart, 2001; Scourfield, 2003). Reinforcing men's invisibility is mothers offering their own interpretation of fathers' roles in children's lives and effectively acting as gatekeepers with their views frequently accepted and not verified by service providers (Sonenstein, Malm & Billing, 2001). Whether service providers have small or large caseloads, they engage substantially less with fathers. Service providers engage with mothers irrespective of whether they are stay-at-home mothers or employed (Franck, 2001; O'Donnell, 2001). Service providers'

approach to engaging fathers does not appear to alter appreciably with greater experience (Franck, 2001).

Fathers are often seen as potential physical threats to their partners and children as well as to child protection service providers. This can contribute to a reluctance of front-line service providers as well as foster parents to be actively involved with these men (Featherstone, 2003; Greif & Bailey, 1990; Marshall, English & Stewart, 2001; O'Hagan, 1997; Scourfield, 2001, 2003). Predominantly female service personnel may fear that men may become violent, even if they have not been so in the past, particularly in situations of domestic violence when men may be actively and automatically avoided (Featherstone, 2003; O'Hagan, 1997). In addition, service providers often are more available during daytime working hours which can be an obstacle for working fathers.

There is some evidence that fathers who wish to be more involved frequently have to overcome obstacles and demonstrate their commitment to their children in ways that mothers often do not (Franck, 2001; National Child Welfare Resource Centre for Family Centred Practice, 2001; O'Donnell, 2001; Sonenstein, Malm & Billing, 2002). There are recommendations in the literature for a more concerted effort to engage fathers in families involved with child protective services through intervention models that are physically and psychologically more accessible to men (Connor, 2002; Dalla & Gamble, 1998; Daniel & Taylor, 1999; Franck, 2001; Harris, 1991; Hendricks, 1987, 1988; Hopkins, 1972; Leashore, 1997; Peled, 2000). For example, perhaps parenting classes could focus on constructive fathering.

Research Methods

The report is based on life story interviews with 18 fathers with recently closed child protection cases at a child protection agency in southern Ontario. Fathers were chosen randomly from a longer list of child protection cases identified from computer records as having a custodial or non-custodial father involved with child protection services in some way. One constraint on this selection processes was including a comparable proportion of cases having a child placed in care to the host agency's proportion. Also, a similar proportion of cases involving domestic violence between partners to the host agency's ratio was selected.

Fathers were interviewed two or three times representing about 4-6 hours of conversation with each father. Most interviews took place in the respondent's home. A very simple interview strategy was used involving a preamble asking each father to imagine that a movie or book of their life was being made and to decide what was in the story. The story could begin in the present or past and should include what they thought would be most important if they wanted someone to understand their life.

Fathers were asked where they'd like the story to begin and neutral probes were used to encourage them to discuss this topic. The interviewer kept a list of additional topics mentioned during the discussion and returned to them later in the interview. Otherwise, the father was asked what came next in the story. Interviewers also asked questions about a standard set of topics (e.g., childhood, family life, education, work, child welfare involvement) in later interviews if these were not discussed through the previous procedures.

Each interview was audiotaped and listened to by the interviewer prior to the next interview to identify possible focuses for this discussion. Each interview proceeded on the basis of informed consent and participants were given a gift of \$100 for consenting to be interviewed.

The tapes for each father's interviews were transcribed and transcripts averaged between 65-100 pages for the combined interviews. Each respondent received a copy of this transcript for his own use as the research team's summary story from this transcript. Each father was encouraged to contact the research team with any additions or corrections he wished to make. Respondents who wished also were given a copy of the study's summary report.

Two broad analytic strategies were used with these stories. First, three research team members read the complete transcript of the interviews with each father. They agreed on the predominant topics and story lines in each life story. The story lines and topics in each story were encapsulated in an approximately 13 -15 page summary story using almost exclusively the respondent's own words. Each respondent also received a copy of this summary to verify its appropriateness. The purpose of these summaries was to allow comparisons to be made across fathers' stories without losing a sense of the specific individuals involved.

To aid with the interpretation of these stories, and to gauge how fathers and service providers might agree or disagree about their meaning, one group of eight self-selected fathers involved in the study, and another group of 12 self-selected child protection service providers, read all of the 18 story summaries. Each of these groups met separately for about three hours to share their reactions to the stories. Each group was

asked to provide their understanding of the lives and child protection service involvements of the men in the stories. They were also invited to reflect on the implications of these stories for understanding and engaging with fathers involved with child protection services. These group discussions were audiotaped and transcribed. Members of the research team also read all of the summaries and met as a group with an outside facilitator to share their reactions to the stories. A later chapter in this volume compares how these fathers and service providers understood these stories.

The second broad analytic strategy involved building a thematic coding schema from the original transcripts based on consensus among multiple readers from the research team. These transcripts were then coded using the N-Vivo qualitative data management software. The major patterns within each part of this coding framework then were identified and summarized with illustrations from the transcripts.

To the extent possible, in presenting the study results, maintaining fathers' individual identities and their "humanity" was a priority. Consequently, in bringing forward patterns of living among these men, relatively lengthy excerpts from individual fathers' interviews are included. This makes the report long. But it accomplishes two purposes: it gives some sense of individual father's lives and it provides supporting evidence for the patterns identified. Readers wanting a more integrated perspective on each father can access all 18 summary stories at www.wlu.ca/pcfproject.

There are several strengths to this study. It focuses on the lives of these fathers and not upon their status as child protection "clients". This allows us to see aspects of these men's lives that would be less accessible if our attention was concentrated on

the child protection mandate. In addition, the four to six hours of conversation with each father provided fairly extensive information on his struggles, successes, fears and hopes. It allows us to consider the specific circumstances of each of these fathers and supports speculations about how others in similar positions might be appropriately perceived and engaged.

Nonetheless, these remain stories about only 18 fathers involved with one child protection agencies in southern Ontario. As with most qualitative investigations, the small sample, the open-ended methods of investigation, and the inherently subjective nature of the analytic and interpretive processes means that we cannot assume that identical patterns would be identified with different groups of fathers or by another research team.

In our life story research with mothers involved with child protection services, there were other methods of investigation with mothers in the Partnerships for Children and Families project and extensive discussion in the child welfare literature with which to make comparisons. This allowed us to be quite confident that the mothers' lives we had investigated had important commonalities with many other women involved with child protection services in Ontario and elsewhere. We cannot make such a claim for these fathers' stories. Indeed, so little is known about men involved with child protection services that we have no way of knowing how typical or unique the circumstances of the men in this story are. If nothing else, particularly in light of the positive contributions many of the fathers in this study make to their children and families, this is a strong argument for the importance of developing a richer understanding of men involved in child protection services.

Finally, these stories are constructions. They represent how these men chose to present themselves to particular interviewers. Under different circumstances, and talking to someone other than a researcher, modified versions of these representations of self would emerge. These stories are not presented as complete or definitive statements of what is taking place in these fathers' lives. They are not presented as the "truth" of how particular occurrences transpired. What these stories do communicate is how these men within the context of this research made sense of aspects of their lives important to them. For us, these portrayals are not more or less accurate versions of family life or service involvements than those that might be provided by child protection personnel. They present different points of view. They enrich our understanding and hopefully our respect for the men sharing these stories.

Points of Contrast: Mothers' Stories

The original impetus to gather stories from fathers involved with child protection authorities came from listening to mothers involved with child protection talk about their partners (Cameron & Hoy, 2003). Two patterns from these women's stories provoked our interest: (1) many of these women described the fathers of their children being marginally involved in parenting, and (2) the images of fathers in these stories provided little insight into their lives and were often focused on the problems they caused in family life. Would fathers' stories provide a male perspective on coping with lives of lesser privilege and ongoing adversity, which were prevalent themes in the mothers' stories?

To be able to compare fathers and mothers involved with child protection services, this section provides a very brief overview of the main themes that emerged from the mothers' stories (for more detail see the reports available on

www.wlu.ca/pcfproject). The mothers' life story research is based on life story interviews with 16 mothers with recently closed child protection cases at two child protection agencies in southern Ontario. A similar proportion of mothers who had experienced having a child placed in care to the proportion of mothers in the host agency were included in this sample. The themes highlighted below for mothers are consistent with findings in the broader Partnerships for Children and Families program of child and family welfare research.

- From its earliest days until the present, Anglo-American child protection systems have focussed their attention on the most impoverished segments of the population as well as on immigrant and other marginalised groupings. The mothers' stories confirm this disproportionate focus on disadvantaged families. It is impossible to read these stories without confronting the ongoing pressures of living with lesser privilege and the extraordinary efforts required to survive and overcome such obstacles.
- All of these women at some point have been single mothers and typically this coincided with a substantial drop in their income. Most have been on social assistance at one time. About half did not complete high school. Long hours of work, shift work, low pay and limited benefits were common for those working outside the home and for the partners of these women. Every woman except one described living with very tight finances and several talked about going into bankruptcy.

- Particularly striking was the level of daily living stress described by some of these women as they invested so much of themselves into working to pay the bills, caring of their children, keeping their families together and maintaining a home.
- Many of these women told truly horrendous stories of what they have had to overcome in their own childhoods and how this has impacted on their adult lives. This is a reality recognized by many child protection service providers (Frensch, & Cameron, 2003); however, in service providers' emphasis on "mothers dealing with their personal issues," the limitations posed by time and resource constraints on these women, and the great amount of time and effort such "healing" efforts require, were often not talked about. Particularly important in understanding these stories is the great persistence and courage many of these women have shown in "overcoming" such obstacles. There was desire and strength in these stories usually not recognized in "official" dialogue about these women nor encouraged in the helping models used.
- A pivotal commonality for many of these stories, particularly surprising in stories of very abusive childhoods, is the central role that relations with parents, especially with their mothers, and other family members have for some of these women and their families. Family was the most common source of emotional and practical support for many mothers and many of these women and their families do much of their socializing within their extended families. The overall Partnerships for Children and Families program of research suggests that of the women interviewed many have potentially supportive relationships with parents, siblings or other family members.

- The literature is replete with descriptions of the dysfunctional nature of families involved with child protection services, including absent and irresponsible fathers, violence and conflict between partners, multiple partners, drug and alcohol abuse, neglected and abused children, unstable families, frequent moves, inadequate parenting, and so on. These family characteristics are presented as very harmful to children and provide the rationale for child protection interventions into homes. These women's stories do little to dispel such images; many of these characteristics were dramatically evident in many of their families. It is not hard to understand why there would be concern for the children in some of these homes.
- Yet there was another story fundamental to understanding and helping told by these mothers. It was a tale about the continuity and central importance of family in the lives of these women and their children, and their persistent desire and effort to have a family and a home. These contrasting stories co-exist and need to be understood in relationship to each other as we hear about ways of living that may be very different from our own.
- While a few of these women talked about long-term marriages, most of these discussions of partnerships told of a series of relationships with different men over time. Most of these women had been involved in a physically and emotionally abusive relationship with a live-in male partner, some with several. Most of the children in these stories were not living with their biological fathers and many had minimal if any contact with them. Siblings had different biological fathers in quite a few stories. The images of many fathers in these women's

stories were of irresponsible men who were not able or willing to play an active role in parenting. Many of these men struggled with substance misuse, particularly alcohol.

- Yet there was another side to the image of partnerships. Several women expressed a desire to stay out of a partnership, at least for the foreseeable future and others remained committed to their well-established marriages. These stories told of a strong motivation to partner, to try again, among these women, coupled with a strong desire for a normal family and home. In addition, in most of the current partnerships, the women felt that they were doing better than with past partners and, in many if not all tales, there were descriptions suggesting that their perceptions of improvements may have been accurate.
- In almost all of these stories, mothers provided the only continuity of parenting and family for these children over time. In many of these stories, becoming and being a mom was central in these women's lives. Many talked fondly about their children and strove to maintain a family and a home for themselves and their children, under sometimes very difficult circumstances.
- There were clearly important positive elements in many of these women's stories about their experiences with child protection services. Quite a few of these women talked about a positive connection they were able to make with a child protection worker. What was most often appreciated was having someone who would listen to them and who believed that they were doing their best. Service providers were also appreciated for offering useful advice and finding helpful resources. Some women gave credit to the Children's Aid Society for helping

them get out of an abusive relationship, though they did not necessarily appreciate how this was done. Some women talked about helpful programs and services that they voluntarily used or were ordered to use by child welfare.

- However, these positive experiences were not the dominant themes in these women's child welfare stories. Having more than one child protection worker while their case was open was the norm. Many commented about infrequent contact with child welfare workers and how hard it was to get a response to their calls. Some child welfare workers were clearly experienced as insensitive and judgmental. Some mothers talked about workers assuming that they were guilty until they proved themselves innocent. Other felt information about their circumstances was misrepresented or exaggerated. Others wished child welfare workers had listened to them before making up their minds.
- Fear was a prevalent theme in most of these stories; fear when child welfare first showed up and fear that they might come back in the future. Even "voluntary clients" talked about not feeling that they had any choice but to agree with what the agency wanted. Most mothers were very clear that they believed they needed to do what they were told to do, especially if their child was in care. Some complained about feeling constrained as parents and unclear about what they could do with their children. Many expressed confusion about what child welfare expected of them and even the status of their case at the agency. Others talked about going through the motions with some elements on their supervision orders or simply not telling the child protection worker what was going on. Even when a supervision order was in effect or when a child had just returned home from care, child protection worker visits often were infrequent. Most mothers were anxious for child welfare to be out of their lives.

- In these stories, child welfare prescribed a fairly standard and limited range of interventions for families: individual and group counselling of various types, anger management and parenting courses, and alcohol and drug testing and treatment are most common. Parents were monitored to make sure they followed through with “treatment” and behaved appropriately with their children. There was a substantial absence of interventions designed to help children directly in these stories.
- Of particular concern to the research team was the use of short-term placements in these stories [from 5 days to 4 months] as a precaution and as leverage to secure changes in family functioning. These placements were horrible ordeals for these mothers. Most of the mothers with young children who were apprehended and returned home talked of the insecurities and confusion of their child afterwards.
- Over half of these stories described the trials of parents trying to cope with a child exhibiting very difficult behaviours. None of these mothers talked about receiving useful assistance from the Children’s Aid Society. The Partnerships for Children and Families program of research into mothers’ perceptions of child placements (Freymond, 2007) and family involvements with children’s mental health residential care programs (Cameron, de Boer, Frensch & Adams, 2003) reinforces how hard it was for families coping with child behaviour problems to get assistance from child welfare agencies. Nonetheless, when such assistance was forthcoming, it was appreciated by parents (Freymond, 2007).
- Life gave many of these women many reasons to give up. Many confronting such circumstances have ended up in mental hospitals, prison, on the streets, or dead. Yet most of these women continued to talk about their joys and aspirations, despite the challenges in their lives.

Talking with Fathers

One of the predictions for our interviews with fathers was that they would be reluctant to meet with us and, if they did, they would not be very forthcoming during the interviews. Neither of these predictions proved to be accurate. Fathers were as willing to be interviewed as mothers were in the earlier study. And they were just as talkative. For example, consider the following comments about the interview from the interviewers' notes:

Interview with George: We talked outside on the balcony and I really didn't have to say more than where do you want to begin and he essentially talked non-stop for 90 minutes. At one point I suggested we stop because he was covering so much material so quickly and it seemed to me he was disappointed and we kept going with him talking for another half hour.

Interview with Nigel: He was waiting with the door open when I arrived. He was willing to talk and stated that he was willing to do so because he was grateful to the CAS for breaking the log jam with his wife and doing something about the situation his children were in.

Interview with Paul: I approached the first interview with some uncertainty about how different it would be to interview men from the women's life stories. The first stereotype to go was that he was extremely talkative. Indeed, I didn't do much more than listen in this interview.

Not all of these fathers were equally talkative. But, at least in the context of these research interviews, most talked quite willingly and extensively about their experiences.

The lead author interviewed all of the mothers in research described previously. He also interviewed about half of the fathers for this research. He noticed that he was not having the same intensity of emotional reactions conducting the men's interviews and began trying to understand why. His suspicion was that this had something to do both with how men present themselves when they talk and for how we are socialized to respond to men. He thought that understanding his reactions might offer some insights into talking with and engaging men involved with child welfare services. What follows in this section are his speculations.

Despite many of these men talking about life circumstances that were as “objectively” trying as the mothers’, they evoked less of an emotional reaction from me. Why? First, it is likely that I am socialized to react less emotionally or sympathetically to men than women. This may be particularly true within a world view as feminized as social work. Second, many of these men’s style of talking, while very open and descriptive, tended to focus on what is happening and why, rather than feelings about what is happening. It was hard in many interviews to get men to talk about their reactions to events, instead of the events themselves. Perhaps a very difficult experience might be accompanied by brief characterizations such as “It was hard” or “it was a terrible time” with further elaboration. Here are a few examples of this kind of talk:

Paul: *I’m the youngest of five. Five kids . . . a couple of months later I got this letter saying . . . I was like born on December the 11th, I’m, I’m, medically I was fine, I was a healthy baby boy and, and stuff like that, it gives a little teeny bit, not too much on the father, it gives just a little bit of the mother . . . she liked to frequent the hotels . . . I think she was pretty young. It was 1957. And I think, I don’t know, but I’m quite sure probably those five children, maybe just didn’t all come from that same father. . . . but growing up [He was adopted], it’s, it was fine, like my they were very open about it. . .*

Caleb: *My parents separated when I was three, uh divorced with I was 7. Um they separated cause my Mom was abusive . . . she was really starting to understand what- that she was being abusive and it was kind’ve a, pushing me away too. Cause she didn’t want to be continually doing it. (So when you say abusive . . . what do you mean?) Uh mostly physical from what I understand. . . we lost contact for a number of years . . . she had a major breakdown . . . still suffers from high anxiety, depression . . . and [agoraphobia] more than anything right now. . . there’s a lot of stuff I didn’t realize that I found out for a few years when I got back in touch with her . . .*

Zack: *Dad and mom didn’t get along really that well. I mean, because of his drinking . . . he’d scream and yell, you know, if you didn’t do something . . . that’s where . . . the fear came in . . . was that he’d scream and yell at ya. Uh, so, it was, it was unpleasant growing up. I mean I wanted to be out on my own . . . my mother was not a good housekeeper. amazing how ya, ya marry the same thing as, as, uh, you leave behind . . .*

Felix: *Well when I was five years old . . . my father had to leave the house. Or he left of his own accord because of his drinking, going to jail, whatever. I’m not exactly sure of all the things, but he had to, it was agreed upon or he was forced to, I’m not sure what it was, but he had, was*

out. So. And since then I've actually not really seen him except for, well four times before we moved . . . at least four times . . . I saw him when I was thirteen actually. Since my grandmother died, his mother, I've only seen him for the funeral ... we did the viewing and then he took us out to, for donuts and pop or something and I was thirteen, and then I saw him about seven years later. And I actually haven't seen him since. So, so almost twenty years ... He's seventy-two now, I guess, if he's still alive ...

George: *Faith was about eighteen or nineteen months old, I didn't get custody of her until then. And, and by that time, I didn't need it, but there was a time . . . and the system, they couldn't do anything because I didn't have legal custody yet of her although the child was with me twenty-four, seven. I lived for probably the better part of a year on four hundred and fifty dollars a month and food bank ... It was really tough.*

Nigel: *...I went away ... to see my, my brother for the weekend, and I came back on the Sunday, and it was Father's Day of all days. I get home, and there's like four members of her family there, this is odd, I'm like "Why are you here so early on a Sunday morning?" And she says "Well they're, they're here to escort you out, you gotta leave." I said, "Leave, well where am I going?" "Well, that's it, I can't, I don't want you here anymore." And I was just flabbergasted and then I, I left right? . . . I ended up getting like a rooming house ...*

It's important not to overstate this point. Even the fathers mentioned above were more emotional about some topics than others. And some fathers talked about their emotional reactions more than others. Nonetheless, on balance, these men were more likely to describe what had happened than to dwell on how their emotional reactions to what had happened.

Another factor could be that these men may have felt a need to present themselves as competent, whereas it may have been more acceptable for women to talk about how difficult challenges have been for them. Some of these fathers described situations beyond their capacity to manage. But many others focused how they went about resolving the difficulties they faced, sometimes with some outside help.

Besides talking in a different fashion, these fathers, compared to the mothers' stories, to a certain extent, also talked about different things. They talked less about their childhoods. They talked less about how events affected them and more about the people and circumstances around them. They focused on different aspects of their involvements with their children and families. Employment was more prominent in their conversations.

These patterns may have been more evident because of my identity. I am a past middle aged white male. I have many of the traits described above myself.

Fathers and their Children

Child protection services focus primarily on the personal problems and parenting capacity of mothers. Service providers often do not usually engage with fathers or male partners even when they were living within the home. There are several consequences of this disengagement.

Prevalent images of fathers are constructed by mothers and mostly female service providers. As mentioned earlier, these portraits of fathers seem almost caricatures, containing little detail about these men's lives. The prevalent images are primarily of men not willing to be engaged with their children, who are irresponsible and often physically dangerous. Consequently, service providers can bring set and limited templates to their engagements with men. In this research, some fathers felt excluded by child welfare service providers and others talked of having to exert extraordinary efforts to demonstrate their commitment to their children.

The stories told by the fathers in this research are much more complex and nuanced than these characterizations. Equally important, these stories show that many fathers are not only willing but capable of engaging constructively with their children. However, to take advantage of this potential, child protections service providers need to become less fearful and more engaged with these men. They need to become more open to fathers' points of view. If the stories in this research are representative, many fathers are willing to make substantial investments in their children's well being.

Importance of Being a Father

Almost all of the fathers interviewed at some point commented on what being a father meant to them. For most it was one of the defining occurrences of their lives. Such a sentiment was most obvious among fathers who were still active in caring for their children:

Paul: . . . *doing homework after the kids into bed 'til midnight . . . at the age of thirty five . . . my son and I think my daughter . . . they were pretty young at the time, and I went and got graduated. So I got my high school education. And I*

thought that was great. It was an accomplishment 'cause I could turn around and prove to them that, that, that you know, I could do it ...

...

Good, I love them [my children]. Love them with all my heart, yeah. They're good.

Carlos: ... *I was the happiest person on earth. When I left, you know, that day I was like, I can't believe I'm a father, and I said, 'You know, I'm, I'm gonna everything I can to take care of you and make sure you're ok.' And when I left the hospital with her, I was so proud. I was showing everybody ... she was such a cute baby. And you know, I was so proud, I felt so blessed. But then going back into that, that, when you go back into your circle of stupidity ...*

...

She's very attached to me. She wants to spend time with me, she screams when she sees me, she's very much daddy's girl. Me and my daughter have an excellent relationship and I hope it stays like that so that when she's sixteen I'm not gonna have problems. I hope that we have this relationship together.

Rob: ... *Um, one of the things, my father, when you, when you get, like you get the opportunity, you, you raise, you have children, you want to do more for your children than, than your father did, or, like my father, was his own, you know, like he was different, right? ... Um, one of the things, my father, when you, when you get, like you get the opportunity, you, you raise, you have children, you want to do more for your children than, than you're father did, or, like my father, was his own, you know, like he was different, right?*

Tarek: *I-I love my kids . . . I- I'm t-treating my kids. . . the same . . . But I have to go to these programs to satisfy them [child welfare agency] . . . I'm telling you- there's no- no different. I- the way and I'm t- I'm treating my kids. It's the same... I-I love my kids . . . I- I'm t-treating my kids. . . the same . . . But I have to go to these programs to satisfy them . . . I'm telling you- there's no- no different. I- the way and I'm t- I'm treating my kids. It's the same.*

William: *So it was special, you know. 'Cause it was the first one for their family and it was the first one for Marie's Family. So, it was double whammy both family names, kinda nice. Because my sisters had to change their names when they got married and my brother he couldn't have kids so they adopted, so it was kinda wow. The first son to carry on our family name . . . And we decided to have another one and she was six weeks early and thank God we had good people looking after Richard while things happened. And this was the time where Marie got to meet her biological brother 'cause she was adopted so it was kinda a real eye opening time. So our family got bigger. Yeah, it was exciting, busier; it was fun . . .*

George: ...*the nurse wraps this child up and hands her to me. And, I'm, I'm looking at her, you know, I open up the blanket, I'm looking at her hands, and her*

toes and her face and she seemed so perfect and so beautiful, and to me that was God answering my prayers. I said, you know, I had to have had my prayers heard and I was, at this time going to Narcotics Anonymous [NA] meetings . . . I had brought my child there . . . and I'd said, "This is why I really believe in God . . . this is an experience that changed my life" ... with NA [I] didn't get a lot of support from them, they weren't really into my righteous attitude about God, God to them could be anything. Pumpkin, a tree, whatever helps keep them clean ... I ended up leaving there and I, I stayed clean and started fighting for custody.

Nigel: *... because like my son, he was just like you know, my pride and joy right, and him and I had been like, like this since he was a baby, right? ...*

Raymond: *And I gotta be a grandpa, oh God. [laughs] ... it is exciting. I'm looking forward to it. I told her to I'd look after him any night but Friday night, Friday night is still my night. [laughter] ... kids are with me now. Family Services still comes around. In fact they're gonna be there tomorrow night to see the kids. So they still visit.*

Burt: *(What, what's important in your life right now? ...) Thomas ... and I being, Thomas to be happy, healthy. I worry about Thomas's mental state . . . bipolar can be, well it's pretty much hereditary ... Thomas's the most important. It's funny, 'cause parenting is the, the most important job that anybody has to do. If they're a parent, if they never have kids they don't have to worry about it. But how you parent your child is gonna reflect on, that's gonna tell more about that person fifty years down the road than any job or career that anybody ever had . . . It means a lot to me. Although I'm so busy with Thomas and a lot of times I don't really sit back and, I feel proud that I am a good father. I love it when I get support from my family. My sisters, my sister in law, anybody in my family says I'm doing a good job ... and that to me, makes me feel very good. [...] Someday I'm gonna be a grandfather ...*

A bit less than a third of the fathers interviewed no longer had custody of their children. Some of these men acknowledged that this was in the best interests of their children because they would not be able to properly care for them. In a couple of instances, the children had become permanent wards of the state. Yet even under these conditions, these fathers communicated the importance having children had for them, sometimes hoping that connections with their children could be established again when they were older:

Collin: . . . I was telling my son last night . . . he's asking about, you know, living with me . . . I just felt so uncomfortable . . . I'd have to quit . . . I'd just sell my car . . .

... I really feel for Oscar . . . I think he really wants to live with me, you know? Um, I kind of signed a, well you know, a document that he's a ward of the, of the crown, eh? . . . I'm in a, in a position now, where I have a low paying job, I, I can't, I really would like to, you know, you know, um, take care of him . . . he's always saying about how he's, he's getting tired of being a foster child . . .

Dean: My plans are to move out, get a two bedroom apartment. One room for me, one room for Victoria on the weekends. Buy her a bed and a dresser and, buy her all the clothes and make her room pretty in pink. 'Cause everything's pink she wants . . . I'd like to be able to pick her up after school and take her out for dinner . . . two, three times a week if I can. I don't wanna be the every other weekend dad . . . everything's positive.

...
. . . growing up you thought, oh my god, is that parent ever protective of that child. Oh my god, like relax, chill. I had no child then, so I didn't know. And now it's like oh, yeah, get away from my little girl. And you know, I'm the, yeah, now I can see the bond. I just, I never understood that before. (Can you tell me about that bond? . . .) I don't know, it's the way she looks up at you. Daddy, she just looks at you and you can see the pure, pure love. Something nobody can take from me. Well they're trying to. But it ain't gonna happen. And, yeah she's mine. She's got my last name, she's got my blood. It's, I don't know, there's just, an energy, a connection. It's just overwhelming, just to hug, a kiss. It's just, yeah, I don't know it's, it's a good feeling . . .

Dylan: and then she threatened to call the cops on me and everything. So then of course I left, like, if you threaten the cops on me, bye bye. So then I took off to Ottawa for awhile and then I came back. And then I met with her in July because I'd be away, I wanted to get back with her in a way, since she was the mother of my kids and I always wanted to have kids...

...
... since they were born premature, with, my daughter, she still can't talk. Like even when she was sick, she still couldn't talk, couldn't talk. And then plus with my son, where he's really slow and behind a lot of different things, like he can talk, but he's still slow a bit. And then since my mom lives in a nursing home, she has pre-senile dementia, so I couldn't help but compare my kids to her.

Peter: Since the children have been back at home with their mother, they come to visit Peter every weekend, but his apartment is still not big enough or suitable to have them stay overnight. He thinks the situation at home with their mother is better now, but he worries that his wife does not place the same importance on the kids doing well in school that he does. Peter is continuing to undergo physical and speech therapy and his hope is that he will recover enough to go back to

*work, save money, and get a bigger/better place to live so the kids can stay with him.*³

A small number of men were less enthusiastic about the importance becoming a dad:

Caleb: . . . *He's 7 now . . . it's always been a little rough between us. I'm not entirely sure why. . . . I'm not sure [I] was necessarily destined to be a father . . . I just haven't gotten with him [Davy] as well as I would like to of. . . Davy's always been a, a bit of a troublesome kid too. He doesn't like to listen, um, he's always causing a bit of havoc that way [. . .] his academics aren't great.*

...
For some reason I've always wanted a daughter. . . but I made that choice and got myself fixed because two is more than enough, I'd only ever wanted one.

...
Like ... [Christine] thinks I'm too ... disciplined with the kids ... she'll get mad ... it doesn't do our relationship any good ... that's been one of the strains on our relationship too. Is that, for her the kids come first and ... for me she comes first. Uh I mean, it's not like there's a whole lot less importance on the kids it's just ... when they're teenagers and they're off playing all day and stuff like that, what's left? The two of us. And uh if there's no relationship there ... where are we gonna be?

David: *Very, very difficult seeing her pack her bags, my wife helped her pack her bags and there wasn't a dry eye in the house for probably a week. That was a very, very tough time for us. A little bit easier for me cause Amber's not my blood. And I don't care what anybody says, it's not quite as difficult if it's not blood. Um there was a few tears but you know, not a ton.*

...
... If I had to do it again, I'd never do it. No. Not in a thousand years . . . I didn't see my kids for ten years, you know, because I was an idiot and I was a drug dealer . . . it was so much blown out of proportion and there was so much harm done, and I tried so hard for three years, in and out of counselling with those kids. I did everything in my power...

Felix: *But she just manipulates and sitting there saying that . . . "I wish I was with my dad, 'cause you're mean, and I don't like you" (Does that hurt you when she says that?) Not as much as it used to. So. Well I'm thinking about it right now, there's water in my eyes, just thinking how mean we can be sometimes. I'm thinking about all the things that I did with her . . . I used to sing to her ... it was the ABC's . . . I did the same thing for, for Ruby too. But with Tashlin I'd sit there holding her and she'd have her ear, listening to my heart, and then I'd sing the ABC's ...*

³ Peter had a speech impediment and these words as well as future illustrations about Peter reflect the interviewer's summary of what he said

Turning My Life Around

About one third of these fathers described how their concern for their children provided the motivation for making difficult yet necessary changes in how they were living:

Zack: ... *They apprehended my kids from me because of my drinking on April 10th, two years ago. They apprehended all four of the kids because at that point, my wife had left February 2nd, 2002. ... I went into detox ... same afternoon as [CAS] took the kids ... And they got me into a treatment centre ... I spent twenty-one days there ... [After detox] ... I called Children's Aid ... I said, 'I'd like the kids to know that I still love them' ... [I got them back] eight months [later] ...*

Carlos: *As soon as Chantal found out that she was pregnant she cut things out dramatically ... Then there was constant fighting as I didn't want my baby to come out dead, or come out with brain problems. ... At the hospital, when my daughter was in the incubator, 'cause she was a couple weeks early, she was holding my finger, like I cried ... I was the happiest person on earth. When I left, you know, that day I was like, I can't believe I'm a father, and I said, 'You know, I'm, I'm gonna everything I can to take care of you and make sure you're ok.'*

Rob: ... *everything in a way worked out so much for the better. Than if I would have continued on the evening shift, doing the, the crazy hours, and it just, it's kinda strange how it just worked out, because by me coming home after work and doing the the things with the kids, if they, you know, the homework, and, and not having a babysitter there for you know, three hours every day, that worked out good, I got on to day shifts, and being there for my kids every day after school really, you know, that, that was something I, I hadn't ever done. So, you know it was a good feeling, it was really good to be with the, the family in a normal sort of way . . .*

Dean: *I don't do any drugs anymore. (Was that easy to stop, stopping drugs?) Um no it was, it was easy, but it wasn't. I just kept remembering my little daughter ... Like honestly I don't think I would have quit if this (child welfare involvement) didn't happen. I would have smoked weed the rest of my life. I was cutting down again because of Family Services . . . came in and came into the home and then I cut way back. (That must have really affected you then . . .) It shocked me . . . it's amazing what a little girl does to your life. ... I totally changed my life around, I just, I'm gonna work the rest of my life. Get my little girl, keep clean. This is a big eye opener. It really, yeah it really wakes you up. I haven't filed income tax in like five years. So now I gotta do that. ... I haven't had a steady job like this in my whole life . . . I dropped out of high school when I was seventeen. Got a job for like a few months, quit. And just became a bum. ... I had to stay away from the drugs. I just disowned all my friends. I sit at home, watch TV every night. Rent movies. I hang out with my niece once in awhile . . . If I got*

no job, I can't pay child support, can't pay support, I'm breaching my probation. I breach my probation, I could go back to jail. I go back to jail I lose Victoria (his daughter) ... Everything focuses around Victoria it's just amazing what one little girl will do to you.

George: . . . *I didn't want to be . . . pushing my baby down the street in a stroller and have a car pull up beside me and shoot me down and have my baby roll down the street, or sit there without a father, I said I'm not gonna have that happen. I'm gonna be there for my kid. And I, and that's when I made the commitment*

...
... look I'm not using drugs, I was peeing in a cup every week, I did that for like almost two years, 'til they finally said, "Man well you've gotten a lot of support from your church and the community and your family, and we just want you to keep on going. And, and you know, we see you've got your own business, and, and all this stuff. We just wish you the best, we're closing the book on you."

Raymond: *And I think when I got divorced, when I got divorced it really, it really changed, because it was actually a blessing in disguise, because it forced me to change. Because now I had all three kids. She only seen them once a week and that was it. So I had to be there. So it was a blessing in disguise, actually. I never regret getting divorced because if it wasn't for the divorce, I probably would be still the same workaholic I was eight years ago ...*

Rescuing My Children

Three fathers told long stories of the challenges they faced “rescuing” their children from inappropriate and sometimes dangerous living conditions with their mothers. These stories illustrated the time and effort invested by these fathers over a long period of time to regain custody of their children. They described overcoming many obstacles along the way including unsubstantiated accusations of physical or sexual violence, the prejudices of child welfare service providers, legal challenges, lack of financial resources and setting up a suitable home for their children.

George: *I had tried to track her down, you know in crack houses and whatnot. And ended up getting stabbed, bottle smashed over my head. Hit with bats and I got, went, sent to the hospital a few times and it became very evident to me that I was gonna probably die trying to find her [Abigail]. So I ended up just praying to God, it was Christmas, my family had disowned me, I had betrayed them and deceived them and ended up owing them money, and I, I had established a, you know, a new place, with new furniture, and I was all alone, I had no, you know,*

wife, no child to, to be, with me, so that's when I prayed to God, to just protect my child.

...

You know, Abigail, my ex-wife was fighting to keep [Faith] because she wanted to get housing, she wanted to have a welfare cheque, a place that she could . . . prostitute for, for cocaine . . . she would leave the child with people that were unfit. But the court, like to try and prove this was hard. Like it was like pulling teeth. And I was so desperately trying to, to watch her closely without being charged with stalking and stuff. And it became very, very hard to me, I figured you know, I'm never gonna be able to prove this.

...

... at this stage where Faith was about nine months old, I had taken her, like and not given her back because of, you know, Abigail was just using so heavily, and she was under the influence, and I had court action going, and she, she brought the police to my house because I didn't return the child, and F & CS at that time, if you fear the child will be in jeopardy of danger again, don't return her. And go to court, so I again took their advice and had her now the court went on for like nine months.

...

. . . until I think it was about, Faith was about eighteen or nineteen months old, I didn't get custody of her until then. And, and by that time, I didn't need it, but there was a time . . . and the system, they couldn't do anything because I didn't have legal custody yet of her although the child was with me twenty-four, seven. I lived for probably the better part of a year on four hundred and fifty dollars a month and food bank ... It was really tough.

...

I got a call from a guy who was there. Said, "Man I know how much you love your kids and how you fought, and you know", I sent him a picture and letters of my newborn, he said, "I see your child, she's just a gorgeous kid, but your wife is here in a crack house, leaving the child in a room full of people shooting cocaine, smoking crack cocaine, and she's going into the bedroom with the dealer of the house for a half an hour at a time, to pay for her cocaine with whatever she was doing. And coming back out." And, and I had phoned my pastor and said, "Look, like I, I know she's done this. I don't have the money to get her back right now, can you send her on a bus, I'll wire you money" I wired him money . . . and he, he went and grabbed her...

...

. . . maybe about a week after she came back, she left through the middle of the night with the baby[second child, Grace]. [Abigail] went to [women's shelter], said I threatened to cut her throat open and they're very, anti-men there . . . but she fabricated this whole total lie about who I was and how I was hurting her and threatening to cut her in . . . I had gotten the police to help me find her, and again, I had obtained an interim, interim order, and had the child returned back to me. We then fought for months for who was gonna get custody of the children...

...

[Abigail] ended up getting her own place, through, through housing. And getting on mother's allowance, and we had joint custody of [Joy] . . . but she had the child living with her she agreed to give me full custody of the two older kids [Faith and Grace] ... I agreed to that, providing I had access anytime I wanted and she didn't deny that ...

...
... [Abigail] started really going downhill, using drugs and, and selling herself and you know, letting the child stay with people and, and the conditions, like I remember going to the house and there was, you know, her and a couple of men they were doing stuff ... and the baby would be upstairs in a room so covered in feces ...

...
I phoned F & CS and said "I'm not gonna give her back" ... at the time she fought for it, and I had to give her back, you know, it was just hard ... the cops have that little bit of cocaine and that little bit of, you know, the crack pipes, and they said, "We can't use it in court." You know, you went into her house and you took it . . . I guess a month later she, it got to the point ... where [Abigail's] ... hydro was cut off, it was coming on every half hour for half an hour, then they'd shut it off for a half an hour, and coming on just enough to keep the food from going bad . . . she was behind in her rent, she got eviction notice, she said, "You won, come take the child." I went and grabbed her and I've, I've had her ever since. Now that's been probably you know fourteen months from today that I've had her.

Nigel: *Anyway, I, we separated in '97. And this was probably when my daughter was only three months old ... we divorced in '98. The children were both living with her at the time because you know, I didn't even contest that basically. She was a good mother to the children, I would see them ... we worked out a custody agreement whereby I would have them every other, every other weekend. And for the most part, that went quite well. But she did have sort of mood swings ... and this sort of escalated, and then when was it? 2001, it just came to a head basically, she'd been acting very strange. And I had actually contacted Children's Aid ...*

...
... just after we got divorced, she got into with a ... bad crowd she had this friend that was probably not the best sort of person she should have ... and they had some bad people and they were in the house that we still hadn't sold yet. And apparently Maria was under the impression that they were breaking into the house and stealing things so she wrote all over the house with a, a black magic marker, F-off, get out of my house, you're liars and all this sort of thing and, and I remember her brothers and sisters came up for like Thanksgiving or something like that, and they were at the house, and they were just horrified.

...
And then 2001 I got a letter through the door ... it was a court order saying . . . you've been summoned to go to court by your, by your ex-wife, she, she, she doesn't want you to have anything to do with the children ... and she wants to cut

all ties ... take custody ... well I didn't have custody ... and I was just horrified and I phoned her ...

...

... as it turns out she thought that I was out to get her and out to kill her or something ... (And had you made any threats or anything like that?) No I hadn't, no I hadn't actually ... and then the police phoned me one night and says, "Hear that your wife's, that you have been threatening your wife." I went "No, I haven't actually." I went down to the police station and . . . I explained the situation . . . I said, "To be honest, [my ex-wife's] she's not quite, she's not quite right ... it's been documented, you can go and talk to the doctor." ... I was never charged with anything ...

...

... like I have to go to court in a month. So I don't have a lawyer, anything like that, and I decided I'd speak to her family . . . I hadn't seen them for three years and they go "Oh you know what Nigel? We've noticed some pretty strange things about her too." ... So they decided that she definitely needs help and they were gonna back me up right?

...

... we got a lawyer and we decided we're gonna split it nine ways ... and it culminated in 2001, in October of 2001, and this is probably like six months after I'd been served this thing through the mail.

...

I got a call at work from Children's Services ... [the] social worker's recommendations came in to us ... [they told me they] went to the school ... and ... [placed] the children ... in the custody of Children's Aid and they're in a foster home. And oh my God ... so I went down to the Children's Aid and I spoke to this guy ... and he explained the situation to me, he said the recommendations came out from [the] social worker, and your children have been placed in two separate foster homes.

...

[CAS] then they looked at my records, said, well you know, you got a job, you, we have no record of you doing anything bad, the kids seem to like you, you seem like a stand up guy. So I started the process of getting them [my children] to come live with me ... at that time, I only lived in a one bedroom apartment ... I said "The kids are safe, seems to be quite stable where they are in these foster homes. How about January the first, it will give me an extra month to find a place, and I'll get it set up by then, I'll have a nice, you know, three bedroom townhouse" ...

...

So we were in court again the next month ... and the judge says, "You know, basically, I don't know why we're here today, things have not changed that much in three or four weeks. ... And I'm thinking, well, well neither do I, but you know, two thousand bucks later ... And basically she [Maria] was wearing us down.

...

... And then this government lawyer ... he said "You know what? I'm gonna suggest now, how about, I know it's rare, but I think it's probably better if Christopher stays with you. And that Julia stays with the mother. You can have

joint custody, with primary custody there and there.” [...] Well I think it’s worked very well, I mean that, that initial eight months I had the pair of them here, and ... I got my hours changed at work to accommodate

Burt: *... I’ve been married since July 25th, 1999 and unbeknownced to me, I married a girl [Miranda] with bipolar disorder and . . . Miranda and I had Thomas [son 2] together. And ... in [the] fall of 2000, [Miranda] started going into a manic phase of bipolar disorder. I didn’t realize what was happening at the time. I’d found out probably about three days before she took off with Thomas. She took off on the run with Thomas and got jumped from women’s shelter to women’s shelter to women’s shelter ... Children’s Aid stepped in and apprehended Thomas ...*

... [Miranda] phoned the police on me, on the Sunday. She locked me out ... on the balcony and went over next door and left Thomas sleeping in the, the apartment. And I just, I crawled in through a window on the balcony and went over and got the keys from there and got myself into the apartment and waited for the police to come, and when the police came, I said, she’s bipolar, I said she’s, she’s not safe to, but the police told me to leave. On three occasions throughout that week, the police directed me to leave the child with her even after I told the police that she was bipolar.

... Miranda was, well she was making rants that I was gonna come and kill her and sexually assault Thomas and ... so they moved her and I didn’t know where she was, I didn’t know where Thomas was. And Jill (Children’s Aid worker) had phoned to caution me about the arguing in front of the child. Because the police had called the Children’s Aid on Sunday.

... I got a call on the Friday night from Children’s Aid, they said they’d apprehended Thomas. And because of the allegations that Miranda had made, that I was a sexual molester and a rapist and all this from Miranda’s, she’s crazy, she’s delusional, when she’s in manic, yeah ... They basically, they conducted an investigation and put Thomas in a foster home for a month before I could get him back. (And then you did get him after that?) Yes.

I sent Thomas up . . . with my mother because I felt he was safer there ... and I’d go up every weekend. And Children’s Aid kept making the demand that I bring him back and they were saying their court order specifies that the child is to remain in my home with me ... Miranda just started coming to the house every night. And she eventually did break in by Christmas of that year and just completely trashed the house ... Jackie (Children’s Aid worker) started giving me troubles, saying it was against the court order, that I had to have him back in this area for Miranda to visit...

At the time, I was, well I’m still just barely making it here, financially. I’ve had to drop six thousand dollars to lawyers, that I’ll be paying off for the next, probably

three or four years. Just to go against Children's, just to go to court when, for Children's Aid service order ... Thomas was to reside with me. Miranda was to have supervised visits provided by the agency. ...

...

From construction or auto body places ... just a lot of strange things. And she would shove them into ... Thomas's pockets or clothes. And Thomas would say, say strange things. He, he called me "Bad daddy" for a long time when, whenever I was mad ...

...

Jackie [child welfare worker] had the gall to phone me and ask me how Thomas got that bruise on his shin. And I said, "Honestly Jackie, I don't know." . . . Miranda could say whatever she likes ... but Jackie still feels that she has to question me on it. And I'm, I'm just so tired of, like what the hell do I have to go through, or like I'll take a lie detector test ... I always feel like I'm under their thumb, and I'd like to just tell them to just (Fuck off.) Yeah. Like how long do I have to, to put up with this? It's already gone on well over longer than it's supposed to.

...

The Children's Aid is keeping status quo until May 29th, they're bringing it in again. They want to keep holding it on, then they want me to go into a voluntary, they call it a voluntary service order ... It's not very Goddamned voluntary. I have no say about it.

...

... they've [CAS] sent me a letter, the telephone, while Thomas was bathing in the tub and I was watching him, and the telephone rang and I ran to the kitchen. And he, I don't know what he was doing in the tub ... and he scraped his back ... and I got a letter saying that I was, I was negligent in supervising him which pissed me right off 'cause I got thinking ... but they just, I just found that they did the best they could to make me feel like an awful father ...

...

I think they're ready to take Thomas away from me. And, and it puts me in a situation of stress, because I just, I don't want to be answering to them for the rest of Thomas's life ...

...

I'm afraid to roughhouse with my son a little bit, like, roll around playing. Because I will, I think and, and the rest of my family as well, we protect Thomas. Like he's a precious diamond, because we don't want to have to explain a scratch to him ...

...

Although I'm so busy with Thomas and a lot of times I don't really sit back and, I feel proud that I am a good father. I love it when I get support from my family. My sisters, my sister in law, anybody in my family says I'm doing a good job ... and that to me, makes me feel very good. [...] Someday I'm gonna be a grandfather ...

...

(... What are the worst things in your life right now?) Probably Children's Aid . . .
. Financial bills.

Pain of Losing Your Child

Many fathers whose children were out of their lives for a limited period of time talked in very vivid terms about how terrible this time was for them. These men were strongly motivated to re-establish connections with their children.

Eric: *They said I did something wrong, which never did happen. They found out, they, they knew nothing was wrong three weeks later. And still kept them in captivity, so. And I didn't like that, but what can you do when you don't have no money to fight it? (So how long, were, were the kids in care) They, well I would, they were there for a year. ... did a lot of, oh lot of pacing and, damage at work, you know, I did over, almost twenty thousand dollars worth of lost product. (So it was affect, affecting your work?) Oh yeah, it was, it was work and everything. It didn't matter what I was doing.*

...

You know, 'cause I just don't want this to happen again, or, or, happen in a different way, or, you know. And, it's, basically once I'm on record, that's it, it's, haunts you for life. ... sometimes I just gotta shut the machine off and pace the floor and, just my mind goes, you know, wanders, and I phone my therapist now and again ... You know, so, yeah, my job was on the line, and then, so, I wasn't, I wasn't, I couldn't think, you know, couldn't think straight.

David: *[on losing contact with his children from his first marriage] you can get kicked in the teeth so many times and then you just say that's enough right? . . . So did it bother me? It bothered me for ten years. But did I let it ruin my life? No. Nope, absolutely not.*

Tarek: *. . . two years they took away from, took away from my kids, and that's a crucial time, because me and my wife was trying to, to have a kid after my other son . . . I have to be two years away from them. Just two hour, two four hours a week [visitation]. Is not hurtful? . . . that's the time I want to be with him . . . not when they are big and they're gonna start to yell back at me. That's the time you have to play with him, have fun with him*

William: *My son was arrested. He now lives away from Tiffany because they can't see each other right now until things get better, 'til she sort of agrees with it . . . Richard [son] went to Marie's sisters to live and*

Tiffany[daughter] was here. Marie's sister is kinda a Godsend because he would have been sent somewhere else eh? And who knows what, where he would have gone eh? . . . It was very hard for me, I lost thirty pounds 'cause the stress is just unreal.

...

But you know, it's just hard when two kids are living apart that should really be living together. Like the punishment has been thousands of times over, that's an exaggeration maybe. Because you know we've not only had to have two kids apart, the financial strain has been just incredible.

Nigel: *So the next thing you know, I'm by, and this took a couple of months for this whole process. And in that time I hadn't to see my kids for six months. [The] social worker said "... I'm gonna arrange for you to see the kids" ... "it'll be supervised by me," ... So I was just excited...*

...

I'm waiting for them, I can see the truck come or the van, and like I said wait a second, where's Christopher? Right, he wasn't in there, it was just only Julia. ...I said "Where's Christopher?" "Well Christopher didn't want to come." And I was just devastated by that, because like my son, he was just like you know, my pride and joy right, and him and I had been like, like this since he was a baby, right? ... And I didn't want to, at the same time, dwell on that, because here I haven't seen my daughter and I don't want to dwell on why I'm not seeing him . . .

Burt: *I had a huge loss. I feel like I had a huge loss. When it all went down the, the toilet and she took off with Thomas ... I was a zombie for about three weeks, I couldn't function. I'd wake up, go to work, I couldn't think. I'd be driving and, driving to work and I'd get off or hit a, or forget my off ramps, or get off at the wrong one. I was getting lost just driving around the city, that I've known for fifteen years. ... I was a mess. I, I couldn't think straight, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't, couldn't relax. It was, yeah, it was, I've never ever been effected like I was then. It was dark, the darkest time of my life ... and I just felt powerless to do anything about it. There was nothing I could do.*

George: *... because she was staying at Community Rez, for the part of the pregnancy, and then on her own, I don't know to an extent what was being used. I know there was some cocaine, but there wasn't really any alcohol, and alcohol's worse as far as I know ... I cried so many days, you know, not knowing if the child was gonna get hurt or die or what, you know. And just wanting to, like the anxiety, I, I just felt just, just anguish, everything, you know, that helplessness.*

Some of the fathers who were not able to live again with their children, including some who did believe that they would be able to do so in the foreseeable future, also voiced their distress over this loss.

Dean: *That was tough. 'Cause I hadn't seen my daughter for probably four or five months . . . after the, the assault . . . and when she walked through the door I almost didn't even recognize her . . . she grew, her face, her hair was getting longer, her face was thinner, she was starting to turn into a little girl, not much as of a baby. And I did the double look, it was like, oh, that's my little girl. And she looked at me like, you know, is that daddy? . . . she had that strange distant look. Then I went, "Victoria" and she was like, "Daddy!" . . . it was hard when you leave, it's only an hour.*

Dylan: *So I, at least now I can talk about it without crying, so I'm glad of that...It's very emotional and powerful, and I still got a lot of anger. Oh and sadness, but that's one word I very rarely ever use. ... 'cause I knew I could have helped the adoption and everything, but I just couldn't deal with it at, like last year, plus I got, going, like with everything that I told you. It was just too tough on me, mentally, and plus for me too, where I suffer from depression a lot too, and I was suicidal before, and I don't want to get to that point again.*

Peter: *He laments the fact that his apartment is not large enough to allow the children to move in with him or to even stay overnight for weekend visits. Peter dreams of recovery from the effects of the stroke, gaining employment, and having a residence suitable and large enough to allow his children to stay with him. He is concerned about being able to stay in Canada because he is not a landed immigrant.*

Collin: *(So what was the toughest part for you then . . .) . . . just, you know, not having access to the kids . . . not being in control of their . . . but you know, a fatherly control... I really feel for Oscar . . . I think he really wants to live with me, you know? Um, I kind of signed a, well you know, a document that he's a ward of the, of the crown, eh?*

Investment in Parenting

Five of these fathers cared for their children as single parents. Each clearly talked about their commitment to their children. They illustrated the demands of being a single parent made upon them. Despite these challenges, each also portrayed the personal benefits of caring for their children.

Zack: *(So wh-what's it like being a single dad?) Well I have no social life. Um you know what? I, I like it. I really do. I like it. Um I liked it better when I had all five of them cause then I didn't have to worry about the two that I didn't have with me. Uh, but I like being a single dad. I, I like going out and shopping for my kids and-and, you know, trying to buy them the right stuff and, uh, uh, it's, it's hectic. It's busy . . . if I'm not, uh, working on this- I'm cleaning. And if I'm not cleaning, I'm preparing lunches. And if I'm not cooking, I'm cleaning up after cooking. . . the kids really do mean everything to me. ...*

George: *All I know is, is you know, I had all three of my kids, I was single up until about a year ago ... (Were any of the other ones affected, 'cause your ex was using at the time?) Well [Abigail] ran away . . . through the second pregnancy, and we're testing Grace ... I've been going through testing for her, for a year and a half, her speech is behind a bit, her motor skills are off, I think she's possible ADD or ADHD ... Psychologist looked at her and, you know, suggested maybe Ritalin, and I said no, I'm not gonna do that until I know for sure that's the only solution left. So we're, we're working with her very closely and she's coming a long ways, we have people sit in with school with her, and help her at school ...*

*...
... 'til I met Madison ... there's been about three years I was alone and single with all my kids, working full time and having them in daycare. And you know, like I, I didn't get a lot of sleep ... so it was real tough I just stuck with it, didn't have a lot of money, didn't have any family there, you know, didn't have any friends, like I left everything [up north] ... and I had to rebuild a life.*

Nigel: *(What's it like being a single dad?) Well I don't mind it, I mean, to be honest I don't have a girlfriend right now, I'd like to have, I'd like to have one, but I, you see it's hard for me to pursue that sort of thing because I, you know, I work days ... I work eight-thirty to four-thirty, I'm home by five o'clock every day. And you know, like there's time ... I'm home with Christopher and we, we have, we do a lot of things together. So I'm home cooking and you know, making lunches and doing laundry and stuff like that. And I don't get to go out a lot ... it's a small sacrifice really, because I really enjoy the fact that he's here. I've gotten used to the workload ... I'm an organized person and I keep on top of things ...*

*...
... still have responsibilities to my daughter, and you know, she can, she's coming over, and Christopher is getting older, and you know, bikes and, and new shoes and haircuts and sporting events and this and that and the other, you know, it's, it's expensive ... but I've got it under control ...*

Raymond: *I get home around quarter after five depending ... I come home Mondays, Eugene's got his golf lessons, so it's come in, make a quick supper and we have to be at the golf course by six. On Tuesdays he's with his mom, so I get to relax a little bit. Wednesday he's with his mom, so I get two days of relaxing . . . Thursday's he's got his drum lessons. So again, it's come home, make a quick supper, get him ready, take him over to drum lessons, sit around there for an hour,*

then come back. And then Friday he's pretty much, he's with his mom. So. That's a normal week ... then there's all the other little things, I have to pick my daughter up after school sometimes, because she just walks over to her boyfriends and she wants me to pick her up her way home. So there's, it's busy. All the time ... Lately I have been, it's only been about the last two months I've been making sure I myself get out on Friday nights ... but Sunday or Saturday, there's a, oh there's housework, there's laundry, there's groceries, there's, I have a motorcycle, I like to get out on it every once in awhile ...

...

I want to be closer to my kids. 'Cause I want my kids to come and talk to me. I don't want the relationship I have with my parents, for them to have the same relationship. And that's what I try to build upon; I always try to get them to talk when they're upset.

Burt: *[My typical day] ... a circuit in my house went out, so my bedroom has no power ... I haven't had any free money to get an electrician in yet, so. Usually I'm up at five, I spend a half hour by myself, I'll have a cigarette, put on the coffee. And [my] roommate wakes up at five-thirty, comes up and I chat with him. About anywhere from ten to ... six o'clock I go and pick up Thomas out of bed, and I just sit with him and wrap him in a blanket on the couch and sit and hold him, try to gently wake him up. I've always, since him and I have been together, just the two of us, I just, I always try to wake him up gently. 'Cause it is awfully early in the morning, to get him to the babysitter . . . that's how I go about it [...] usually it's a scramble to get in and clean up dishes, get supper started. We never eat too early, it's usually, it's usually seven o'clock by the time we get supper on the table and get Thomas sat down, and then he's, he's a handful at supper, he doesn't eat for me. He eats well for everybody else, but I usually have to sit with him for an hour and half the time, I spoon feed him. Just to make him eat. I know he can do stuff, he can dress himself, he can put his shoes on, he can, he can eat himself, but because I am pressed for time, I'm by myself doing that, just to rush things along.*

...

... lot of the times when Thomas and I get home, especially in the summer, what we do ... for an hour, we'll go and hang in the backyard and he plays, he's got lots of cars and stuff. I get his pool filled up for him ... we were both in it last night ... lot of times I just sit out in the front yard and let him push his car out on the lawn and then the driveway . . . sometimes we go down to the park, we have a park down the street, we usually do that on weekends ... about the first hour we just kinda chill out, we play together, we don't do anything too strenuous. In the winter we, we'll roughhouse in the living room, we'll make houses, do the forts out of the cushions and the couch . . . we don't do anything too special, I'd like to do more with him ... Bedtime is probably later than most three year olds. It's nine o'clock. Bath night's every other night, it's, get his bath ran and get him in the bath. And a lot of the times I bath with him, just 'cause I don't have time to have it any other time. Get him out of the bath, wrap him in towels and get him all dried off, read him a couple of books, I usually read books for at least twenty

minutes before I put him to bed . . . a lot of the times I go to bed myself right after, when I'm beat.

Fathers with a partner also talked about their active investments in parenting their children:

Paul: . . . *She's the one at home, um, she questions her parenting. She, I sometimes thought that, like what the hell have we done, what have we done wrong? . . . But we still have two younger children that we have to worry about . . . my two youngest boys we have on a waiting list . . . they have a counsellor coming here . . . I basically want them to talk to somebody, just 'cause we really don't know how it really affects the, with a sister gone out of house . . .*

...

(Do you, do you do a lot of the parenting?) Um, I do a lot of it. . . I do a lot preparing suppers ... Because my wife's not feeling good. I do the laundry... Vacuuming, now a lot of times on, during the week nights, because I'm tired, I come home from work ... I might have to go out ... there's a doctor's appointment, stuff like that ... the weekends, if I'm not working, then, is basically just clean up [...] (... do you see yourself as a bit of a nurturer?) ... Yeah, I guess, yeah. I guess...

Caleb: . . . *we work alternate shifts so during the week we've actually we've only actually got roughly, uh, three hours that we spend any time together . . . Um I start at 7 in the morning . . . I get up uh about 20 after 5 . . . I get my shower. I get uh, eat breakfast, get a few things together, get dressed. Then I go up, I get Lindsay- plopped her on the couch. Make my lunch and, uh, then I get her dressed. Get her teeth brushed and get her off to daycare and then I'm off to work . . . Christine gets home at 6:30 [a.m.]. I leave about uh 6:35 . . . If she's tired she'll grab a nap until 8 and then she'll get up, she'll get Davy up, she'll feed him breakfast, make sure he's ready and off to school and then she climbs into bed for 9 and sleeps until, uh, until we get home . . . I'm home about 10 to 4 'cause I pick Lindsay . . . and then he gets dropped off by the school bus.*

Eric: *... the kids are older, so they can, they take care of themselves, I just tell them, I just gotta keep reminding them, bath time, wash your hair, brush your teeth type thing. It's, you know, it's, otherwise everything's basically the same.*

Rob: *if I would have continued on the evening shift, doing the, the crazy hours, and it just, it's kinda strange how it just worked out, because by me coming home after work and doing the the things with the kids, if they, you know, the homework, and, and not having a babysitter there for you know, three hours every day, that worked out good, I got on to day shifts, and being there for my kids every day after school really, you know, that, that was something I, I hadn't ever done. So, you know it was a good feeling, it was really good to be with the, the family in a normal sort of way . . . I'm trying to get back into the things that I enjoy, and try and expose the children to it. And see how they, you know, they,*

and they're at the age now where it's great, because they're, you know, they're either gonna like it, or they're not. And this week we took them canoeing, down a stretch of the river, it's about a ten mile stretch

David: . . . *I did that for a reason . . . I felt badly for it but it's that I didn't care cause I needed everybody there at court to stand up and say, you know, "You have to put her away this time because she's gone way out over the, the edge." . . . it was a 30 day trial . . . Amber went back to court and we had her put away for [residential care] . . . four months . . . we only went to see her once a week while she was in closed custody . . . we both work long hours . . . and secondly we . . . kind've [wanted to] give h-her and give the workers . . . [time] to try and work with her, to try and get her back to some kinda normalcy in life. So we went to see her every Sunday . . . now that she's out, she comes home every weekend . . .*

. . .
I don't know what else that we can do to help that situation. We've spent thousands and thousands and thousands literally of dollars . . . like I guess you get to the point in life where you just have to say 'enough is enough' . . . 'cause you have to want to help yourself. And I don't really believe that my daughter is at that point yet where she's gonna say 'enough is enough' . . . Well I fear that Amber's gonna be dead one day. That's, that's a huge fear for both of us because of we both know with all the counselling and all of the people that we've talked to, the judges, the lawyers . . . Family Services...

William: *So, our lives turned upside-down, but we're still living and it makes us kinda stronger I think sometimes. 'Cause you have to be in two places at once and it makes you appreciate what you've got. Because you know, you hear so many stories about kids separating and kids suicide incidents.*

...
You got a son, you have two kids living apart from each other and he lives in [another area of town], she lives here and you have to get people to look after Tiffany while you're visiting the other one. It's back and forth, somebody had to stay with Tiffany to make sure she did her homework and help her out, but now she's getting to that stage where she can be left on her own for a little bit so we can go see Richard, the two of us and have time with Richard . . . You know we've had to make sure Richard gets fed well; clothes and whatever. We have to go down there to check on his homework and stuff like that. For awhile there when this first happened we were taking Richard, going down in the morning after-before work or something like that whenever we could we took Richard to school. That was good because I'm working part time I can do those things; see him in the morning when he needs that extra boost before he goes to school

Doing Things with Kids

A notable pattern when fathers talked about their engagements with their children was that quite a few talked about sharing activities with them. These types of

engagements were described as enjoyable for these dads as well as good for their children.

Eric: ... *But, but yeah, that's what we do, we, we, we're, we go bowling as a family ...I bowl, and the kids bowl ... Yeah, I, I bowl for one league, and the kids are in their youth leagues. Yeah, but my leagues, it's, it's a family team, it's six bowlers and that's all brother and sisters and parents ...*

...

[talking about what it was like when the kids were in care] [before care] I did everything with the kids, like, some bike riding, do swimming, do camping, do, so it was, very, very boring. (So a lot of your, your life was, was centred around your kids. And doing, doing things with them?) Yeah. Well yeah, I did, I did the, that's what, that's, yeah I was with the kids, as much as I can, well actually, all the time, it was from, you know I took them to baseball, soccer, um, gym, she was in gymnastics for a little bit. You know but, yeah, I did everything with them.

Rob: ... *because by me coming home after work and doing the the things with the kids, if they, you know, the homework, and, and not having a babysitter there for you know, three hours every day, that worked out good... I used to always go fishing. Like I mean, before I had children. From mid March right through, I'd usually end skiing, start right into fishing, fish right through until about the end of, probably about the end of May, beginning of June. And then summer, bicycling, always active eh? And that's, you know, keeps you, it keeps you, you know, out of trouble, you're, you know, constantly doing something besides drinking... I'm trying to get back into the things that I enjoy, and try and expose the children to it. And see how they, you know, they, and they're at the age now where it's great, because they're, you know, they're either gonna like it, or they're not. And this week we took them canoeing...*

William: *I gotta look after myself too and keep my strength up too - by going out and bowling and having fun in my life again. I was always a bowler and I've just quit the last couple of years because you know we were driving kids all over the place. Sometimes you have to take time for yourself too. I bowl once a week. And Tiffany bowls on Saturday morning, Richard bowls Sunday nights. Just one of those family things.*

Nigel: ... *we have a lot of the similar interests, you know, like we both like sports and, and yeah we, we you know, play, we play board games and like, he likes Scrabble and Monopoly, that kind of thing, we play that occasionally, or we watch, he doesn't, he watches TV, but we watch some TV together... it's a guys house and it's like, when Julia [daughter] comes over and she's got her friends in here and she pretty much has the run of the place. But, yeah we have, we have a pretty good relationship, and you know, we, we go out like, you know, we go out and play some soccer or we'll go out and hit the driving range, and do some golfing or something like that, you know, we get along pretty good.*

Burt: ... lot of the times when Thomas and I get home, especially in the summer, what we do ... for an hour, we'll go and hang in the backyard and he plays, he's got lots of cars and stuff. I get his pool filled up for him ... we were both in it last night ... lot of times I just sit out in the front yard and let him push his car out on the lawn and then the driveway . . . sometimes we go down to the park, we have a park down the street, we usually do that on weekends ... through the summer, because it's just, we spend, a lot of times when we get home, I'll barbeque out in the backyard and Thomas and I will just hang out. Last summer we just pretty near lived in the backyard 'til nine o'clock every night. So. We'd read our books out there. I set up a tent for him. Him and I sleep out there the odd time in the summer.

Many of these dads were heavily invested in providing a home for their children, as well as in their everyday care. There were also indications in these stories that many paid attention to how their children were doing physically, socially and emotionally and tried to be supportive. For example:

Eric: *(Your kids are having a bit of trouble in school?) Yeah. Yeah they always have, so it just, so they're ... But we've been going, they've been going to tutoring, to Sylvan. Yeah, tutoring type thing, so ... We had to pay for that. They're supposed to go back April, April, May. 'Cause their session was over, so we had to, had to wait and get some more money, 'cause they're not cheap, those guys either... They're, they're shy at school, so they don't put up their hands if they're having problems or trouble and, so ... that's the way I was too...*

...
(How about your daughter? How's she doing?) She's doing good. She's, she loves reading. She reads, the way it sounds, she reads too much... She's always reading, constantly reading. It's, she playing, playing teacher, and just, reads and just writes, what's in the book on the paper and just, corrects it, you know. So, but she, but she's doing good too, it's, so to me I think she is, it's, you know ... she's getting aid too, she's, she has special aid there at school too, so, you know. And, to me they're, well they're, I, I think they're you know, progressing, but sometimes the school doesn't think so.

...
(So to get in at seven you, you, what time do you get up at?) Um, about quarter after six. Make a lunch, like make the kids lunch, my lunch, and out the door by quarter to seven ... I'm just, jump out of the bed, and gone ... the kids are still sleeping, I call them. I call them in the morning. At seven ... I call them from work.

...

I work 'til five. I, right, right now I have the bike, so, the peddle bike, so I, so I'm home by quarter after. And then I come home and if supper's ready I eat. If it's not, then I just, take a shower and, and then, and we eat at, you know when supper's ready, and then, whatever the, whatever the kids are in, like the son's in army cadets on Mondays ... so, now we drive him in. But then that's Mondays, and Tuesdays it's same, same routine, she goes, I come home and supper, shower, supper, take her to cubs. For six-thirty. Drive her there, and, and Wednesdays she goes to dance. And Thursdays she goes to dance, and then Fridays I bowl, I bowl, go bowling on Friday nights.

William: *Tiffany has dyslexia. She's in grade seven and Richard's in grade ten, both in [family home town]. They're both slow, they've both been identified that they need help. Tiffany is in a special school program and has extra help at school.*

...
you have two kids living apart from each other and he lives in [another area of town], she lives here and you have to get people to look after Tiffany while you're visiting the other one. It's back and forth, somebody had to stay with Tiffany to make sure she did her homework and help her out, but now she's getting to that stage where she can be left on her own for a little bit so we can go see Richard, the two of us and have time with Richard . . . You know we've had to make sure Richard gets fed well; clothes and whatever. We have to go down there to check on his homework and stuff like that.

...
...we realize Richard did wrong and Tiffany did wrong and there's gonna be a time and we hope it happens sooner than later. All the kids, all the counsellors want the family back together again so they're all working and we're just in the limbo stage . . . we just do our best.

Felix: *Tashlin, you know, for her, I held her, and you know, just the other day, she actually cuddled up to me, she put her head right here, and listened to my heart, and then put her head on my lap and went to sleep. Well that's basically what I did, I held her, her head was here, when she was a little girl, and I fed her and I rocked her and I just gently wiped my hands over her eyes, and that's how I put her to sleep, singing the ABC's . . . and put her to sleep. And now I couldn't do that with Ruby. Every time I held her, and hold her and wanted to be sitting free for a moment and Tashlin come running up to her and try and get some attention*

...
[Ruby] . . . she has a non-verbal learning disability and doesn't know um, a smile from a frown . . . She can't read tones. Like, you've been bad, [angry tone] to her sounds like, that's a good girl . . . she can't read facial, body language very well. It's, so, I don't know what else there is, with her. But she is a smart little girl. I don't understand about the toilet training, I don't know why she wet the bed, because we used to put her to bed with a diaper on, after just changing her.

...

[Ruby] . . . she has a non-verbal learning disability and doesn't know um, a smile from a frown . . . She can't read tones. Like, you've been bad, [angry tone] to her sounds like, that's a good girl . . . she can't read facial, body language very well. It's, so, I don't know what else there is, with her. But she is a smart little girl. I don't understand about the toilet training, I don't know why she wet the bed, because we used to put her to bed with a diaper on, after just changing her.

Nigel: *[talking about impacts of breaking up with his wife on the kids] Well, Julia was too young to know. Like I left when she was three months old, so she's really never, doesn't even remember being there ... it's just like water off a ducks back to her, like these things just don't affect her. And Christopher is kind of easy going, and he, he, he took in stride too ... and maybe it affected him in a different way. In a quiet sort of way, you know? To the point where he's come, comes across as being shy and withdrawn ...*

...

... it's a divided family ... most people wouldn't think, "Oh poor kids, they're split up." but that's not such a bad thing and, he gets spoiled here and he gets spoiled at his mom's, you know and he's got two bikes, he's got two of this, he's got two of that, right? He's got two video systems. One of each, you know. So it's not all so bad. In fact you know like the kids adapt very well ...

...

(How's your relation, how would you describe your relationship with your daughter?) With my daughter, pretty much the same, and it's like, she, when she's around, it's like, and we kinda both soften up a little bit . . . she's like the little princess and she does what she likes and you know. And she's also a bit of tomboy too right? I mean, she's, she's into the girly things, and she likes you know, looking pretty and combing her hair, all this kinda stuff right, but she, and playing with dolls, but she also likes to mix it up and go outside and get dirty and stuff and play around and, and when she's here, she has her friends over and I have no, no problem with that, 'cause she has, like I said before, three or four really good friends, all in the same age, and, "Daddy, can Friend come in?" Yeah, whatever you wanna do, right? 'Cause she doesn't have, she only sees them every two weeks.

...

I'm not a really strict parent ... I ask [my son] to do things . . . some laundry, the yard work or get him to do the dishes or something like that, but I don't have him doing really strenuous things, but generally if I ask him to do it, he'll do it. And he's pretty good about it. And I don't, I, to, to be honest, I never have to yell at him, because he's, he's a well behaved kid and I, you know, I don't have to, I don't really believe in corporal punishment, and luckily it's not even a consideration, 'cause he's, you know, he's a good kid ...

Raymond: *[talking about his divorce] It was difficult for the kids. It was, it was really hard. I think the person that took it the hardest was probably Sarah. She took it pretty hard. Then the next one would have been Eugene, the youngest and,*

and Max. Max was really close to me ... youngest [Eugene] was very close to his mom. Still is...

...

There was another time ... Sarah would call a lot, and say, you know, I just had a fight with mom, I want you to come pick me up, I want to come home. And I would always try to say no, I'm not gonna come pick you up, you and your mom have to sit down and you guys have to work it out, I can't run over there every time you have a fight. You've got to work it out.

...

I was to get counselling. Parenting counselling ...I didn't disagree. I mean, hey, you can learn a lot from taking a course on kids ...

...

Going back to when Sarah tried to commit suicide ... I think Sarah was depressed at a lot of things. She was a teenager, going through a lot of teenage girl shit, with boys and she didn't think boys liked her. She, I mean she's a really beautiful girl. Gorgeous girl. But she had it in her mind that boys just didn't like her and she had a hard time making friends and it was mainly because of her attitude. She treated people, she treated people like her mom treated people.

...

Sarah did have a hard time, for some reason she felt she couldn't talk to me. So I wanted to go to the sessions with her, so that we could actually talk. ... Sarah would tell me how she felt about things ... So it, it was good. It was, it was really good ... Sarah and I very, very close. A lot closer than, than we were.

...

I also went for raising teenagers course ... which I think out of all the schooling I have, those eight courses were the best thing that I ever took in my life. They were, it was amazing. Just the relationship between my, between my kids and myself, after that course, it's just totally different.

...

Doing stupid silly little things, like leaving notes for them. I left my, my seventeen year old a note, just telling him how I respected him and everything else. And I figured he would just throw it out. About three months later, I was just going through his room, checking for drugs or beer or whatever else. And I found the note underneath his mattress, he actually kept ... and my daughter kept hers, my other son kept his. [...] I made it a point, on Sundays that Sundays is family dinner, everybody has to go and it's still that way now.

Burt: *They conducted a Patel test on Thomas ... it's a developmental type of test. And they told me that Thomas was way behind on things ... they told me he was developmentally behind, and I said "No he's not, he was sick that morning that he did it ... Jackie would say, "Well no, he doesn't talk at his, he doesn't know his name, he doesn't talk at his visits with his mom." And he was, he was talking and yapping a mile a minute. And what they did is they pushed me to get him in the [assessment centre] for an assessment ...I said "I don't think he needs it" so I dragged my heels on that ... I did take him there to [the assessment centre] and he's fine.*

...

About anywhere from ten to ... six o'clock I go and pick up Thomas out of bed, and I just sit with him and wrap him in a blanket on the couch and sit and hold him, try to gently wake him up. I've always, since him and I have been together, just the two of us, I just, I always try to wake him up gently. 'Cause it is awfully early in the morning, to get him to the babysitter...

A Danger to My Kids

Most of these fathers talked about circumstances in their family homes that were potentially harmful for their children. The majority were aware that their behaviours and relationships within the home represented a danger for their kids. Often these risks involved conflict or violence with partners, problems with addictions or criminal/delinquent behaviour. These concerns are discussed later in this report. Two fathers indicated that they had hit their children hard enough to come to the attention of child welfare. One thought that his prior history of sexually abusing his siblings and his lack of anger control with his kids caused the child welfare agency to keep him away from his kids. Another talked about how his efforts to control his stepson led to family conflict that resulted in his going to jail. In most of these instances, at the time of the interview, these men were living with their children.

Dylan: *I ended up slapping my son on the back in front of Jan, so of course Jan calls, told the teacher, be a teacher or a nurse or something like that, so then that's when of course F & CS, F & CS called...This is in, few years ago. Yeah, it was two years ago when we lost them. ...I just remember hitting him...Like there was big red mark on his back too...Might as well talk about- I don't want to remember it. I haven't talked about this in so long. Because like I know the place was a complete disaster, plus there was laundry all over the place, and bags, like it was a disaster. So then they took the kids ...*

Caleb: *I got very mad one day at Davy. One morning and I end up slapping him across the face, hard enough to leave a bit of a mark. Just one thing set me off that morning. Christine couldn't even recall how long it had been since I had even lost it like that. It was just a very quick incident. I didn't think much of it. I was sorry as hell. I don't even recall whether I broke into tears or not about it afterwards. It's always upset me. Davy was just getting up that morning but there was something that just set me off. So, I dropped him off at the babysitters and just went to work as per usual. His babysitter noticed the mark and Davy told her that I hit him so she phoned CAS.*

Felix: *Um but my two sisters, molesting, or abusing them sexually. I got charged when I was seventeen, eighteen years old. Or nineteen. I don't remember when exactly . . . but Children's Aid was involved with that because I had to move out of the house [and] I went to live with a friend and then I moved into my mother's boyfriend's house because he was living with my mother. So I sort of um, a year's probation...*

...

the things that I don't like most about the Children's Aid is, when Tashlin and, and Ruby [daughter 2], when I had to leave them, [CAS] they forced me out, Jasmine forced me out too ... Um I wasn't allowed back in [the house] for three and a half years

...

Of course, couple of things might, have been reported, but I might have scared her one time, I didn't, picked up, I picked up Tashlin and um I was mad and I got way up here [motioning to raising child up in the air] and I was gonna come down and put her in, but when I was up here, it was like, ok, that's stupid, and went down, put her in the couch.

Cause there was a time in the summer, I was with Ruby, all [by] my myself, she was doing some sort of schooling . . . I was trying to get Ruby to go to sleep and I was giving her a bottle, she didn't want it. Tried feeding her, she didn't want it. Tried rocking her to sleep, didn't want it. Got frustrated. Placed her in the, I placed her in her crib, or playpen and then I went to the wall. I stood at one of the walls and pounded and pounded for a minute. And then I walked across, pounded, pounded. On that wall. Trying to get . . . Trying to get the frustration out, going, 'why can't I do this?'

Tarek: *When we had a quarrel [. . .] because he says I can't go in his room; he can't be smoking dope in my house. Right? I didn't tell him that . . . I get the blame for it . . . I got the jail for it. (For the fight?) Yeah for the fight. And that was, that was on causes of him. Really you . . . can't smoke dope in the house . . . I quarreled . . . but I didn't want to involve him because he's a- he doesn't realize that someday. Right, cause I, if I put him there he's gonna be charged- he's gonna have a record. I- I didn't tell the cop that he had been one of the cause of the fight . . . but still they call the cops on me, well because I had drinks right? They call the cops and I got in I gotten in jail. And I got in trouble, I got drunk, I had the paper I know . . . they put me on probation . . . so that's how it goes ...*

A Difficult Child

Two fathers talked about having a child whose troublesome behaviours led to their placement in a residential children's mental health facility. Parenting these children presented painful and long term challenges for these men. At the time of the interview,

there were no indications that relations between this child and their family were improving.

Paul: *Um Stephanie basically ... first started to act out was when she was roughly around twelve years old ... we found out that she was, be going up to the bus stop, not taking the bus to school ... In the summer before ... it would be 2003 before Family and Children's Services got involved. She was just going wild. Just going out her bedroom window at night time, and ... I went down to her bedroom, she was upset, she was crying ... and I sat on the bedroom floor and I said to her, and I just came straight, asked her is somebody touching you inappropriately? And she broke down. And she said yes. So basically we did the police thing ...*

David: *... she became so deviant and anytime that I would stop her from going out, um she'd do the 911 call and "My dad's holding me and I can't blah blah blah." So'd we'd have the police at the door. I remember one time, uh, Paige stood at the door and said, "You're not coming in the house, uh, that's it. That we're done, we're finished." And Amber went to go bulldog her way through and Paige just stood her ground. And from our garage Amber phoned 911 and said "My mom just pushed me down the stairs" . . . there was a lot of, um, misc- not misconceptions . . . down right lies to the authorities on what we were doing and what we weren't doing, and ultimately Family Services saw right through Amber.*

Relations with Partners

The prevailing image of families coming to the attention of child welfare authorities is that they are both conflicted and unstable. Besides being the perpetrators of most of the violence within the home, male partners are seen as absent from family life. In the previous section, evidence was presented that many of the fathers interviewed were engaged in their children's lives. This section looks at what these fathers said about their relations with their partners. Not surprisingly, conflict between male and female partners was common in most of these stories. There was evidence of physical violence between partners in about one-third of the cases.

Longer Term Partnerships

About half of these fathers described continuing relatively stable long-term involvements with their female partners. In every instance, the couple lived with all or most of their children.

Paul: *... But we still have two younger children that we have to worry about ... my two youngest boys we have on a waiting list ... they have a counsellor coming*

here ... I basically want them to talk to somebody, just 'cause we really don't know how it really effects the, with a sister gone out of house ...

Eric: *... [My wife and I] we've been married fifteen ... But I've known her sixteen, seventeen years ... I met her through bowling ... But she doesn't bowl no more either ... But I still enjoy it, so, my son enjoys it too, 'cause he just won a tournament two weeks ago ... the kids go bowling Saturday mornings, I take them Saturday mornings ...*

Rob: *... And I had a motorcycle and a, a car at nineteen, and I was doing pretty good . . . she figured I must have some money or something. Who knows right? But we started dating and she was sixteen at the time. And you know, right from that day we . . . had a lot of good times, like we, you know, we really hit it off . . . from nineteen 'til twenty-four. Before we got married (around 1990), we lived together for about three years . . .*

William: *[. . .] I met Marie [my wife] in '79. We were both in St. John Ambulance at the time, of course we don't belong to it anymore, she looked after the duties for the corps, stuff like that. You know we sorta looked at each and we kinda tried to arrange to be there together, it was a good thing. My mom told me you know, you're, you have to go to a place, that you like going to, where there's good people and you'll, you'll meet somebody. And she was right, we married in 1981 . . . We have two kids, Richard and Tiffany, they were both born early.*

Three longer term partnerships involved a second partnership for the father or his partner, or both.

Tarek: *(. . . when you came to Canada . . . were you with your wife . . .?) No we were weren't married yet. (. . . When did you meet?) Well I knew her for sometime but then- back home. I knew her for sometime- like she was married before but then- before I came with a couple- I think about six months before I leave- we got to know each other a little more. But then . . . I came here [to Canada] and then after that I sponsor her . . . she and her husband get problem. Like we were not intimate, we were just friends then and then she and her husband had problem and just started accusing me that- that I am involved . . . well I wasn't. But then . . . she husband start beat her up [. . .] We have a relation after that . . . I have to leave for Canada because I have my visa . . . so as I get here, a couple months after I- I sponsor her with the kid . . . she had to wait for her divorce to go through before . . . I sponsor her; we get married over here.*

David: *. . . all through my whole life including up until I was married for the first time. My dad always said to me . . . "If you ever decide to go back to school, whether it be college, university, I will flip the bill for you." And then we found out this year that [Paige- his second wife] has MS, so that hasn't been, that hasn't been easy either, right? And she takes shots every Friday night now and then weekend's . . . She's had two MRI's . . .*

Felix: *I had had Tashlin [Daughter 1,] or she [Jasmine my wife] had had Tashlin. And I basically [had] . . . been with Jasmine for three to six months of her pregnancy, with Tashlin, so I'm basically her daddy. I'm you know, was there when she was born; although I wasn't in the delivery room . . . I met [Jasmine] . . . [for the] first time . . . before my sister reported [me for sexual abuse]. [Jasmine] keeps telling the story about how she first saw me, she asked my brother, "Who's that old guy sitting on the couch?" {Laughs} I was twenty, she was sixteen... I'm disappointed in Tashlin . . . I'm betrayed by Tashlin because she's continually doing this stuff and saying that she wishes she was, was with her dad. You know . . . she gets to see him occasionally.*

Caleb had been together with Christine for four years at the time of the interviews. They had a daughter Lindsey together and Christine had a son Davey from a previous partnership. Caleb had been married once previously also.

Verbal Conflict

About three-quarters of these fathers described how serious conflicts characterized their relationships with their partners at some point prior to the interviews. In most instances, this involved intense ongoing verbal conflicts between the men and their partners. Sometimes, the life styles of the mothers were a concern for fathers. Sometimes the fathers indicated that the conflicts were about how to parent or made worse by financial stress. Most of the men who talked about this type of conflict were not living with their partners at the time of the interviews, although most continued to be involved with their children. Four ended up as single dads.

Caleb: *(Okay. And how's things been?) Um good and bad. Um they've gotten rockier um after she had [daughter] Lindsay; [Christine] she suffered a lot from depression and that made the household a bit rough. And she [Christine] was uh, not so much depression in a sense either as the mood swings that she got. You know she'd be really good and then the next day you, you, you just seem to do everything wrong. And she'd just be freaking out on ya... So she can get very defensive if you say anything that she feels she's being overly criticized or anything like that. So it can be hard to sit down and just talk . . . (Uh huh. So do you feel like your relationship is on shaky ground or somewhere in between?) Somewhere in between. [...] . . . I finally said to her . . . "We can't resolve our relationship if every time you get angry you're gonna tell me to get out because you don't want me to leave. Cause every time I make it look like I'm about to walk out the door, you tell me not to go."*

Zack: ...that was the day that ...she'd been sitting at the computer all day long... I was doing (two) jobs, and I came home and the place was a disaster. There's nothing cooked for the kids... She sent all (the young children)... to the store and buy candy. And to get there they had to cross ...five busy intersections. And I kinda freaked out... I said, look this is enough, we can't do this anymore... We had a big fight. We had an argument. And I actually had a witness that there was nothing, Son I had an aide at that time... Police came, and they just said, ok. They didn't... ask me to leave ... just to calm down.

Peter: About four years ago, shortly after the birth of Amy, Peter lost his job and eventually also lost his house. This, together with his concerns about escalating violence in his neighbourhood, led to Peter and his family moving to this area about three years ago.

...

The family's transition after the move was difficult. They knew no one there and had little money. It was a difficult adjustment for the children, both at school and in the community. Peter and Tanya together got a job managing a local paper route; however, marital relationship difficulties soon developed. Within a year of the move, Peter says that Tanya told him she "didn't want him anymore" and she "kicked him out of the house". Peter moved but continued to see the children regularly.

George: [Before I moved from up north] my ex-wife had come back to my church, in front of my pastor and, and his wife and a couple of the other people that were involved, she just bawled in front of everybody at the church, I'm sorry, forgive me, I'll never do it, I want my family back, it's just been killing me not having you, and bringing her back into my life, re-opened the books with F & CS because she had still a serious drug problem. Wanted to have help with us, was deceiving the whole lot of us the whole time, my, my church, everybody there, myself, and was using behind my back. But I didn't know this and, and took her to be sincere. And when we moved down here to . . . well before we moved we got pregnant again right away with my second child, Grace...

Nigel: (You ever like, did you ever like lose your cool [in the marriage] ...) I did, yeah, I was yelling, I was yelling and screaming. For sure, I would, and, and but both. We, we reciprocated it, I mean she'd be yelling and screaming at me too. But it never got violent, but there was, there was a lot of bickering too ...

Raymond: So, so we were having a lot of troubles... financial problems because she wasn't working and she needed the biggest house in town. ... I was making like, forty-thousand dollars. So we just couldn't afford it and that's why we moved ... but when we moved, it was the same thing, she wanted a huge house. So a lot of it had to do with, with money... And me being away. And I think for me, it was an escape too, to be away, it didn't upset me, because it got rid of the problems. So, but it was difficult on her, I do agree with that...

...

Things were still not too bad. I'm not exactly sure what changed everything, but things just got worse, where we couldn't talk. She would ask me, we were having a lot of trouble with Sarah.

...

It was like she thought we were still married. She made all the rules and I had to live by them. And that's when I think things started, like ... it got to the point now, I'm divorced, I don't live with you, I don't love you, I've had enough of it, I'm gonna, I can make up my own mind, I'm a big boy. But, and you couldn't say no to her. Like if you said no, she would fly off the handle ... So she would stop talking to me and I would stop talking to her.

In Dylan's case, the spousal conflicts coincided with personal mental health issues:

Dylan: *'Cause Carla [his ex partner] blamed everything on me, she couldn't take any responsibility at all. So I had to go through counselling to realize that it wasn't just me, that it was the both of us. Like a lot of people like, well if it was just you, she would have got them back herself, and she would have got Jan back. [Q: Jan was taken away too?]*

Yep. Like, last I heard she was living with her dad.

...

But I knew I just wanted to stabilize myself mentally and get stronger and go through the grieving process before I find out [about his children who were crown wards].

Physical Violence

A bit less than a third of these fathers talked about hitting their partners. In every instance, this resulted in police and child welfare involvement and in the father not living with his kids, at least for a while. It is unusual to hear fathers' perceptions of these occurrences. According to these men, the violence often resulted from escalating conflict over time. Problematic alcohol or drug use was common in many situations. Children often witnessed the conflict and violence. All of these fathers acknowledged that they had hit their spouse and most volunteered that this was a serious act and not justified.

In quite a few instances, they described situations where both parties attacked each other physically. They also sometimes complained that the reports to the police were exaggerated and did not reflect what had taken place. However, most said that they did not challenge the charges against them. Some said they took responsibility for the violence to protect their children from further disruptions in their lives. Fathers who returned to live with their partners and children felt that the child welfare agency kept

them out of their homes longer than was necessary. On the other hand, some acknowledged that the child welfare intervention helped them break a downward spiral in their lives. Most believed that what was going on was bad for their children and needed to be stopped.

Carlos: *I started working again ... and I would go to sleep, I'd wake up and Chantal would be gone. And her and her sister would go out and go party ... one day she did that and I, I kinda lost it. And I'm, we're driving to work, like she's driving me to go meet my, my boss. And I gave her a backhand ... because she was doing drugs all night, her nose started gushing blood ... I was at work, her sister calls her brother ... And so now you know he wants to kill me ... so that was the last day I lived with her, then I moved to my parents house that day ... I was twenty-four.*

...
So, so she's telling me, 'Hey why don't we move back in, why don't we get together and all this,' and I'm like, you know, like, 'Hold on, like if you still wanna party and everything, obviously we can't, we can't live together. Because we, we have a daughter and it's not gonna work.' ... I started working with my dad ... doing landscaping and stuff. But it rained one day, so I didn't go to work.

...
I called Chantal [partner] ... and her sister was over ... I get there and her and her sister are both in the kitchen and I could see that they were wacked out ... So I get there, and I'm like 'Whoa, what the heck is this? ... I'm leaving, I don't want anything to do with you' ... I go and get my daughter's photo album, I'm gonna take my VCR and all this stuff and her and her sister start going nuts ... grabbing on to me and I'm pulling away, her sister runs and to the phone and I'm like what the heck? ... she's calling the police... And, and so I leave the house, but on my way out I made a mess 'cause I took my VCR and I threw it on the floor ... I lost my temper ... By the time I get to my house there's a cruiser pulling up. And they said, 'Oh, well we got a report that you assaulted Chantal and her sister' ... They took me to [jail] to hold me for the weekend or whatever ... no one talked to me, no one came to see ... Chantal calls my mom's house at ten-thirty at night and says, 'I'm coming to get Deirdre.' And my mom was like, 'Well Deirdre's in bed, why don't you come tomorrow? If you really wanna come get her.' And then the next day my mom called Children's Services and said, you know, here's the situation ... I think that there's drugs involved ... (Did your mom do the right thing?) Well, if she didn't do what she did then Chantal probably would have come the next day and taken Deidre ... to a place that was terrible, like dirty ... Because my mom took that step, I'm here today. But my daughter's here today as well.

...
(Can you conceive of you and Chantal getting back together?) I don't know. It's, it's, I don't want to say no, and I don't want to say yes, it's just, it's hard, like for, for what I want out of a mate, then she has a lot of improving to do. And if we do

couple counseling, then maybe I'll be able to address that kind of, those things, and maybe she'll have a dramatic change, you know what I mean? But unless there's a dramatic change, then it's gonna be very hard for us to, to make a future together. 'Cause I don't want to compromise my future and my daughter's future. To help someone else who's not, who doesn't wanna be helped. You know what I mean?

Carlos had an assault charge pending for assaulting a “friend”. He felt that his partner and her sister greatly exaggerated in their original complaint what he had done when he tried to take his stuff back from their place. They later recanted this statement to the police. He was convicted and placed on probation at his parents’ home for other assault charge.

Rob began to work more to pay the bills and spent less time with his wife and children. He began to work evening shifts and took on a second job. His relationships with his wife and his children suffered. Both Rob and Sherry began to drink a great deal more as alcohol consumption became central in their lives. They started to argue more frequently and more violently, episodes that were witnessed by their children. Children’s Aid Society became involved after a violent conflict with his wife. Rob was charged with assault and had to leave his home for over a year. He described reading some devastating testimonials given by his children about life in his home. While Rob was out of the home, it was difficult for him and his wife to pay all of their bills and he was worried they would lose their home. Rob was able to take care of his kids after being out of the home for a while but had to leave before Sherry came home from work to satisfy the Children’s Aid Society. Eventually, Rob and his wife gave up drinking and began living as a family with their children once again. Rob began to work fewer hours and re-established his involvement in fathering his children.

Next thing you know, you're drinking three beers a day, and four beers a day, and my wife started drinking more because we were so much apart now, I was

working seventy hours a week . . . the drinking got worse and, being on opposite shifts, we didn't try and keep either in check.

...

... my wife put up with it for awhile, but then I said, the drinking started to get, you know, get involved, you know, started to ruin our life...

...

... we were both working too much, we were drinking too much ... we needed help and we even, we both discussed it ... but we didn't know what to do [...] there may have been two or three ... [arguments], and there was one where it got really carried away and the children witnessed it.

...

The intake worker ... talked to the children ... they [the children] kind of blew it 'cause they exaggerated on a few of the stories, on our, on our fights ... like when I read the transcripts from Family and Children's Services, it, what the children said ... I don't know why they did it, why they stretched out ... my youngest son said, 'When daddy goes in the kitchen and he goes near the knives, I get scared for my life.' I was like, why would he say that? Right, and then there's, 'My dad spanks me all the time', and I hardly ever spanked my kids. Hardly ever...

...

... Sometimes she would start swinging at me, or I would start swinging at her. Usually she started it... I remember thinking every day ... this is insane, like I'm drinking every single day. And it went from three beers a night, to like six beers a night.' Both were having a hard time functioning.

...

And, so we got into one fight ... at Christmastime, ...where I hit her, and well we both were fighting, but I hit her ... and then over the period of the next twelve months, there may have been two or three more, and there was one where it got really carried away, and the children witnessed it. And, my wife, she cut her head, I don't know what she cut it on, I don't remember if I cut her head, or if she cut it ... we were both drunk... Both of us the next day really had no idea what we'd done the night before...

...

... we were all out of booze at about five in the morning, and of course I can stay up 'til six because of the shift I'm on. So we got into an argument over a bottle of vodka. And I knew she'd hid it. And I didn't know where, so I got into an argument, I went into the fridge upstairs, and I was yelling at her and I was, you know, rooting through the fridge, where did you hide it? ... I grabbed ... a bag of groceries in there, and I just kinda swept it out on the floor. My wife picked it up and, and ... I didn't know this at the time, but she drilled the bag at me, and in the bag was a one litre bottle of ketchup. And it hit the side of the fridge and just blew up. And I had ketchup everything, and I'm looking at her, I just lost it on her. Didn't hit her, but I lost it on her right? And so she went outside to have a cigarette. And at this point I knew that... I'd got really fed up with the violence and I wasn't gonna hit her, I knew that...this is the last thing, I'm gonna leave the

house, whatever... I'm cleaning up and the ketchup bottle's on the floor and its broken open... I put it in the garbage outside, so I open the door to put it in the garbage, and my wife's sitting on the garage step. So I thought, and I'm standing behind her, and at this point... I wasn't that drunk... I remember this clearly, I thought to myself, what the hell? I just poured the ketchup on her head. One litre of ketchup, or half a litre, 'cause the other half was on the floor, and, I just closed the door and, just kinda thought it was funny. Well it was probably about plus four, plus five degrees, my wife was in...a white dress, like almost like a sundress. So I continued cleaning. And, after about fifteen minutes, and it's kinda strange, it's cold outside, I wonder if she hasn't come in from the garage, so I open up the door, and she's nowhere to be seen eh? And I went... where would she go? Right, so, I wait about an hour, two hours, you know, wondering where she went. I was starting to get really worried about her.

His wife had gone to her sister's home nearby. The latter phoned the police. Initially Rob's wife tried to prevent this call being made, as she did not want outside involvement and was thinking about getting help. The police came "and of course I got arrested for assault with a weapon." Rob had seen domestic violence growing up, but had not thought that this would become part of his life. He did not notice how much it had encroached on their relationship, and also wasn't aware of the legal consequences for spousal abuse.

...when... the cops threw the handcuffs on me, and they started to tell me...you're getting charged with assault with a weapon. My children are in the house, my wife's nowhere to be seen, and I'm thinking to myself, this can't be, they can't be serious. Assault with a weapon, when I poured ketchup on her head? But, you know, it wasn't a nice thing to do, but you know ... I'm going to jail now, and ... I have no idea what's going to happen to me.

Despite his wife's pleas, no one agreed to bail Rob out until after the long weekend. Child welfare became involved and informed his wife that Rob was not to have any contact with her or the children; otherwise the children would be removed. Rob had to go and live with his mother. His wife was surprised by the scrutiny that she received.

...she didn't realize that now she was gonna be penalized, or held under the microscope, as much as me, or more. She's been a victim by me, and now the system's victimizing her...they're more or less making it out as she's an irresponsible parent. And she was the victim in all this, so now at this point she's

really mad... and all she was trying to do was seek help.

Rob heard about counselling courses while in jail, and signed up immediately for anger management on his release. His wife also went to counselling. The couple found ways of meeting, despite being instructed not to do so.

... we were meeting in places outside of town actually, 'cause we were so concerned that somebody might see us or something might happen, so, we met a few times outside of town, just on the weekends . . . without the kids. We didn't want... to risk that, ... because the kids might say something . . . me and my wife were very careful, and we only did it for very short periods of time because ...my wife was scared that somebody might figure out that she's not at home when she should be...

Instead of going to trial, Rob's wife informed the court that she had been coached by her sister to say what she had. Rob pled guilty to assault and got a conditional discharge with a year's probation. It was four months before Rob could see his children alone. He would be able to baby sit the children while his wife was at work. It was approximately six months after the incident when the criminal charges were settled. Even so, child welfare still did not permit the couple to be alone for some time after that. The family is now reunited. Rob talked about how his home life had improved after these adversities.

Colin met his wife Isabel at the hospital. He talks about financial difficulties and being in and out of work when they were first married.

... it was actually about two months before we got married . . . I couldn't get a medical clearance because of the, you know, epileptic seizures resulting from the drug reaction eh? . . . so I was pretty upset about that . . . we got married in August, went to Algonquin Park for the honeymoon . . . I was pretty excited because you know . . . the first year, um I had a, yeah again I had a few jobs . . . most of the time we were on welfare . . . yeah it was kinda rough actually . . . I remember one time, jeez, it was like, we had absolutely no money at one point I was considering actually stealing food...

Colin and his wife separated on a few occasions before divorcing; two of the

separations resulted in Colin being charged for assault. Subsequently, he was separated from his children with the exception of scheduled visitations.

... like if you get up early in the morning to go to work and she'd just be, screaming at me...and, then ... she'd take my bag ...that I'd take to work with me, and she'd throw it out the door, and just ... like totally lunatic, and... finally, one day I, I guess, there was a couple times... I just couldn't take it anymore, so like I got a little physical you know... we got into an argument...where... she got physical with me and I responded in kind... there was this candidate...knocking at the door, you know. And ... she uses that moment to, to say that ...I've been beating her up you know? ... and next thing I know, the cops are there.

(Now was she able to limit your access to them, because of the charges of domestic violence?)... There was another, another time I was, I guess, I wasn't even supposed to be, wasn't even supposed to see [Isabel] you know? And, but she, she got into the, to where she'd, let me come over anyways . . . would be great if, you know, um, if she'd have held her part of the bargain, but she ended up... she called the cops on me, you know? And so again I went off, I got, I was arrested . . . I had signed a form saying that I would I wouldn't see her unless it was, you know, like under supervised, whatever . . . I had all these legal, you know, problems . . . nobody knew, you know, nobody knew um, you know, what I was going through all this time, I just kept it to myself...

Colin felt that this was totally unfair. He felt that any misconceptions were reinforced by the fact that his partner was a diminutive woman. He was seen as the big bad guy.

... she could do whatever she wants really... Anything, you know, 'cause nobody will believe... that in fact, that she's got to be the victim, she's got to be... I ended up... arrested... charged with assault ...it's never happened before... you can imagine... I'm not a tough guy...

He was relieved that the police released him under his own recognisance within a few hours. Because he could not return home, he had to explain what had happened to his parents, which was embarrassing. The couple reconciled, but ultimately separated a year and a half later.

Tarek was charged with domestic violence some years before child welfare became involved with his family. He felt that his wife would argue with him when she noticed that he had been drinking.

...You save everything and you get into an argument, they'll call the cops, I get involved. So that's it all- when they, when they are near they're locked up. .. I pled guilty to everything- yeah I was doing this an- cause I didn't ...want to waste time in there...the longer I stay there- it's my job on the rope- what's gonna happen?

He felt that his wife was influenced by her friends to make allegations against him. He said that she did not consider that this might lead him to lose his job and what the consequences would be. Tarek's alcohol abuse contributed to conflicts within the home.

(. . . How do you feel that she was influenced?) The friends are, the friends are telling her what to do. And she's, she's doing it. (What were they telling her to do?) Well- when well- if I- we get a little drunk . . . Like if- if you're, uh, we are a family. We have a problem we have to solve it ourselves. . . . I know she's listening to them. When I get there [to court] I just pled guilty and I didn't fight . . . challenging the case doesn't work so I just pled guilty . . . It happened two, number of years. It build up right . . . so it build on my record . . . that I abuse . . . when the cops come they tell the cops that I beat them.

...

I'm convicted . . . when that happened I started looking for some attention and I got in trouble. Some drinks then I drive I get stopped so that's all...

...

Because I- I had my drinks then we have an excuse and I drink and I- I fight . . . if I'm going to quarrel with something during the week when I'm not, when I don't have any drink it's okay . . . if I have a few drinks then they will start, go on from that. You save everything and you get into an argument, they'll call the cops, I get involved. . . . I-I tried to get out. I pled guilty to everything . . . cause I didn't want to, want to waste time in there . . . the longer I stay there- it's my job on the rope- what's gonna happen?

...

I get the blame for it . . . I got the jail for it. (For the fight?) Yeah for the fight. And that was, that was on causes of him. Really you [his step son] . . . can't smoke dope in the house . . . I quarreled . . . but I didn't want to involve him because he's a- he doesn't realize that someday. Right, cause I, if I put him there he's gonna be charged- he's gonna have a record. I- I didn't tell the cop that he had been one of the cause of the fight . . . but still they call the cops on me, well because I had drinks right? They call the cops and I got in I gotten in jail. And I got in trouble, I got drunk, I had the paper I know . . . they put me on probation . . . so that's how it goes . . .

...

CAS one day they come in. Zip in right here with the cops said they're taking them away . . . my wife said ' . . . they're taking the kids.' Then my wife say 'He say he's not going anywhere without the kids.' So she uh, she go with them. . . (She went with them?) My little one was almost a year, a year old I think . . . (So it was like three years ago?) . . . Yeah . . . they put them in a house for . . . (Like a shelter?) A shelter . . . because I said I'm not moving from here because they want me to move out of the house . . .

...

two years they took away from, took away from my kids, and that's a crucial time, because me and my wife was trying to, to have a kid after my other son . . . I have to be two years away from them. Just two hour, two four hours a week

[visitation]. Is not hurtful? . . . that's the time I want to be with him . . . not when they are big and they're gonna start to yell back at me. That's the time you have to play with him, have fun with him [. . .] But the thing was going like other two years and this is, I say, by time I get back, if I do get back home, then my kids will be, be a big man.

Tarek believed that the fact that 'abuse' was on his record, made child welfare view him as a risk when they became involved. He was not permitted to live with his family for approximately one year, but was reunited with them at the time of the interviews.

Dean: *And then Vicky was my first long term relationship, it was great. And then drugs got involved. You know, I never worked, we lived off her income. Things just got worse and worse, as money, money got tighter and jealousy became into the play, and are you cheating? Both accusing each other, [Vicky] more than me. But, but it just got worse and then I ended up getting in a huge fight on Mother's Day, of all days.*

...
Yeah, Vicky woke me up at three in the morning and we'd been fighting earlier that day. And then she woke me back up at three in the morning, and I had to have my clothes packed in a couple of suitcases, and she didn't realize this earlier. And she came to bed at three in the morning, I'd been sleeping for about four hours. Exploded, just beating me up, hitting me, pulling my hair. And, 'cause the suitcases were there with the clothes, I didn't unpack them. And I had to unpack them and then that fight just got completely out of hand. And I ended up giving her a black eye . . . Anger management helped me a lot.

...
Well it's not her fault, it's still my fault. But I just, I exploded . . . I took a big flower pot and smashed it, it was a little orange one. And I was upset 'cause I'd bought a lot of things in the house too, and I said I was gonna smash some stuff. I was gonna smash it all. And when I smashed it on the ground, she picked up a piece and was gonna stab me with it. And first she threw four or five pieces at me, hit me in my back of my arm, and I was all cut up and bleeding. And then she was gonna punch, well stab me with it, she's left handed, she came at me, and I just, I punched her, gave her a black eye and, that was it, I started crying, she started crying, and we both said sorry. And then later when I went to jail, I found out that she said I'd punched [her] thirty, forty times, pulled her by her hair, threatened to kill her, her ex-husband, her mother, her father [and] I would hurt all the kids . . . she put me in jail, charged me with assault with a weapon.

...
Vicky said I tried to smash the flowerpot over her head . . . and when I missed her head, it smashed on the floor . . . she had no socks or shoes on, and it cut her big toe . . . like a paper cut almost. And she got the cut from running through the pile and picking up pieces and throwing at me as I was running to the other room, I spun my back, so it wouldn't hit me in the face . . . and everybody says to me, 'why

don't you, um, press charges, why didn't you get pictures of your cuts on your arm and the bruises on your arm, and the cuts and the blood coming down your back?' I said "Well, where does my three children go now?" They go to foster care. They go into adoption. So I just suck it up and take it, right?

...

I even said when we were arguing once before, you know, I'm gonna end up giving you a black eye and I'm gonna go to jail . . . and it happened, you know . I don't know if it was to get away from it, because it was hurting the children, they seen us fighting all the time, arguing all the time. They were like never abused, always fed well, you know we took them to Wonderland, and fairs and parks . . . but they saw the arguing constantly, you know, which was no good.

...

I wanted to get back together, but [Vicky] didn't. She said I was too violent, too out of hand, and looking back I can see, you know that anger management course, whatever it was, four month course, was really good. Showed me the things I was doing wrong and how I thought it was her fault, but you know, I set her up or I led her into it. And, or I was just plain denial. You know. So that course the Family Services made me go, I recommend that course.

...

The welfare programs. (Ontario Works?) Yeah, whatever, you gotta find a resume course, it's four to six weeks. How to do a job interview, four to six weeks. How to, you know, and they had all these different courses they send you to. And I didn't like them, I got kicked out of three of them. Oh, ten years ago. And they made me go see a psychiatrist. Back in the, that's a whole other story. (Why did you get kicked out?) Violence . . . speaking up.

I just exploded . . . they said, no more courses, I didn't even have to look for a job, I just had to wait for, to see a shrink. 'Cause they said I was mentally unstable. Too abusive, too violent. To go to any more programs. And that took months and months, eight months, ten months, maybe a year. (To get to the psychiatrist?) Yeah. So every month I just signed my name. And hand my card in. And that was it, I get a cheque every month. I went and saw the psychiatrist, down at the welfare office . . . They said, there's nothing wrong with [me]

...

I started drinking again with Vicky, that's how I met her, I started drinking, getting drunk and partying, but it was never really my thing. I don't like the hangover. I always get hangovers. And that's why I like the weed. And the drugs, you just wake up, it's a new day, there's no headaches, there's no nothing. No side effects really. Except, short temper, angerment, outbursts, moody swings . . . when you don't have it . . . ,but I look back now, and it's like oh my god, I was out of hand. People that I see now. And that come up to me and talk to me, they're like, oh my god, you're a different person, we were afraid to talk to you. You were ready to snap, you were gonna explode. We thought you were gonna fight everybody...

...

... when I got out of jail and I was at home, had to move in with my parents. You

know, and then me and my dad gets a little, little touched, little tense once in awhile still, because of past lifes and, I owe him probably five thousand dollars, six thousand dollars, from all this case, helping me pay, my van payment, I couldn't keep paying it, 'cause I wasn't making money.

...
I didn't want to meet anybody, I didn't want to get married, I didn't want kids. I just didn't want to fall into that trap of marriage and all that. I just didn't, I saw the way my parents were, that's not love. That's abuse. I was scared of women when I was young. 'Cause my dad, I didn't go near them. My dad called me a faggot. Do the little cocksucker. You know. Then if I did bring a girl around, he would kind of hit on them once in awhile, or say weird things, you know, why do you wanna hang out with my son, don't you know he sucks dick? Like, you know, so then you wouldn't bring them around, so then, I just was scared of them, I just didn't know what to do.

...
Vicky took everything I owned. I lost everything I owned . . . (So you lost everything you had?) I ended up with my couch. A little beer fridge. And like a couple of small power tools that were just garbage . . . Vicky took all my clothes and ripped them up . . . I wasn't allowed to go to the house.

...
I'll be sitting at home and I'll just get the shakes, and my whole hand will just start shaking. And my chin will start to shake and all of a sudden I get emotions and I start thinking about Vicky and the kids and what happened, and then I just, start channel surfing . . . I still have nightmares. I had nightmares last night.

In addition those who felt their partners had exaggerated in their descriptions to authorities of their physical violence, a number of fathers talked about being falsely accused of physical or sexual abuse by their partners. In some instances, these fathers felt that they had to overcome a propensity to believe these accusations on the part of police and child welfare service providers. In all of these instances, the accusations of violence were not substantiated and the fathers ended up with custody of all or most of their children.

Raymond: *I got a call from her [estranged wife's] boyfriend, that they had broke up and I guess she had got pretty violent and the kids were there. So I went over to grab the kids at one point I heard there was a knife thrown ... I'd seen her with a bad temper, but I'd never seen her like hit or do anything ... But the kids had told me that, that at one point she had thrown Sarah's cell phone, at one point in time, and smashed it 'cause she got mad at Sarah ...*

...
So there was one time the kids had, had called her and she came over and I told her, "No, you're not taking the kids. I'll work out the problem, if they have a problem with me, I'll deal with it, they're not gonna call you every time they have a problem." And I grabbed her by the arm and asked her to leave and I didn't

push her or shove her or anything else, I just grabbed her by her arm and said "Leave." And she got violent. She started kicking me, she started hitting me, and the kids were standing, right on the stairway. So at that point, I walked away, I went to the phone and I actually, I called the cops ...they went and talked to her, she told them that I had actually beaten her up and the cops came back and pretty much almost charged me . . . the police then called Family Services . . . Family Services, alls they did was just really just interview both of us, interviewed the kids, went to see the kids and that was pretty much the end of it, nothing happened after that ...

...

Sarah [daughter] had two black eyes, she had a cracked lip and she had a, her cheek was all swollen. So I asked her what went on, she said she had a big fight with her mom ... she would have been fifteen ... Supposedly too, her boyfriend pushed Sarah down into a chair also and there was a bunch of, she dragged her, Sarah tried to crawl out through a basement window and Ursula [estranged wife] tried to dragged her back through the window and, I'm not exactly sure of everything that went on there, but I picked her up, I didn't call Ursula and I called the police ... they went over to talk to Ursula ... They went out and had supper, I mean, beat up your daughter then go up and have supper. So the cops didn't get Eugene out of there. And I pretty much stayed awake all night worried about him.

...

The next day the cops came back over, they had gone over to her place and talked to her, and they were not gonna charge her ... It was self defence. So I said, "Did you see any bruises on her?" "No, she said they were all in parts that they, she didn't want to show." ... meanwhile, my daughter's got black eyes, she's got a cracked lip, her cheek is swollen, and if it had been me that had done that, I would have been, I would have spent the night in jail ... And that's when Family Services got heavily involved. [...] they decided what they were gonna do was put a court order against her. That the kids would be placed with me, with supervised visitation with her and her boyfriend ... Ursula was to get counselling. I was to get counselling. Parenting counselling ...I didn't disagree. I mean, hey, you can learn a lot from taking a course on kids ...

Zack and his wife Julia had some serious arguments. On the first occasion, the police became involved when his daughter's friend's mother made a report. She had believed that Zack was hurting the children or their mother. Zack and his partner were indeed having an argument.

...that was the day that ...she'd been sitting at the computer all day long... I was doing (two) jobs, and I came home and the place was a disaster. There's nothing cooked for the kids... She sent all (the young children)... to the store and buy candy. And to get there they had to cross ...five busy intersections. And I kinda

freaked out... I said, look this is enough, we can't do this anymore... We had a big fight. We had an argument. And I actually had a witness that there was nothing, [Son] had an aide at that time... Police came, and they just said, ok. They didn't... ask me to leave ... just to calm down'. The police did notify the child welfare agency of the incident.

...

[On another occasion] She had brought her boyfriend over her for the first time ever and, he had brought five of my kids home, in the back seat of a Hyundai Pony. There was no seatbelts for more than two of the kids, and these are young kids ... And I went ballistic on her. ... I never, to the best of my knowledge... laid a hand on her... I started out, talking to her and then she started out yelling at me, and then I started yelling at her, and then it got to the point where she shoved me up against a wall and put her hands around my neck, and my son was in the room... I never fought back. This woman was two hundred and eighty pounds... I'm a hundred pounds. And ... I was brought up, you don't touch a woman...

...

[Another time] we fought and she was fighting with me more ... I was egging her on... she called the cops. Even though, you know, she said you have to leave right now, and I said, ok, fine, I'm leaving. And when I picked up the phone to call my sister to come and get me, she slammed the phone down, and pulled it out of the wall. So I couldn't get out. And then she calls her boyfriend in Mississauga, and he said, call the cops right now. And I'm going, you know, the cops came and I said, 'I want to leave. And she's preventing me from getting my stuff and leaving'. I said I've already arranged for a ride and everything...

...

... and then she left me, she left a note by the computer, saying we're ok, I'll contact you soon. And then I found out that she was living in the shelter. She kept my kids out of school for six weeks. Well, 'cause she was worried that I was gonna go and you know, try to cause trouble at the school. There's no way, I promised, and I meant it, I mean I wasn't drinking then. Well I, no, I just started drinking. But I mean, I knew the, the rules, you know, like if I'm gonna be drinking, I'm not gonna be seeing the kids, you know. But I would have never done anything, and she knew I wouldn't have done anything. 'Cause she, she experienced it.

Burt: *... What happened was, the investigator came up here and interviewed Constance [first wife] and Constance's husband and they alleged that I was abusing him and said that I was sexually assaulting him and said that Arthur was the product of rape.*

...

... When I got back to the worker the next day about it, that's the worker never told me anything about that Arthur was a product of rape. She ... just kinda kept quiet and never told me what happened, she told me to deliver Arthur back to his mother. And she said she was starting an investigation. And she just wouldn't answer any of my questions. ... But all the time, she [the worker] just kept a, like a cold distance towards me and wouldn't talk to me ... I said "Well when I lived

with her a few, like when she got pregnant ... “ and she said, “Wait a minute, you lived with her?” And I said, “Yeah.” ... she says, “I thought Arthur was the product of a rape.” So this worker took Constance’s word right off the . . . start that Arthur was a product of rape, which wasn’t true.

...
Constance had walked into the police department and told the police that she was raped by me four years ago, and I was under investigation for a couple months by, with the police. ... Soon as Constance figured out that the police weren’t, were figuring that she was lying, she was afraid she was gonna get her and her husband Constance’s husband and Arthur, bolted up and left everything and went to [another province]

...
The police phoned the day after Miranda [second wife] took off with Thomas and went to a women’s shelter. The police aided and assisted her in that. At the time I didn’t know what my legal rights were. I should have just held to Thomas ... I had as much custody as, as she does. Let her go to the shelter if that’s where she wants to go. But the police told me to leave it alone, so the shelter jumped her to place ... all within a matter of a couple of days ... Miranda was, well she was making rants that I was gonna come and kill her and sexually assault Thomas and ... so they moved her and I didn’t know where she was, I didn’t know where Thomas was. And Jill (Children’s Aid worker) had phoned to caution me about the arguing in front of the child. Because the police had called the Children’s Aid on Sunday.

...
I got a call on the Friday night from Children’s Aid, they said they’d apprehended Thomas. And because of the allegations that Miranda had made, that I was a sexual molester and a rapist and all this from Miranda’s, she’s crazy, she’s delusional, when she’s in manic, yeah ... They basically, they conducted an investigation and put Thomas in a foster home for a month before I could get him back. (And then you did get him after that?) Yes.

Nigel: *And then 2001 I got a letter through the door ... it was a court order saying . . . you’ve been summoned to go to court by your, by your ex-wife, she, she, she doesn’t want you to have anything to do with the children ... and she wants to cut all ties ... take custody ... well I didn’t have custody ... and I was just horrified and I phoned her ...*

...
...as it turns out she thought that I was out to get her and out to kill her or something ... (And had you made any threats or anything like that?) No I hadn’t, no I hadn’t actually ... and then the police phoned me one night and says, “Hear that your wife’s, that you have been threatening your wife.” I went “No, I haven’t actually.” I went down to the police station and . . . I explained the situation . . . I said, “To be honest, [my ex-wife’s] she’s not quite, she’s not quite right ... it’s been documented, you can go and talk to the doctor.” ... I was never charged with anything ...

...

And in that time I hadn't to see my kids for six months. [The] social worker said "... I'm gonna arrange for you to see the kids" ... "it'll be supervised by me," ... So I was just excited, but this was in September, I hadn't seen them for four or five months.

...
(Why did they need to be supervised?) ... because of the, Maria had said that I offered death threat, death threats and this is why I hadn't seen my kids for so long and the, the judge even said, "You know what? My advice to you is just to get your, you get your facts straight and just don't phone her, don't harass her, just keep going the way you are, and, and get this sorted out. Because you know, one wrong turn from you and you could blow the whole case."

Growing Up

Most of these fathers did not talk a great deal about their childhoods. Descriptions were often general and factual rather than emotional. In only a few instances did fathers talk extensively and personally about how things were for them growing up. There was a good deal of variation in how these men described their childhoods. Most of these fathers talked positively about their childhoods:

Eric: *Like- The girls in one room, the boys in the other room, and then Mom and Dad. (Like, like how many boys, you had like how many brothers-) Five boys ... Yeah, two bunk beds, and, and a single. And then a small, a single bed. So. (So what was, what was home life like?) Um, good actually. Did sports. Park, went to the park every day, and the school was right beside the house, so it's, school, kindergarten to grade eight, was it eight, yeah, eight was beside the house.*

...
(I think you'd mentioned in, in the last tape that, that you were kinda, a little shy and, and not too sort of talkative, or whatever, when you were younger. Was that hard when you were a kid?)

No, 'cause I had family. More or less, it's, 'cause we were eight, so we were always doing something, and ... and, friends of Mom's and Dad's, they, they were five, so, we always went to the beach, or, you know, the two vehicles loaded up, to the beach. Now, now like you need about, for a family of eight and five, you need about a bus. Or, or more because, you gotta need seatbelts, and everything else now. Before you just loaded up in the station and away we went. You know. You know, two families, you know, but, but, we still communicate with those people too. So, you know and that's Mom and Dad's friends, from way back.

Carlos: *... And went to school and everything. You know, pretty normal. And when I was about five or so we moved to [a suburb of the city]. And by that time we already had, I had a little brother. He was born . . . And we lived [there] 'til I was about eight or so and then we moved [to a smaller city] and I was getting, I was just going into grade four. So we moved up in September of '88, and, and, so*

it was a new school and new friends and, and everything. So . . . I was always trying to fit in . . . where I didn't need to, 'cause everyone thought I was so cool 'cause I came from the big city and I didn't know that. {laughs} So . . . just maybe not feeling like part of the group or whatever, right? . . . we got bussed from our, where we lived to the fights and stuff, and, you know, kids stuff, played hockey - with my friends on the street. [...]. My home life was, I had my chores when I came home. My first couple of summers because we, we moved to a new home and we had to the driveway, and the, the landscaping around the house, we built a shed, like all these things. So a lot of my summer I was, you know, doing things for my dad while he was at work. So most of my friends would maybe have more free time than I did at that time.

Rob: *... So there's, you know, nothing, my parents were happily married, hardly ever any fights in our house. Hardly any arguments, no violence, just calm and, and the people, you know, mother or father, would lose their temper once in a while, but you know, nothing out of the ordinary, so. And I was, I was a pretty good kid. I, I got into, you know, a little bit of trouble when was younger. Most of the things I got into, most of my friends did too, so it wasn't any different.*

David: *. . . My dad was a principal of a high school. At that time a teacher, sorry . . . head of a technical department and my mom was a stay at home mom who never worked. Uh, that was the agreement that they had apparently when they got married that Mom wouldn't work even though she was a qualified teacher. She would never work until the kids were history . . .*

...
I don't have bad times when I was a kid, I really didn't like . . . it was a fantastic life . . . I just don't have any there's not a bad memory except if you want to talk about a broken arm or a an operation on my knee because I screwed it played hockey.

William: *My father was a ... teacher. He was always a teacher. When I was born he was in the war for a couple years stationed in Africa, he worked on the planes. My mom stayed home in [Europe] and she worked in some sort of place where they fed the people ... We all came over from [Europe] in 1958. Three brothers and three sisters...*

...
So that would be nine kids after 1964 [. . .] I'm the middle boy, there's three sisters older than I am and a brother, then I come in fifth down the line. It was kinda good for clothes and everything else. And you know, it was good, my mother could go out and do the groceries and whatever while the older ones took care of the little ones . . . I was the middle boy and I was in contact with all of them basically [siblings]. 'Cause of the situation I got to have time with the older ones 'cause they looked after me when my mom and dad weren't home. It was good because I tried to stay in contact with them when they left. And you know they were like parents eh? Just like looking after me and stuff like that. And you know there was always somebody there to talk to . . . there was that closeness that we

had, as we grew up we didn't have much money and whatever we had you know it was quality time because we used to go at least once a week, the whole family say to some park and we'd have time, they made a point of it every Sunday to go out somewhere . . . We used to go fishing and stuff like that. . . it's a good family outing.

...

Dad was very good with authority. You know when he spoke everybody sorta jumped and had to do what he said you know. My mom ran a bakery beside the house, through an extension. We had good education. My father would help us out and my mother fed us, so it was good all around.

Burt: *I grew up in a rural area ... Fairly happy childhood. Nothing, nothing ever happened, no traumatic ... (How large was your family?) There's my father was married, and his first wife died and he had three kids, we're all a very close family. And then he married my mom and had brother and ... when brother and I were seventeen and eighteen, my, my parents split. And I lived with mom for a couple months and I, I usually lived with dad and my brother lived with, with mom. And then finished school and came down the line to start working down here ...*

...

Just, went to school, there was only three hundred and fifty kids in grade, grade five to thirteen ... and my mother was a teacher ... She taught me grade five, so, that was kinda strange. But then again, like there's a lot of, lot of kids I went to school with, lot of kids in my grade whose mother's were teachers too. Nothing too, we just worked at summers, haying most of the time. From the time we were about eleven, ten, eleven to fourteen, fifteen. And then when we were sixteen we ... had jobs at the harbour. And I can't remember what, and then in the next couple years I worked at washing dishes and at night a tavern and cutting wood all day in the bush ... like we always, we grew up on a huge farm. We never owned any livestock, but we, dad always rented out pastures, so there was always cattle there, but we, we never had any real strict regiment I guess, for kids. We were just, we just went out and played every day and then I had a big bush I used to go crawl back in, climb cave, and bike to our friend's place ... It was, it was a good safe place to grow up ...

...

(How about your dad, what did he do?) [Sales person], and he was a, he was a farmer. Then he got into clerking and then he became a real estate agent 'til he retired ... he's eighty-one or eighty-two now ... He'd take brother and I out fishing and I, most of the time he's just go with his friends though. But, yeah he was, he's like, I'm very close with him . . . (What about your mom?) I'm close to her too. She looked after Thomas for me for and then she came down here in, actually well, my sister in law, my sister and Mom all took turns looking after Thomas up North.

Another group of fathers, even though they described events in their childhoods that must have been difficult for them, still talked about their childhoods in mostly positive terms:

Paul: ... *I've always known I'm adopted. There was, there was nothing ever hidden, my mother never believed in hiding it ... I have the picture at home of myself, um, taken at, just shortly afterwards, a colour picture of me, just shortly after being adopted. And that's where I'm pegging myself as very, very young. I remember I think a year or two years later, we went to [another city] and picked up my brother[who was also adopted].*

...
. . . my mother was very authoritative, like she was loving, but she was very strict too . . . she believed in the belt. But not all the time . . . treats were like going to the, maybe going to store for, like you know, buy a bag of chips or a chocolate bar or a pop, or, um, baby bonus day she'd take us both down to [a restaurant] and go out and buy us a sundae, that kinda stuff like that . . .

...
... my father was going to take us down to, take us down to see our mom [in the hospital] . . . my mother said, "Oh come on boys, give your mom a hug and kiss" she was in bed, like, you know at the time . . . and we got up and gave our mother a hug, and she grabbed us right by the heads and smacked our heads together, and she said, "If you ever, ever steal, and you wreck my name, I'll kill you. You were not brought up to steal or anything else, it's not a game" [laughs] . . .

...
... she couldn't give herself needles, she had to get the insulin, so I can remember my father's having problems just doing that, so I, I went to the hospital and learned how on a orange and I gave my mother injections before I went to school in the morning. ...

...
... I was more closer to my mother I think . . . I had more close time in his [father's] last two years of life, than basic probably from when I was a teenager into my adult years. 'Til he went into the old age home. And I'd go over there on Sundays and I'll meet dad, go over on a Wednesday evening for an hour or so . . .

...
It was like a cloud, in that as a kid, like, looking at her in the casket, I can remember her looking much better, health-wise, they, they because they do the makeup and everything else. Like, then when she was actually in real life, like 'cause she was a, she was two hundred and fifty pounds. And when we, when we buried her she was eighty nine. So she had gone, straight down.

Caleb: *My parents separated when I was three, uh divorced with I was 7. Um they separated cause my Mom was abusive . . . she was really starting to understand what- that she was being abusive and it was kind've a, pushing me away too. Cause she didn't want to be continually doing it. (So when you say abusive . . . what do you mean?) Uh mostly physical from what I understand. ... we lost contact for a number of years . . . she had a major breakdown . . . still suffers*

from high anxiety, depression . . . and [agoraphobia] more than anything right now. ... there's a lot of stuff I didn't realize that I found out for a few years when I got back in touch with her . . . her first letter to me . . . she spilled her guts . . . Um, she was, she was abused a lot as a child. Um I'm not sure if it was sexually or not. ... Um but I, I guess there was foster homes too ...

...
I've never really had much of a family. My uncle lived with us for quite a number of years, um, and my dad and I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. But other than that . . . I did a lot of family stuff with my, uh, my best friend growing up. He uh, he had a good stable family relationship and uh they were just always out doing things . . . it was very much a surrogate family . . .

...
. . . so I grew up with my dad . . . once in a while he tells me about how it was tough because like if stuff comes up on the news, how it was tough being a single father in the 70s. Cause it's just . . . he couldn't get, he had to fight to get things like uh, child benefit and stuff like that. ... (So it was kind've a male household that you grew up in?) . . . Yeah . . . he made sure we went out and did stuff. ... that time was important to him because we'd like doing renovations on the house and there's the teenage years where kids never see their parents and vice versa. ... Was a-a-a promise that he'd always made that he was, he was gonna take care of me and gonna do everything that he could for me. So he, you know, he put me through school. ... And he still does, we uh still have a very good relationship.

Nigel: *I had a pretty good childhood. Now my dad was, when I was younger, he was in the armed forces so we, we lived in a few places ... my brother was born there . . . I had a pretty normal childhood, had, we lived in what was called in [Europe], it's like a [city] house. You know, people, lot of people don't have money to buy houses ...*

...
... it was kinda near the sea too, so you could get away from it. .. by the time I was fourteen or fifteen, I was more independent, and then I could get, you know, get on a train and go to ... the biggest cities, and go to see rugby and soccer matches and stuff like this and it wasn't that bad.

...
... My mom had been here (Canada), well I guess it, I don't know if it's pertinent to this situation but I was born out of wedlock, when I was, when my mom had you know, when she was eighteen, she had me out of wedlock right? (With your, was your dad your biological dad?) No, no, he wasn't.

Well it turns out when, you know, the whole maternal thing took over and she couldn't give me up right? So it turns out that well, ok, no, no big deal. So as soon as I was old enough to, to fly, I guess I was about four months old or something like that, she went back to [Europe]. And then you know, it, it turned out it wasn't as bad as she thought it might be. And you know, it wasn't such a stigma, and then you know, like once granny saw me, it was like oh my, how could we even have thought such a thing? And then within a year, she met my dad

right? And they, they married, and he adopted me when I was like two. So basically he's been my dad all my life, and I've never had any concept of my real, biological father ... I met him once or twice, but that was only arranged through my granny, and, and it's like, you know, I never really pursued it. And you know, so it's, it's not really a big deal.

...
And I, to this day, I mean my dad's, still, and I, we have these, I don't know, he's, we're not, we're not always on the best of terms. My mom and I are on, you know, great terms, and my brother, my dad's a bit of an issue sometimes.

Raymond: *Well I grew up in [the suburb of a large city], my parents lived there, they still do in the same house. I've got two sisters, I'm the middle child, I've got a younger sister and an older sister. I lived there pretty much my whole life until I was seventeen. And I moved out at, when I was seventeen, eighteen I guess and went and worked my way through college [in architecture] ... So I moved out . . . got a job and worked my way through college for the next three years ... Most of the time I tried to work just during the summers.*

...
[I] graduated then I went off to work ... actually I moved back home for about two months until I found a job and then I moved out . . .

...
I never got along with my parents, my mom or my dad . . . there was nothing wrong with them, I mean they were, they were strict, but there's nothing, there was nothing really, really bad, I was a teenager, I just didn't like the rules. [laughs] Like kids do now. So, but even now, we're not, we're not close, I go down and see them once, twice a year. And that's it. And they, I call. And I should be closer, 'cause my mom, my mom's great, my mom, with the kids, she'll, she doesn't remember a single, she doesn't forget a single birthday...

...
I want to be closer to my kids. 'Cause I want my kids to come and talk to me. I don't want the relationship I have with my parents, for them to have the same relationship.

...
Umm, my father worked at a [business], was an equipment manager. Did that I think pretty much his whole life. My mom didn't work, she quit when my oldest was born ... she always regrets it. She always regrets not going back to work. I had a pretty good childhood. I mean I didn't have any problems, my parents were very, very strict. I was rebellious ...

...
Now, my father was an alcoholic - and that's why I'm really careful about how much I drink ... I always watch what I, what I drink. So. (Did that impact your whole life much?) Um, to a, not very much, he was a, he was a sleeping alcoholic, like he'd get drunk and he'd sleep. He wasn't abusive or anything like that ... So it didn't really affect, like it wasn't a really bad, bad environment ...

Tarek: (. . . I wondered what you remembered most about your parents?) Well . . . they were good parents . . . when I was nine years old my mother died. Like I was living with my parents, all the times with my parents, before my mother died. Like she, she was a very good parent, like she helped me with all my school work, homework, everything. Like when I was in elementary school, I was top of the class all the time. The year she died, I went right back, 'cause like I missed lot of school, and, and like I went back, far back by then. The, the following year, I start to come back up, get back up on top again. So. But even with my parents, my dad, he was a carpenter, and for, makes a, he does his own contract, like he is a contractor, he's not, he doesn't work for any government or anybody, he has to do his own work, at home. He build houses.

...
. . . I was happy and everything was fine . . . Like anything I need I, within their reach, they can afford, they, they provided for me. Like I was the only child too, right? For my mother and father. And when my mother died, my father got married back, I lived about two, three years with him, lets see. She died in 1967 [or] '70, yeah, three years I live with them, and then I went with my grandparents . . . my grandparents had two uncles were living there too. So big house. Plus one, like there was another house right beside, my uncle had a house there, so like they were close, right close by. And their house all had kids too. Oh like when my dad got married back, he had, when I left, he had one child with my step-mother. And then I, when I left, he had six more after that . . . [Step-siblings] They all live in the States . . . my dad died . . . He passed away, a couple years ago, '97 . . . (Had you seen him much, since you moved here?) My dad? . . . like my step-brothers and sister, they went to the States, I came to Canada. And because they were like in, they, they had sponsorship from their parents, my step-mother, her parents were there . . . when I came here, I applied on my own. Like . . . I applied, found out from the independent immigration . . . so I came here . . . I don't see any problem with me and my childhood.

...
Go, go to school in the morning, come in the afternoon, or sometime I used to give my grandmother, he used to give my grandmother, when they were, they weren't living very far. So when she go to the . . . markets, over there, fresh vegetables, so she'd buy fresh goods, collect it from her, come home, I start cooking by the time he gets home from work . . . he teach me how to cook. (When you were nine?) Yeah . . . In the morning, like, I, I would get up, cook, he gone to work, I have to go to school. It was, it was a bit rough . . . like so stressful and like I, I was just nine. [...] But once, once he[his father] got married back, well then my step-mom starts cooking or whatever.

...
. . . when I was a kid my mother died . . . my father got [re]married back around then and I lived with my stepmother for um, about a year. I was the only kid from my mother and father, and I went to live with my grandparents [. . .] til they died and then I lived [with] my uncle. (How old were you when your grandparents died?) I don't know, I was a boy . . . life was good like I just . . . it's tough cause

like back home you didn't have the kind of luxury that's around here right? It's different.

About one third of these fathers described events in their childhoods that were very hard for them and sometimes quite horrendous. Not surprisingly, these men tended to talk more extensively and more emotionally about how these times were for them. It was striking that all of the dads interviewed who were no longer actively parenting their children were in this grouping. However, as a counter balance, it is important to acknowledge that three of the fathers in this group were custodial parents. Also, most of the fathers confronting the greatest financial difficulties or problems holding jobs also were in this group. They also talked more about personal mental health problems. However, once again, there were exceptions to these patterns.

Zack: . . . *they were together for many, many, many, many years until she died at 48 I guess. ... dad did not make a lotta money, same as me. Uh, my dad had 5 children, same as me. ... My, uh, my dad drank. And, uh, and I really believe that he passed off some genes to me. Uh, unfavourable genes . . . my idea, . . . was to, you know, die by the time I'm 30 of alcoholism. And, uh, I have a feeling that I used to, I used to listen to his parties. ... He was a weekend drinker for most of my life, and then when I started drinking it kind've encouraged him to go for more than one- more- more than the weekend. Cause I was hooked on the stuff even before I started drinking . . . Dad and mom didn't get along really that well. I mean, because of his drinking . . . he'd scream and yell, you know, if you didn't do something . . . that's where . . . the fear came in . . . was that he'd scream and yell at ya. Uh, so, it was, it was unpleasant growing up. I mean I wanted to be out on my own . . . my mother was not a good housekeeper. amazing how ya, ya marry the same thing as, as, uh, you leave behind . . . (So your house was kind've . . .) It was a mess. It was a total disaster from Sunday to Sunday and when I grew old enough I, uh, I started to clean it. I was probably 12 or 13 when I first started. And I would clean the whole entire house; well at least the downstairs so if people came in . . .*

Colin: *I can remember, uh, just before we actually we, we came to Canada [. . .] my dad was already here [in Canada] and . . . maybe 6 months it was just yeah me and my mother and my sister. [. . .] . . . we came over on a . . . ship anyways . . . it was fantastic for a f-five year old eh? . . . I didn't realize that I would never be, you know . . . well I wouldn't see any-many of my cousins or . . . my relatives for probably for a long, well . . . the only time I went back was when I was 18. ... I had a lotta good memories actually . . .*

...

. . . uh, we moved to [another province] . . . I can remember I was really, really, uh, unhappy about that . . . I was 8 . . . I had friends and everything, you know . . .

. as it would turn out my older sister [Patricia] . . . we lived in [that province] like from what '61 to '64 and December of '63 my, my older sister uh, passed away from uh Meningitis. ... [It was like] practically [moving] to a foreign country quite frankly . . . uh so we c-we ended up, uh I guess the whole exper- losing my sister and everything, you know. They, uh, uh, they . . . my parents couldn't, they, they just couldn't, uh, live there anymore . . . so my dad, we moved back here . . .

...

. . . when it happened [Patricia died] though I-I-I guess I had a- a- I just thought, well okay- uh- you-you go to heaven- whatever that is. And-and-uh I guess I have to wait, you know . . . oh I forgot to mention . . . I had a brother born in August of . . . '65 . . . so basically in a short time span of from say May of '63 'til August of '65 I had two siblings born and one sibling die.(Huge change.) Yeah I know . . . [I] had a tremendous change and this is a . . . like, I was 11/12/13. . . . I can't remember actually, you know, like just being withdrawn quite a bit . . . my dad for-forced me into Scouts and I just wasn't happy at all there. I thought all the kids were all too rowdy and everything . . . I just could not get into it, you know? [. . .] Cause I . . . definitely changed . . . uh I definitely became uh, uh more withdrawn . . . [. . .] . . . we [moved and] lived in a townhouse at first . . . then . . . subsidized housing took it over. So we moved into a-a- we rented a house. And, uh, uh, I ended up flunking grade 11 although I didn't find . . . out I had flunked 'til after we had already moved [again] eh? So I didn't have to share that information with anybody you know.

Dean: And yeah my dad used to just yell and scream. I used to hide in a little, a round, forty-five gallon drum in the closet, put clothes over my head. And we'd jump out the windows, and run when dad come home drunk. And that gave me a lot of anger. And built up over the years.

...

I grew up with an alcoholic father. I've got a couple of brothers who are in and out of jail all the time . . . one's really bad. Like he's spent eighty-five percent of his adult life behind bars. Yeah. And yeah my dad used to just yell and scream. I used to hide in a little, a round, forty-five gallon drum in the closet, put clothes over my head. And we'd jump out the windows, and run when dad come home drunk. And that gave me a lot of anger. And built up over the years. And then I finally met Vicky, who is my ex, and thought things were gonna go great . . . I didn't meet her 'til I was thirty and I stayed away from women, long term relationships my whole life. Probably because of my upbringing. You know, my dad used to call me a little cocksucker and different things like ...

...

Six, I was, I was young . . . I slept through the gunshot . . . when I woke up I could hear all my brothers and sisters "Dad tried to shoot mom" . . . he'd come home drunk, she'd open up the window, throw the shoes out, throw us out the window and we'd just run, you know. 'Cause it was his house, he's gonna burn it down, you know.

...

(How many siblings do you have?) There's different marriages. My father had an affair. So I've got eight sisters, only one is my full blooded sister. And I've got three brothers, which are all half. Same father, different mother. (... did you grow up with all of these in your home?) Um, most of them . . . Jake [Brother 1], the [other] brothers not too much. Jake, he's in and out of jail all the time. ... My brother Ricky [Brother 2], when he was young, he had to be raised on goat's milk. Which was very expensive back then. So he was raised with my grandmother, my dad's mother . . . and then Doug [Brother 3] is, we got the same father, and that was from my dad's first, I'm not sure if they were married or not. But ... he grew up with her. And we don't really talk, I don't like him, he don't like me. So we just stay away from each other.

...
Cause I have memories of sitting in our in living room. At the ages of six and seven and eight, we'd all have to put the kitchen chairs in a semi-circle, and there was a, some kind of a guidance counsellor lady, whatever, a psychiatrist. And she would sit down and [we'd] . . . discuss how to make Jake [Brother 1] better, and how I was gonna stop him from beating people up at school, and doing crime and drugs ... he started shooting needles I think, the age of thirteen, fourteen

...
... well if I'm gonna get accused of stealing, and I'm gonna get grounded, well I'm gonna do it. So then, my brother [Jake], like he'd take me and he'd show me how to steal, so then I just started stealing on my own . . . (What kinds of things did you steal?) Um, tee shirts, hunting knives, clothings . . . stuff like that. Trade for drugs. Go to the weed guys . . . we'd be fifteen, they'd be like twenty-three . . .

...
(. . . money must have been tight with that many children.) Yeah, there was a lot of children, they bought a, she said she went through, there was seven or eight of us in the house when we were small. She used like twenty loaves of bread a week. You know, potatoes we just bought by the fifty, that big huge bag, that, you know, like a hundred pound bag.

...
My dad always worked, that's one good, you know, he always fed us . . . He was a truck driver . . . and he had his own roofing company. ... Trucking? . . . Yeah, that was nice when he was gone. . . when I went to high school, I could skip, my mom was a cook back then, so nobody was home. So just skipped class constantly. Forged the notes . . . I had that down to a T. I sound like my dad on the phone . . . so I knew all the ins and outs to get away with stuff.

...
(Are you close with your mom?) Yeah. Yeah, she's going through counseling right now, finally. From the abuse my dad put her through . . . the poor old lady. I don't take her to my family court cases or nothing. Because she gets very emotional [. . .] . . . her and my dad both bailed me out, I live with them right now. So, yeah he's made up a lot, he gave me a thousand dollars for my bail . . . So, I think he's did so much, is 'cause he's felt guilty, of the way he's brought me up and raise me, and the abuse he gave towards the whole family. Right, so I think

he's feeling a little guilty, and that's why. (What makes you think that? Did he ever talk about it, or?) Oh no, I don't talk to my dad at all.

Felix: . . . I don't remember it, but I was told I fell, fell out of the window. At a fairly young age, it was before my brother [Alex] got hit by a car ... in 1970 I was five years old when [Alex] got hit by a car. And I have some memories of that, but I have some vague impressions of standing by a window and my mother told me I fell out the window and hit a fence before hitting the ground. And I'm not sure if she said it was picket fence or one of those steel bar fences. But she did say that it saved my life. 'Cause, cement pavement was under that, so, I imagine that's the first time that Children's Aid was even involved in the family...

...
(How many siblings do you have?) I have three others . . . when I was born my father was thirty-three. My mother was twenty-two . . . I don't think I have siblings through my mother, but there is the possibility, I keep thinking that you know, eleven years between my mother and father. So, I could have an older half brother that's, or sister that's in their fifties. And I also think that there's a possibility that I have younger siblings through my father.

...
Well when I was five years old ... my father had to leave the house. Or he left of his own accord because of his drinking, going to jail, whatever. I'm not exactly sure of all the things, but he had to, it was agreed upon or he was forced to, I'm not sure what it was, but he had, was out. So. And since then I've actually not really seen him except for, well four times before we moved . . . at least four times . . . I saw him when I was thirteen actually. Since my grandmother died, his mother, I've only seen him for the funeral ... we did the viewing and then he took us out to, for donuts and pop or something and I was thirteen, and then I saw him about seven years later. And I actually haven't seen him since. So, so almost twenty years ... He's seventy-two now, I guess, if he's still alive ...

...
(So you grew up, your mom raised you and your siblings?) Yes. She raised us . . . when my father had to leave, we went into a, a shelter. I think it was like three days, that we were in there, I have this picture of the furnace, I think. And being there for a short time. And then my brother and I were taken up on to the mountain. To live in a foster home 'til about Christmas time, or a little later, maybe my birthday, I'm not sure . . . I think it was when I was six . . . it was a pretty good experience.

...
So I think Children's Aid was involved in that one ... Yeah, my two sisters went to a farm. If I was six, my sister Alexis was um, three, and my sister Maureen was one. So it was the year, I think it was the year after my brother got hit...

...
(Then what happened after that?) Not too much. Until, until I was about thirteen. I guess when my grandmother passed away . . . then I started to, to, I sexually abused my siblings. At that time. But that didn't, nothing happened to that until I

was eighteen I think it was. Seventeen, eighteen. And my sister reported, my sister Maureen. So um, five years, I guess, of abuse, sexually abusing my, my, well I did my brother once I think. Um but my two sisters, molesting, or abusing them sexually. I got charged when I was seventeen, eighteen years old. Or nineteen. I don't remember when exactly . . . but Children's Aid was involved with that because I had to move out of the house [and] I went to live with a friend and then I moved into my mother's boyfriend's house because he was living with my mother. So I sort of um, a year's probation . . . Well I was, by the time it was finished I was twenty.

...
(Was that hard for you when [your father] left? Do you remember?) No I kept telling my mother I wanted to live with him. For even when we moved in '74, 'til about '75, and my mother said ... "You're never gonna live with your father. Um, he was a drunken alcoholic. He's been to jail. So just wipe it out of your head. You're not ever gonna live with your father." So after that I think I gave up ... and after 1978, that's when I think I started to abuse my sisters . . . I was thirteen

...
(Was that hard for you when [your father] left? Do you remember?) No I kept telling my mother I wanted to live with him. For even when we moved in '74, 'til about '75, and my mother said ... "You're never gonna live with your father. Um, he was a drunken alcoholic. He's been to jail. So just wipe it out of your head. You're not ever gonna live with your father." So after that I think I gave up ... and after 1978, that's when I think I started to abuse my sisters . . . I was thirteen

...
. . . Vince [my step-father].... he didn't, he didn't marry my mother until '82, I think it was. But he had been there since '71, '72. I remember going to his gas station, I would clean the toilets occasionally, I'd get a dime or a quarter for doing that I could get a can of pop and a bag of chips, couple other things. And then by '75 I was pumping gas [at] ten years old

...
I think in 1978 that he may have been abusing my sisters himself. Which kinda, I, I really don't know how much I knew, but probably felt for sure that something was going on, and it kinda made it easier for me to be able to do it . . . But I do have the feeling that I was told, because I've always had that feeling, after we moved out and after Step-father was gone, I've always had that, I had that feeling when he was gone, that he had been doing the, the same, as I was ... So yeah, 1982, '84, yeah I was nineteen when . . . my sister [Maureen] . . . told me that, that Vince had been abusing her and my sister. Vince also threatened us. Threatened us, to keep the girls and to, that's one of the reasons now that, looking back he kept saying that he was gonna institutionalize my brother and send me off to foster care or something.

...
Um since [Vince] . . . moved out in 1982, '83, I've never seen him. Now he's called my sister Maureen occasionally. But he's never called me and I've never

went to the phone or tried to find him. I don't, I don't like him. Although I kind of respect him in some ways because . . . he gave me the chance to, gave me the responsibility, you know, had the trust in me or whatever to, to open up a shop and to watch the store ...

...

My mother says that Vince was insecure. We moved around a lot, it was like a pregnancy . . . It seems like once ever year we'd move . . .

Dylan: I hated the word retarded, like 'cause to me I had no clue what was wrong with my mom when I was young. So as soon as someone said retard, or called, loser or called other names, I fought. I didn't care who it was, where it was, and then once I hit sixteen, I quit fighting because I knew it wasn't worth it.

...

Yes, since I was five...It's more like Alzheimer's...she was only in her thirties when she just got it. Like she's been in the nursing home already for at least twenty-five years already. And she's only in her mid-fifties.

[Q: So did she live with you when you were young?]

Yeah. Hard to remember, remember it though. Like I remember some things, but it's, since it's been so long.

...

[Q: You've mentioned your dad a few times. Can you tell me about him, what he was like?]

I know deep down he was a good person and did love and care about us, but he cared more about his drinking all the time, and that's why he hit us ...

...

...he was sixty-four last year. And that's how skinny the past two years, like since his liver was shot, his mind was shot, he went downhill. Like one thing I had a hard time dealing with too is, people said he looked better when he was cleaned up at the wake, than what he did in life. And I'm like, can't you just keep your f-ing mouth shut? You don't say that, how can a person look better when they're dead than when they're alive.

...

... like I was able to play hockey, go to cubs, go to scouts, army cadets, and everything else. So-...Yeah, I loved that. See that was like a-...I loved going camping, at least I wasn't home. Just being around kids and I was able to be a ham, and stuff like that.

...

[Q: So, you've talked in the past, that you've struggled with depression on and off throughout your life. (Yep) Did it start when you were young? Or-]

Yeah. But I don't know how I couldn't be depressed with everything I lived with. Especially like losing my mom like that. Because that, and then seeing my dad drunk all the time, and everything else, like I remember like the good parts too, like going to camps all the time, cubs, scouts, cadets and stuff like that...

...

[Q: You lived, you moved around a lot when you were a teenager?]

Not teenager, but early twenties...I lived in like Toronto, Hamilton, Oshawa, out West, worked at a fishing lodge too in St. Arrows...I liked it. I miss the travelling, but now, where like I can, I'm moving back to Toronto hopefully, and to me it overwhelms me a bit, it's like I want to get my old feeling back of no fear.

...
[Q: *When did you move out of your family-*]
About fifteen, sixteen. 'Cause I just couldn't take the yelling and the fighting anymore. Especially since my dad used to hit me, my mom and my sister. So I was like, ok, bye-bye.

George: *My mother, she, she just had, just this memory, but as a small child, like I was, you know, the first child, like I was a, a year old, I was peeing in a toilet when I was just over a year old. My dad was so proud of me, like I was the only one of his buddies kids that could talk and walk and he was taking me to parties with him and, and they, they would be all drinking and they would teach me to swear and they would laugh.*

...
... the next morning, you know, I get up, and I'd, first thing I do is, I start swearing, f-ing this and stuff, and he's say "What?" And he'd slap me, he used to beat me for it at home. And my mom and him ... I remember them fighting about this ... It was, well no, yelling and throwing stuff and she'd slap him, but he never hit her. He never hit her. He slapped me though, like whenever I swore ... And my mom and him fought ... and then he got caught in bed with a babysitter ... and I remember that day 'cause she was whipping his stuff out the bedroom window, we lived on a, on a main floor apartment, but there was a basement below, and there was stuff was flying out the window and I was crying ... I was running the clothes back in to the house ...

...
So I never really had a dad, I remember having, you know, just all my friends had cottages and motor bikes and boats ... and I said, "Mom, can't we have some of that stuff" and you know, no, you know, "I can't afford it, it's just me, you're never gonna be able to get that, so you might as well get it out of your mind" ... she bought us a lot of toys and she was very good that way, but she drank a lot ... when she was twenty, she was alone with three kids.

...
And I left home, I was 15 years old. And I, I ran, I was involved in crime, I got caught, got sent to reform school. That changed my life . . . I was not gonna be stupid like that anymore.

...
Well [I] had two little brothers. And you know, my mom worked at eight o'clock in the morning, eight to four-thirty. And she would get me up with her at seven and I would get ready and we would eat together . . . she'd have to walk to work and . . . I would commence making them toast and tea, 'cause that was one of our favourite breakfasts, dipping our toast in our tea.

...

I grew up . . . my grandparents lived in a town not far from there and I used to wanna go there all the time because they had a snow machine and they had a trap line.

...

And my grandfather ... like he showed me how to shoot the, the 303 Winchester... but he also, he swore incredibly, a lot. Like just constantly. ... But he was quite promiscuous back in the town, when we went home to my grandparent's home and he would, he would flirt around, he also bootlegged booze to make money on the side, he was a CPR foreman. He was a big guy, you know. And he, he, he was quite a womanizer. You know, he, he'd always go out and drink and fool around with women whenever he could. And it got to the point where he got so bold he would even bring, bring them home, into his room, his, my grandparents never shared a room. But he would always, if my grandmother said anything, he would, he would smack her. And, and slap her silly... [These were] my mom's parents, but my mom, she witnessed more horrific stuff, like my grandfather just smashing my grandmother's head into the wall, you know, but why she stayed, why she loved him, I'll never know, like she was a status Indian, and she lost her status ... Well I saw quite a bit of it. And it was a regular thing, you know, [my grandfather] drank a lot and he was very violent with [my grandmother], never hit me 'til I, 'til I got involved, like I tried to stop him, I think the first time was about 9 or 10. And he smacked me back, quite hard and I fell down and you know, I remember, I remember him, him holding me back and ... was whipping my grandmother with a belt. ...I knew something was gonna happen, so I'd sneak Grandma, like Grandma let's go, I'd sneak her in the truck, because I could drive a standard. I'd hop in the jeep and I would drive her to neighbour's, or somebody that I knew she, where I, where she would be safe...

...

My mother still says you know, nowadays, you know, you, you three boys were the best boys ever. You know, couldn't have asked for better kids, polite, quiet . . . we were just well behaved, manners were good. [...] Is [your mother] still alive?) Oh yeah. Yeah, she comes, she, and visits, she's remarried ... (So how often would you speak to her?) Oh, every week we speak ... (Did you ever make peace with your dad?) No. He actually died. Right when I was, I was in my last year of high school, I think I was 21.

...

[Are you ever violent in your relationships?...] I never took that road. You know that my grandfather and my uncles did ... I was disciplined through martial arts and I took my anger out in other ways. And I, I, I didn't see any real benefit in smacking my girlfriends around. You know. So it didn't happen. So like I, I ultimately broke that chain ...

Work, Education and Money

A unique aspect of these interviews with fathers is the amount of time that many spent talking about their jobs. While many of the mothers interviewed earlier worked

outside of the home, they did not focus on the nature of their jobs in the interviews. For many of these men, work or the lack of employment, was important to their stories. Work meant more than providing financially for their families. It was a big part of how they spent their time and how they presented themselves.

There was lots of variation in the employment histories of these men. About one-third had been in the same job for many years or had only a few job changes in their careers. About another third were employed but described many changes in employment over time. One father was new to working, motivated by his desire to set up a home for his daughter. A bit less than a third were not employed at the time of the interview. Most of these men had been out of work for some time.

None of these men were university graduates and only one had completed a college degree. Three others had some college courses but did not finish. Six others had completed high school. Two of these fathers had finished a vocational program in high school. Five fathers had left school before finishing high school.

Only two fathers said that they earned enough money so that meeting everyday responsibilities was not a challenge. Six dads were working but said that money was tight and they had to be frugal to cover expenses. Half of these fathers described serious problems with income adequacy that restricted what they could do. Not surprisingly, all of those who were not working fell into this grouping.

A third of these men described stable long-term employment:

Paul has worked for the same employer in the textile industry for twenty-eight years. His wife is on a long-term disability pension. Coping with limited finances with five children is an ongoing challenge. At the time of the first interview, Paul could not afford to have his car repaired and was commuting by bus:

My first job, working at a place where they made, it was a printing, printing place, that they did stamps on tee shirts, with printing, screen printing place. I worked there. I was fourteen years old at the time. Worked there for a summer. Then went back to school of course. And then, I got a part time job at a place called the Matador's Tavern.... And they got me into the kitchen and the guy, the brother had come around, and said, you know, you're only fifteen but you, you work out and have a job here, are you interested down the road, that, this place would send, could send you to a place called George Brown in Toronto. To get cooking papers and stuff like that. I said, oh fantastic, sure, sure. So I stayed there for awhile... So that, that was a really interesting job, but you know, at that time

there. Um, then from there on that kinda petered out. Because different managements change and stuff like that, so that kinda went to the wayside. So, um, I got a, I got a job at a place called Mother's Pizza Parlour. It's another restaurant job. I got that up on Hespeler Road. And I worked there, I think I got that when I was fifteen, I think I worked there over a year. Went to school, and then like, there was a couple times during the night, and then on the weekends, for sure, you know Saturday and Sunday. I worked like in, food preparation, and stuff like that, and that was enjoyable, it was pretty good, I got a job there. And um, that kinda petered out, I got some, what was another job? I got a job, there was a shoe elastic company. That was painful, that was, oh it was a horrible job. I was sixteen at the time, just, sixteen or seventeen. At the time there, I worked there for the summer, I worked I think from May until September. Stuff like that, and that was just making elastics for shoes, and that was a hard job. You'd come out with your hands blistered every night.

...
It's a towel manufacturing place. We manufacture towels. So, when I first started there, I started in I started in shipping, shipping and receiving, I was in that for awhile. And then there was a job opening in the finishing room. And I was in the finishing room for about ten years. Then there was a job opening for coming out in the dye house. And it was there for quite a bit more money. And I went into the dye house. And I was in there for two years and then there was another job opening for parts department . . . and I worked for that for ten years. And the last place I am now, is, is like a slasher assistant. Which is, it's in the preparation department . . . I've been in that department 'til, to this day. (So, you like your job?) Oh no. [laughter] Yeah, yeah. Yeah, you need a job. Potatoes and stuff on the table and get groceries . . . I've been there a long time . . . I get five weeks for my vacation time. And basically it's not too bad if you've been there for quite a few years...

...
. . . thank God for my drug plan . . . my kids are on this medications, over a hundred and fifty dollars a shot . . . One of my wife's pills are over four hundred and something dollars. Um, yeah, close to a over a thousand dollars a month . . . (Is money tight?) Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's tight. Yeah, and um, it'll be more tight too because, they're, they're after us for um, child support now . . . (So is that stressful, like are finances stressful?) Oh yeah. Yeah, that can be more stress, I think that worries me out, worries me more . . . I got food on the table, and stuff like that, you know, it could be a lot worse, you know. A lot of people are a lot worse than us.

...
Seven to three. Monday, Monday to Friday, unless they pull a stat hol-, a mandatory Saturday, which is, basically they have to post that up between, before Wednesday at four p.m. and that, basically, if they post that, it's, it's called a schedule Saturday. Then if you, your department's name, then you have to go in for that shift, that's a mandatory thing that you have to do a Saturday... I get up at five-thirty. Yeah. Yeah, usually five-thirty. Wash up a bit, and then just have a coffee and then I'll leave a little after six. 'Cause I like getting the Toronto Sun,

and going there and sitting down with a coffee. Just take my time. Yeah I know some people like it, they're right up, seven, I just, oh, I just hate it.

Eric: *Yeah, but that was a good high school it was, it, like a trade, trade school, and I don't know if they have them anymore here, but, but not too many. (So what, what trade was, was that that you were learning there?) Um, machinist. Machine, either machinist or electrical, but I, I was more advanced in the machinist part, so I took that. And, be good to have more schools that way, it's way, you know there's, 'cause there's, there's some people out there that can't find work because they don't have a, a high school trade of some sort. (So you, you went there for the whole, for the (Rights) whole of your high school?) Nine, yeah, nine to twelve.*

...
You know, but, yeah, I only put forty, forty-two hours a week now. You know, but before, forty-two hours a week, but before it was forty-six, because, if I worked a full Friday, would be, you know, and extra, the whole afternoon, type thing ... we're slow. That, this is why I can come home on Friday afternoons. (So how long have you been there?) Twenty years ... Um, yeah. I started right, basically right after high school. Working, so it's, I think it, I was planning to take a, a year off before I started working, or, you know, but, never did, it just, I got, the job was there and ... I like, I like my work, it's, there's days, you know, well it doesn't matter, a job is a job, it's, there are the bad days, there are good days, there's frustrating days, and you know

...
(You, you both, you would both need to work though, to, to make ends meet?) For right now, like if, we figure within the next year, we should be clean of everything, 'cause the lawyers were ridiculous price, for trying to get the kids back and, and, and you don't get the money back from that. We got the kids back, but the, the money's gone ... Still paying that off, it's ... it's, you know, with her just getting back to work, it was all on my income, so it's, that's still paying that off.

...
I, I make pulleys. So, I'm a machinist. Machine operator. But they [child welfare] thought I was just working too many hours.

...
You know, 'cause I just don't want this [child welfare involvement] to happen again, or, or, happen in a different way, or, you know. And, it's, basically once I'm on record, that's it, it's, haunts you for life. Which is still haunting me now with this, you know... at work sometimes I just gotta shut the machine off and pace the floor and, just my mind goes, you know, wanders, and I phone my therapist now and again... because the secretary gave me this phone number, says, you know, 'cause this was, (Right) messing up too much at work, I just, you know, I, one job itself was eleven thousand dollars, it just, and it just scrap, you know. You know, three days work, to be scrap.

...
*[The current machine shop, so how long have you been there?]
...Twenty years. [That's a long time.] Yes, it's, it's a long time at one place. [So*

since you were about twenty years old then.] Um, yeah. I started right, basically right after high school. Working, so it's, I think it, I was planning to take a, a year off before I started working, or, you know, but, never did, it just, I got, the job was there and... [You like your work?] Yeah I like, I like my work, it's, there's days, you know, well it doesn't matter, a job is a job

...
they know my work now, so they don't bug me no more, they just, I, I go in the morning, go in the office, look at the schedule, I take it off and go in the back and I sometimes, I don't see nobody for the whole day. You know and I'm there for the whole ten hours, and nobody tells, you know, nobody, I don't see nobody for the whole day sometimes.

Rob: I quit school when I was sixteen. And I just didn't, I didn't really do well in school so . . . and that time in the economy you could get a job, no problems, paying really well. So I, you know, I quit school, I quit school and within about six months I was making almost even to what my dad was making as an engineer . . . He got his engineering licence so he would be, but he was like a draftsman, engineer, designer, mechanical designer . . . he was making like fourteen thousand a year, I was making twelve thousand a year, back in nineteen seventy- about '77 . . . I was making pretty good money so everything in my life always came easy, I never really, you know, had any hardships. Or, you know, everything seemed to always go my way . . .

...
my wife started working at the same company I did, Raytheon, my dad worked there, and I, my dad got me the job, and it was an easy job, easy, easy money

...
... and in that time frame I quit . . . because of financial reasons around '96, '97, just my job was going nowhere and my wife and I both worked in the company, and the company just, it wasn't doing well at the time . . . and it didn't look like it was good, good idea to stick around, like both work in the same company. Because I thought well, ok if I lose my, if the company goes, goes under, or if the Americans pull the plug, we could both be unemployed. I needed more of a challenge in my life. I actually got another job . . . started making some really good money, which that helped a lot. But then that removed me from the house more. And I still, I, to get the other job, they needed somebody that was competent on their evening shift which I was . . . I still had one child at home for a couple more months . . . there was a time frame in there, where I was working seventy hours, sixty hours a week . . . then my other son was in, both in school full time, then I could, I was . . . putting in huge hours . . . I've never seen that much money before . . . it was like instantly, debts were just going, it was great [. . .] ...But then one of the things I couldn't afford before was drinking, you know, alcohol...

...

everything in a way worked out so much for the better. Than if I would have continued on the evening shift, doing the, the crazy hours, and it just, it's kinda strange how it just worked out, because by me coming home after work and doing the the things with the kids, if they, you know, the homework, and, and not having a babysitter there for you know, three hours every day, that worked out good, I got on to day shifts, and being there for my kids every day after school really, you know, that, that was something I, I hadn't ever done. So, you know it was a good feeling, it was really good to be with the, the family in a normal sort of way . . .

...

. . . 'Cause I got a very stressful job. So. You know, you, in living with stress, you have to have a way of coping with it, and alcohol isn't a good way to cope with stress. And working more isn't a good way to cope with stress. So they made, made me recognize that the problems that I had, that you know, there's other ways to deal with stress . . .

...

I'm a machinist but I run a electrical discharge machine, it's EDMs, wire cut machines, they're very expensive machines. And they, they're, it's important to keep them running twenty four hours a day.

...

I've got a really good career and I make really good money.

William: *When I failed grade nine my father took me camping, we set the tent up in July and then he told me the news - that I failed my year. Well, I guess I kinda knew it was gonna happen, it was very close... I left [school] in '73, I was one credit short of, for a grade twelve and I have it now.*

...

I went to work in [my home town] for a friend of my dads. And I worked there for the summer. Then I worked in a tool and die place for a year. And then I thought, no, I'll spread my wings and I went to [a big city] for a year or two. Then I came back [home], 'cause I missed home, and thought I'd get a transfer with the company, but it didn't happen . . . I worked for [Farming Equipment Wholesaler] cleaning trucks and maintenance, it was a good job, but I came back to [home town] 'cause I missed home and thought I'd get a transfer with the company in [another city], but it never happened. So I went back to school, to machine shop. And I got a job in [a town] at a [Tractor, Equipment Company]. I worked there for awhile until the place closed. Then I got a job in [my home town] and I worked there for twenty four years.

...

... the factory where I worked in [my home town] for twenty-four years, it closed about three or four years ago. I'd still be there if it was still running. It was good. It had it's times. But it moved to the states and some of us needed to change jobs. We we're best of friends, you'll see somebody you haven't worked with for twenty-four years now, it's like a reunion every time. It's, it's nice. I see them whenever; we shared a lot of hours working together and it's just like being part of a family .

...

... When [the factory] closed I was gonna become a teacher's aide 'cause my father's a math teacher and two brother's were teachers, so, I thought that'd be alright. So I did go to volunteer at some of the schools for classroom monitoring, going out at lunchtime to look after kids. So I went to school, finished my grade twelve - I found that very hard cause I've been away for so long.

...
And then I got a call, the hospital, so that was it . . . I got a part-time job at a hospital because I don't know, just my luck, and I do housekeeping; it's a change from the factory because I don't have to yell no more. I can move around the hospital and do things differently, do work on other floors. Whenever patients stayed for awhile you really got to know them . . . I see myself . . . just as a person that goes to work and does his job and you know. I am a person that doesn't talk very much. And I just go there and do the job and come home basically. At my job at the hospital I talk to people and make their day and they make my day too 'cause we're all in that place together and have to work together.

...
I can move around the hospital, and do things differently, do, work on other floors, and that's why, recently I just had a change, I went from the rehab floor to [another floor]] you change, because, that was the medical floor, and two was the rehab floor. Whenever patients stayed for awhile, I, you really got to know them, (Oh) well on this floor, well, they can be there for a day or two, and go home, and stuff like that, so, it's faster, so.

...
Unless I get a job at [another hospital]. The hospital's reopening this year sometime. They closed it two years ago. And they're rebuilding it, so they're gonna need more people, so, (Right) there should be some full time work there for me, so.

...
There was a time in my life where, [long term job], I used to work, the last eight years, I worked straight days, because, everybody decided, you know, if we can go to the company, let's see if they can vote on straight shifts. They would do it and they did it, so. That was a good thing, that's how I become a soccer coach too, and stuff like that. So I had time to do these things, eh? (Right) And Wife was on shift work too, at the time, so, it was nice to have.

Raymond: And I moved out at, when I was seventeen, eighteen I guess and went and worked my way through college [in architecture] ... So I moved out . . . got a job and worked my way through college for the next three years ... Most of the time I tried to work just during the summers.

[I] graduated then I went off to work ... actually I moved back home for about two months until I found a job and then I moved out . . . got a job there, drafting . . . I've never, never been in architecture since I got out of school ... So I started that job ... I lived there for about, oh probably a year, in an apartment. Then moved . . . switched jobs to a consulting engineering company. At that time I was living with

my then, she was my girlfriend at the time, but she, eventually she'd be my wife. So we moved in together

...

So, so we were having a lot of troubles ... financial problems because she wasn't working and she needed the biggest house in town. ... I was making like, forty-thousand dollars. So we just couldn't afford it and that's why we moved ... but when we moved, it was the same thing, she wanted a huge house. So a lot of it had to do with, with money ... And me being away. And I think for me, it was an escape too, to be away, it didn't upset me, because it got rid of the problems. So, but it was difficult on her, I do agree with that. So we finally we sold that house and we moved back [here] ... we got separated in '96...

...

Uh, I like where, where I live right now. It's a, probably a middle income neighbourhood, it's relatively new, I've lived there, the house was new when I bought it. It was just built, it was one of the first ones on the street. So it was brand new, there's lots of kids. The kids like it, they each have their own bedrooms. It's not a huge house, got a nice yard. Four bedrooms, I got the basement finished. I like it.

...

I was a, probably an average student in school 'cause I didn't, didn't really care for school. A lot like my oldest son, but my only, the difference between my oldest son and myself, is that I respected, I did respect my parents. I mean I never got along with them that well, but I always respected them.

...

Now, now work isn't as important as it used to be. Six, eight, ten years ago, it was, it was the most important, I mean I don't know what, I was off travelling all over the world . . . now it's different. Family comes first. Always, I mean my kids, if they're sick, they need me at home, that's where I am. If they were sick before, then I would find someone to look after them and I'd go off to work. Now, now they come first. Work is, is second.

...

[What was the longest you were ever gone for one stretch?] Probably, it was usually about thirty days at a time. I was usually gone thirty days, home for thirty days.

...

work was number, number one, well for one thing, I was the only one making any money, so it had to be, I couldn't afford to sluff off and get fired from a job. But it always came first, I mean if they called me in and I had to go somewhere, I mean one morning I walked into work at eight o'clock and I was in the Toronto airport by ten, going to...

...

And I think when I got divorced, when I got divorced it really, it really changed, because it was actually a blessing in disguise, because it forced me to change. Because now I had all three kids. (Right) She only seen them once a week and that was it. So I had to be there. So it was a blessing in disguise, actually. I never regret getting divorced, because if it wasn't for the divorce, I probably

would be still the same workaholic I was eight years ago.

...

I'm in project management. (Ok) For, I do planning and scheduling, cost control. (Ok) So like on a construction job, I'll do all the scheduling for it, (I see) all the costs, track all the man hours, progress. Go to the site, do site inspections. Things like that. But it's not only construction, I also do engineering jobs, IT jobs, pharmaceutical jobs. What other ones have I done? I think that's about it. ... I've done manufacturing too, [company], I've worked there. [Company] foods. I've done some planning there. It's a different type of planning, but it's, yeah it's interesting work. (Yeah) It's interesting, and now I've, I took a course two years ago in Visual Basic, so I do a lot of programming, in VBA now. On top of what I do. So, it's, I like that part of it too, that's been an interesting portion, part of it. ... I like most of the people. (Yeah) There's a few that you don't really want to see again, but there's a lot of people that are, that are nice.

Burt: *And I lived with mom for a couple months and I, I usually lived with dad and my brother lived with, with mom. And then finished school and came down the line to start working down here ... at first I was working up North a bit, working at fixing appliances and [moved] ... and I just, first few years out of school, I wasn't just able to hold a job very long 'cause it was a bad economy and I wasn't really skilled at 'maturity'. Then I started to, when I was about twenty-one or twenty-two, I started working with my brother and my cousin, at, our cousin had a siding business, doing industrial construction. And that's basically what I've done since.*

...

(... what's it like to you, what's, how important is work?) It's very important to me. I, I'm proud of what I do. I don't know why, it's, it's, lots of people do it, but I, I take a lot of pride in my work, I like to do a good job. I've had a reputation that I'm a good worker, that I'm employable. I feel I've worked for that in the last seventeen years, basically that I've been doing construction. (Do you get satisfaction out of the work?) Yes, at the end of the job, I, I, and all the way through it, I do look at it, I admire it, 'cause I think I've done this one better than the last one ...

...

It's shorter than it has, usually was, when I was married, or, (Yeah) all the years I've been doing it before. A lot of the time I'd work, I'd keep the same hours, but I was working in Toronto, so I'd be out of the house at five. And home six-thirty, seven. So. (Right) A lot of the times I work out of town. That's pretty much, I sorta ended that. ... A lot of times I found it, you had to take stuff that's less profitable just to stay closer to home.

...

I get along well with my coworkers, I, I don't, I don't get upset at the job, I, like I don't, can't remember the last time I had a falling out with anybody at work.

...

... it'll be a, stuff such as architectural panelling, it's basically the, the layout, the framing and the installation. It would probably resemble, see the brown rooftop

or panels on the top of that building? (Yep, yep) They do, it would probably resemble that in a lot of appearances, a lot of times they'll run straight flat lines, you know the [large public] (Yeah) building? (Yeah) Actually, you know the [educational institution]? (Yes) You've seen it? (Yes, Yes) That's what I'm working on right now.

...

For some reason for about five years, we'd be slow for, anywhere from one week to a month in the spring time, in a year. So being self employed, it's a lot of projects just didn't get started, or we didn't, projects that we bid on or were supposed to go on, just were delayed and we just, for some reason it always happened in the spring time. Summer's always been steady. Fall is usually very busy. Winter's somewhat steady. Not too much time off for lack of work in the winter, it's probably more weather conditions that anything, but I still usually work everyday.

...

I have a partner. Him and I have been working together for about the last six years. But I'll be on different jobs as him. I work for a company doing the [large building]. And basically I get a cut of the profits, or our company gets kinda the profits at the end of the job.

An equal number of employed men described holding a variety of jobs over the years. Overall, employment was more tenuous for these fathers and financial obligations were harder to meet.

Caleb: we work alternate shifts so during the week we've actually we've only actually got roughly, uh, three hours that we spend any time together . . . Um I start at 7 in the morning . . . I get up uh about 20 after 5 ...

...

... being a summer worker, I never took the time off . . . I wouldn't get paid if I did, and we just never had enough money that I could . . . winter was always just a scramble just to find any work . . . I got into the cab business too for a few years and until she went on nights, and then I had to look at other work, and that's how I got into the machine shop. . . . when I, in grade twelve was when I got into co-op, and then I worked for the [nature conservation authority], I worked for them for five summers . . . Um, I got into work at a brewery for a year. That was my first job I'd ever had for a year 'cause up until then I'd been in school, so it was always just summer work . . . so I got into the landscaping . . . (Now would that have been seasonal?) Yeah. I'd have, I got some partial work in the winter doing snow cleanup, but that was a matter of, if there's no snow, there's no work. So I just, I just did the UI thing . . . I've been in this job since last September. So. It's, it's getting a little bit itchy right now. My body's telling me I should be working outside. 'Cause I've done it so long, I mean, it's three years landscaping, almost three years with the city, the five years I did with the {County Conservation Park}. I've spent almost all my summers outside And then when I met Christine, I got into the cab business. Or I worked for, I said her step-mom owns a cab I think I mentioned the machine shop, that I still do part time on the

weekends right now. [...] (Have you, do you like your current job?) Yeah, I, I enjoy it very much . . . if I didn't get the overtime, and if Christine didn't, didn't get her at overtime, we'd probably just be eating Kraft Dinner. [laughs]...

...

I'd never made much money anyway, so it was, um, but Christine, she was just, I don't know why, 'cause she's always been heavily in debt. And she just never seemed to learn from it . . . she's got the better part of the debts. And she makes the better part of the money . . . I pay my debts and then whatever I have leftover, I put towards the rest of the debts. [...] . . . it was like the first week or so after Christmas, we had like no money to buy groceries. We just had nothing . . . it was January, around the beginning of February. [Christine] she had a, a real breakdown where she called me up one day, she was crying, she was, and I guess it had just finally hit her . . . she was just really realizing how badly we were in debt and why.

...

I work at a- a binary. They do book binding. ... I- delivery. It- delivery is what I do but I do packing when I'm there too. When I'm in the plant and my stuff isn't ready or whatever other odd jobs. [And what does your- your partner do? She works at a packaging plant [out of town].

...

[I work at this job] five [days a week] But I have another part-time job. But that's only, uh, on average 3/4 hours just on the weekend sometime. Excuse me, but it's flexible. A lot of the time I gauge it on a Saturday evening. I'll go in just before they go to bed. Excuse me. And then I don't miss much time- spending much time with them. I'm just a little more tired on Sundays is all.

...

I like having the time on my own but I like knowing that there's gonna be somebody around I can talk to. It's like, uh, with this job I have it every- after this next trip- every 3 weeks. During the winter it's every 4- I go out to the east coast for a- well it's a three day trip. Leave on the Sunday, come back on the Tuesday- weather providing. And, uh, I enjoy that to a point. I enjoy, you know, being on my own that little bit. I- I love driving- most of my jobs have always in dr- involve driving, I just- I don't know why- it's just something I really love and enjoy. And- and the travelling aspect and, you know, bunking out by myself and getting some time away from- from people and family, but there's a certain boredom and quietness about it too. That makes me enjoy getting home too.

...

[You usually haven't taken summer vacations?] Oh no, its, being a summer worker, I never took the time off, 'cause I was never gonna get, you know, I wouldn't get paid if I did, and we just never had enough money that I could, you know, afford to sit there and say, ok well I won't work three or four days or a week, or whatever, and take the time off. And then, the winter was always just a scramble just to find any work. So, well actually it wasn't, 'cause I got into the cab business too for a few years. And, until she [partner] went on nights, and then I had to look at other work, and that's how I got into the machine shop [part time work].

...

I think it was when I, in grade twelve was when I got into co-op, and then I worked for the [nature conservation authority], I worked for them for five summers. I couldn't during the sixth summer because their policy was after that, like the time they had to hire me full time. Well at that time, they were laying off a lot of people, full time and part time people. So they weren't into the habit of hiring anybody. So it was just like, oh, great. Um, I got into work at a brewery for a year. That was my first job I'd ever had for a year. 'Cause up until then I'd been in school, so it was always just summer work. When that closed down, I went, I got a job at a U-brew.

...

But anyway, then I went to work for the U-brew. For seven months. And, I got about my fifth month, I got, finally got a, a job back in the landscaping [out of town]. Um, a week later I wished I hadn't taken it, because I got two other calls from places that were local. I was living [locally] at the time, it would have been nicer to have a local place.

...

I got up around five, five-thirty, got ready, drove [out of town], did the landscaping from seven 'til whenever, and then I went to the U-brew and worked for them for the evening, and get home anywhere between nine and eleven. And I did that for a couple of months until they found somebody to replace me. And then I just stuck with the landscaping. I became a crew leader a few months later. Worked at that place for another year and a half, and then... [Now would that have been seasonal?] Yeah. I'd have, I got some partial work in the winter doing snow cleanup, but that was a matter of, if there's no snow, there's no work. So I just, I just did the UI thing at that time. 'Cause it was too hard to, to really try and find a part time job that you could schedule around it.

...

... the first spring I was crew leader, I went through twelve people in, what, four weeks. It was just, just mostly it was the money. Nobody wanted to work that hard for that money, and then there was just people like me who were just happy enough to have a job. ... my resume just showed seasonal work. So it was very hard to get anything else.

...

... 'til I got my foot in the door working for the city. ... Was only for six or seven weeks, but I knew I was basically guaranteed a, a return for the next year. ... I did a few other little things, but mostly it was just the grass cutting. He stuck me on that 'cause he found out, not only did I really like it, which most don't, really, um, but I was also a lot better at it, I enjoyed the work of it, and I worked. I mean, what they say about most city guys is pretty true. [laughs] I mean there were guys, I knew one guy, all he did for two weeks is drive around. ... but I kinda wanted to try and keep up as much of a pace as I could to, for that reason, you know, to kinda, to kinda say to myself, you know, I can still do it. And I guess that's part of why I like this job too, 'cause it's a lot of lifting, it's a lot of heavy work, but I like being able to prove to myself that I can do it. You know. I have no misgivings about the fact of how well I can do this job when I'm like maybe

fifty or fifty-five, it's gonna be damn tough, I can't see myself doing it

...

I've been in this job since last September. So. It's, it's getting a little bit itchy right now. My body's telling me I should be working outside. 'Cause I've done it so long, I mean, it's three years landscaping, almost three years with the city, the five years I did with the [nature conservation authority], I've spent almost all my summers outside.

...

And then when I met Wife, I got into the cab business. Or I worked for, I said her step-mom owns a cab... it's a big difference between night and day on that. And, and just learning the streets. I mean with the two, two week training period you can learn a fair bit of the streets. ... it got to the point where, after my first couple years, I'd be at an address, and going, am I really in the right place? Just 'cause, I really didn't think about it, it just, I read the, read the address, and it was just such an, an address I was so used to going to, 'cause there's a lot of addresses you really, you're at a lot, because they're either apartment buildings, or you get some people that just don't have a car, and that's all they do, is cab everywhere.

...

I did it full time over the winter. I was lucky enough, 'cause Wife's dad is one of the, the best guys in the fleet, and one the people that been there the longest. So it was, he helped me out to always find jobs. I worked for them on weekends, and another guy through the week when I first started. And, I've done a lot of my work through her sister who also owns a cab. So I did that for three, three winters straight, full time. And then, last winter I worked at a machine shop during the week, then I did cabbng on the weekends. And that's the, I think I mentioned the machine shop, that I still do part time on the weekends right now.

...

... doing the cab thing got me into long hours. I mean most of those shifts are ten, twelve, or fourteen hours. So I kinda got into it with that. And, and like I said, my earlier time when I overlapped with the, the landscaping and the U-brew, so, that's usually around here, why I can put Wife to sleep and I'll still stay up, because, it's, I've gotten so used to it.

...

... my dad's ticked off at me, 'cause he wants me to get into the, the prison work that he's into. Mostly because it's, generally easy work, and it's also well paying. ... it's a fairly extensive progress to get in. You have to first write a, a written test. It's, you spend the day writing it, just writing all kinds of various tests and things like that. You have to pass that. At a certain percentage. Well each, there's different sections and you have to get so many marks per section. I missed, I was off like by four points on one section.

Carlos: *Um, right from high school I went to college . . . I took a marketing course. I didn't really know what I wanted to do but my parents were kinda pushing me to go to college. No one in my family ever went to college . . . but I didn't really wanna go, I wanted to take a year off, but my dad was, was telling me, you know, it's a waste of time taking a year off, should just go, just figured it's*

normal school, but it's not when you get there . . . It went well, I, I mean within my first year I was nineteen at the time.

...

I didn't finish college. I didn't even finish that first year. I made it to exams, but then I failed most of my exams. I, I started not keeping track of things. You know what I mean, like I, I was working on the weekends, and then I'd work the three or four hours after school. And then I'd get home and I would really study and I didn't really understand everything. It was just my, my brain seemed blocked . . . I started working full time nights at the factory . . . and then I was working [at the chip factory] on weekends . . . Then I started working on the machines. Like actually cutting wood, it was a furniture factory . . . I was making, you know, ten something, almost eleven dollars an hour there, working forty hours a week. And then I was working another twenty-four on the weekends, so now I'm making, you know, six hundred dollars a week. And that's good money . . . So who needs college when you're nineteen or twenty if you're making six hundred dollars a week, right?

...

I had another roommate come in and he smoked the odd marijuana once in awhile. And so one day Chantal and I were looking at him, going, you know, how does that make you feel, like is it like when you're drunk? I'm kinda curious. And so we tried it. That probably wasn't the, the spark that did it, you know, but I mean, it, it started from there . . . I started missing days at work . . . I wasn't paying my bills, so eventually . . . the repo man came to my, my factory where I was working and was loading up my car. And I just caught them in time to take things out of my car. And that was probably the worst thing in the world. Seeing them take my car away. And my, my, my sports car, you know what I mean.

...

[Carlos began selling drugs, but this did not improve his financial situation.] Then it seemed so easy. You know, I started first I started picking up for the girls at work, the owner and the girls, and they'd be like . . . I want a half, I want a half, I want a half, so everyone's giving me forty dollars, and I did the math in my head, well now I can get a bigger amount for a cheaper . . . Um, I started falling, started falling behind again . . . I think my judgement was starting to, to go. You know what I mean? I just, I, at that point, I declared bankruptcy. I was forty thousand dollars in the hole... I was still trying to sell so to make ends meet, so that I can make enough money, so that when Deidre [daughter] was born, we'd be ok, we'd have this financial, you know, stability . . . I was happy that she was pregnant.

...

My bail terms [for assault] was house arrest, no firearms, illegal, all that stuff, no alcohol, drugs, without prescription. Not allowed to even walk into an establishment, like I wasn't allowed to go into a restaurant. I wasn't allowed for my parents to have liquor on the table. I wasn't allowed anywhere at all, either I was only allowed to go to work, if my father was at work, my father and my mother were my assurances . . . So I was really under my parent's thumb. Which, you know, it's stressful when you're twenty-five years old and you're used to

living on your own for five years. And now all of a sudden you're, you gotta be there with your parents twenty-four hours a day. ... being under house arrest for so long and following through with it, it helped, because I'm not around those kind of people. The whole house arrest and everything, I seen, even though it was, it was bad, like I didn't want to be under house arrest, at, like inside, I was happy, because I, I had an excuse not to go out and I had an excuse to stay away from everything . . . I was kind glad that everything fell into the way it did. And it did, it helped, you know.

...

... one of my bail terms was having to keep and maintain lawful employment. So I work seasonal, so in the wintertime I decided to go to school. So that I can keep myself busy, and I took marketing, English, and computers. (It's high school or college?) High school. Now I already have my high school. So I decided well, you know what, instead of my, my brain going to mush over the winter, I'll, I'll do some of this. And I got over eighties in all my, all my courses. So I told all this to my, my prob- probation officer. {laughs} . . . he said I'm doing well

...

At one point in my life, I lost everything. I didn't have a home, I didn't have a licence, I didn't have a job, I didn't have, I was bankrupt. I, like I lost all that, and I wasn't even twenty-three . . . that education, I couldn't get at home and I couldn't get that at school. And, and what I'm doing now in my job, like I like doing what I do, I like the landscaping[works with his father]...

Collin: *I decided I'd uh I better get some more education so I, uh, I ended up at [college] September of '73 . . . majoring in marketing, but the first year, was, you know, was actually quite easy. But the second year I came back . . . and I dunno, I don't know I just have a problems and I end up quitting . . . I start[ed] working at [a sports company] and [the factory] . . . right up until 1980 I guess. Uh I uh, I guess, uh I mean it was just a job, you know, it's nothing special eh? . . . (What were you doing there?) Uh th-the warehouse . . . doing order and s-stuff like that, and loading trucks . . .*

...

I guess it was about '78 . . . like my life was uh, kind've like, uh, going nowhere you know? . . . I ended up uh, having a . . . nervous breakdown. I-I ended up in [seeking a mental health program] . . . with uh, depression, you know. [. . .] I was in [the mental health program] and . . . finally I-I-I would, I would not . . . want to leave the house that much, you know? . . . (Were you still working?) Yeah . . . I did end up, uh, getting tra- valium, which helped for a bit... But my plan was to, was to kill myself, you know? . . . I ended up just driving into, uh, the front entrance of this . . . business . . . next thing oh I'm at the hospital and there's all these cuts

...

... finally I got the medical thing cleared up ... so I got my cab license . . . and actually I found I was making really decent money ... well into the eighties, yeah the boom ... we had a recession . . . the boom must have started around '83, or something like that ... I was making good money . . . so things started to, you know, improve...

...
I ended up living . . . in a, some cheap hotel . . . I was kind of at a low point, you know, . . . but I was still driving cab . . . she [wife] wanted me back you know, as long as I behaved myself, you know, and, and, I think I was there for another, oh, say year and a half before again, there was problems . . . And then of course things got really bad, you know, there was no business, like you know, like business was really bad driving cab... I couldn't pay people to take the, you know . . . it was just unbelievable . . . Anyways I, I ended up moving back home . . . pretty much forced, . . . it was really hard to the kids you know . . . [and] I had to look for a job...

...
I was telling my son last night . . . he's asking about, you know, living with me . . . I just felt so uncomfortable . . . I'd have to quit . . . I'd just sell my car ... I can't afford, I just can't afford to, you know, a lawyer.

...
I may have to look for another job ... I've had it easy in some aspects, I mean, I've been, well I don't know, basically leeching off my, off my father ... but it's just the, the circumstances ... I feel stupid, you know, living at home, but you know, I don't know, do what you have to I guess...

...
I really feel for Oscar [son]... I think he really wants to live with me, you know? Um, I kind of signed a, well you know, a document that he's a ward of the, of the crown, eh? ... I'm in a, in a position now, where I have a low paying job, I, I can't, I really would like to, you know, you know, um, take care of him ... and Oliver, you know, if that was possible. Um, but . . . I work midnights ... if he's living with me, I, you know, I have to be there . . . So it's like, almost give up my job ... the money ... right now I'm really uncertain. I really want to help. I want to do something, but I feel guilty. I really feel guilty ... I wouldn't even be able to afford a car even, you know?

Dean: *To find a lawyer, I phoned, they want two thousand dollars up front. And I have zero dollars. I drive a van, well I don't drive it, I pay monthly payments, and finance it, four hundred and thirty dollars a month, every month ... I got a, a loan.... through the bank, through the company. I pay four hundred and thirty dollars a month, and it just sits in the driveway, 'cause I can't even save money to afford insurance on it. And it's been sitting for eight months ... I drive my mom's car. They pay the insurance ... I drive her car to get back and forth to work, and to all my meetings. Now my mom wants her car, 'cause it's summer ... {laughs} ... now that the nice weather's here, so now I've gotta come up with money to pay my insurance so I can get my van on the road . . . first I had a criminal lawyer, and that cost me over seventeen hundred dollars . . . my dad put a thousand dollars down, and now I'm doing monthly payments to pay the last seven hundred off.*

...
[Where are you working right now?] ... [at a] meat packer. ... they slaughter pigs. I just work in the packing department. I wrap loins ... [And you've been, how

long have you been doing that for?] Five months . . . the people are good. Pay isn't the greatest . . . benefits are not too bad...

...

When I lived with Vicky [wife] she said I didn't live there. Because I had no income and she was on welfare, then they'd want me to go do, or on the social assistance, whatever, they'd want me to do all their programs. The welfare programs. (Ontario Works?) Yeah, whatever, you gotta find a resume course, it's four to six weeks. How to do a job interview, four to six weeks. How to, you know, and they had all these different courses they send you to. And I didn't like them, I got kicked out of three of them. Oh, ten years ago. And they made me go see a psychiatrist. Back in the, that's a whole other story. (Why did you get kicked out?) Violence ... speaking up. ... I just exploded . . . they said, no more courses, I didn't even have to look for a job, I just had to wait for, to see a shrink. 'Cause they said I was mentally unstable. Too abusive, too violent.

...

I went and saw the psychiatrist, down at the welfare office . . . They said, there's nothing wrong with [me] . . . then I would have to go through all these courses again to get welfare ... so then I just, I would get off welfare, and I wouldn't collect it and then I would just bum off people. I would steal, out of stores . . . do whatever to get my money. And, then once in awhile I would collect welfare, like after five months or three months. But you can only collect it for two to three months, then they make you go and do these programs. So I'd be getting two to three cheques, and then I wouldn't get another cheque, I would just drop out . . . that's way before I met Vicky...

...

I totally changed my life around, I just, I'm gonna work the rest of my life. Get my little girl, keep clean. This is a big eye opener. It really, yeah it really wakes you up. I haven't filed income tax in like five years. So now I gotta do that. Like there's just, there's all these little things I gotta do in my life, that I've been letting slide. And like, get by, 'cause I just didn't care. And now they're all right there in my face. So now, this is, the only thing is this is just straightening up my life. And it's doing it quick. They would have buried me, or, or I'm gonna thrive from it. I'm gonna succeed ... I haven't had a steady job like this in my whole life ... I dropped out of high school when I was seventeen. Got a job for like a few months, quit. And just became a bum

...

It was just like a street kid . . . then when I was twenty, I had enough of it and I went back to high school . . . I went for two years 'til I was twenty-two, got my grade twelve. And like a week after graduating I got hired at a company, I was making like twelve bucks an hour. And that was back in 1992. Here it is, now, 2004, and I'm only making twelve bucks an hour. I'm back where I started. But at least it's honest . . . and I had a job there until the company went out of business. And then when they went out of business, I started collecting unemployment, and then my brother got out of the penitentiary . . . and [he] brought the strippers around, and then we all got a, a three bedroom townhouse and started partying with all the strippers and a lot of drugs then too, lot of

alcohol and partying, and, and then he robbed the bank, and got eight years. And there he went again.

...

And they just kept paying money. I'd borrow cars and I'd drive the strippers all over . . . if it was a two hour drive there, two hour drive back, they'd give me like eighty, ninety bucks . . . they'd buy my lunch, couple of beers. You know, hook me up with some drugs. And I got, made good money off that, just driving stripper around . . . then that all just of course, went up in flames and everybody moved . . . (How did it go up in flames?) We all started arguing. We all started fighting.

George: *Well I guess before any of my three daughters were born, I was quite involved with, with drugs and I was a bit of a gangster myself. Um, got involved with all types of different types of drugs and weapons and dealing with bikers, and I ended up losing a lot, you know, we, through it, it really it bottom and I lost a house and lost all my property and all I was left with was my girlfriend who was pregnant with my, my daughter and she [my girlfriend] ended up running away, couldn't stop using drugs. I had tried to track her down, you know in crack houses and whatnot. And ended up getting stabbed, bottle smashed over my head.*

...

Now I was at the time out of work, I was living on general basic welfare. For like I was getting like four hundred and fifty dollars or something like that a month. And I had to pay rent and feed this child and I, I was, I was living on next to nothing for the longest time

...

I ended up, again through prayer and determination, landing a business with some training solutions ... out of [the United States]. And, and I opened up a couple of little kiosk stores in two malls and got off of welfare, but through the whole time, I didn't have any mother's allowance . . . until I think it was about, Faith [eldest daughter] was about eighteen or nineteen months old, I didn't get custody of her until then. And, and by that time, I didn't need it, but there was a time...

...

the business was doing well and I ran into a millionaire ... who had a water treatment company up here ... and he, he met me in my, in my town [up north] and he came back to my house for a, a small business meeting, and saw all my products and what I was doing in my little kiosks and said, "Gee, let's start a business together, let's get these products shipped up to [here] . . . you move up [here] and we'll, we'll sell this stuff, it's great products" ... he had lent me some money to buy a van, 'cause I had no vehicle, and rented a place for me, paid my one month up here ...

...

... my partner, in my business here had actually ripped me off ... he like emptied the warehouse out, him and the president of the company that was supplying us in the [States] , emptied a warehouse out there and hauled everything out to the West Coast.

...

I had to go find work again and I got involved in telecommunications, worked for a couple of employers, and then ended up starting my own business. Which, which is, I've been doing now for about four years ...

...

All I know is, is you know, I had all three of my kids, I was single up until about a year ago... So Madison [my current girlfriend] and I have been going out for three years. Lived together for a year, a year now. And they [the kids] know her so well . . . for my children [Madison's] a great role model. ... there's been about three years I was alone and single with all my kids, working full time and having them in daycare. And you know, like I, I didn't get a lot of sleep ... so it was real tough I just stuck with it, didn't have a lot of money, didn't have any family there, you know, didn't have any friends, like I left everything [up north] ... and I had to rebuild a life.

...

I grew up in a town [up north]... I spent quite a number of years, I think, from, I think around the age of about twenty-four 'til about thirty-four... I had a great job and a house and like I ended up getting screwed over by my boss and felt I got short, short changed by unemployment. And that was when I said like "I'm never gonna work again, I'm never gonna pay taxes, kiss my ass, Joe government" and I went into the gangster thing, and I was dealing on a high level, I was dealing with the mafia members in [another province] and you know, bikers, you name it ... (So were you sort of in one of the biker gangs?) Not at all, no, they wanted me to get involved, I never did. I never used needles . . . Smoked a lot of grass . . . Used a lot of cocaine ...

...

[So how'd you get into that life?] Well I knew people . . . I was working . . . selling camper trailers. I was probably the top salesman [up north] ... I was probably retailing a million to a million and a half in just product. Making really good money. ... it was, soon as I sat down at my desk, clock ticked to nine o'clock, and then he said "Look, either you come in at twenty to nine from now on, or you don't bother coming back in." And I says, "Why would I come in at twenty to nine, what can I do at twenty to nine that I can't do at nine? ... you don't pay me by the hour, you pay me straight commission. ... he grabbed my keys off my desk to the store and took my keys. I was floored. I couldn't believe it. Said "Get out." . . . I went straight down unemployment. ...So at that point in time I was very upset with the government, with my boss, and I knew a few people and one of my high school buddies, I just happened to run into him . . . he was into the grass big time, selling grass, dynamite, grenades, guns, cocaine. And I just got bang, heavy into the, selling cocaine and hash and, and marijuana and dealing it in large quantities with everybody...

...

[when I] left home, I was 15 years old. And I, I ran, I was involved in crime, I got caught, got sent to reform school. That changed my life . . . I was not gonna be stupid like that anymore.

...

I started working, fighting fires and then I got a job in a mill ... and it was like going nowhere, even though it was good money ... I was there at 17, I was supposed to be 18, working in the mill, if I could have got hurt, I would have got in a lot of trouble with compensation or whoever. So I figured heck with it, you know, I saved up a bunch of money, bought myself a car and I went back to school. Put myself through high school ... I got through high school in, in two and a half years ...

...

So I ended up being this, this brat of a kid. Truant all the time . . . my locker got raided at school before I even went to reform [school], so like in grade nine, I got to grade nine, before I was like four months into school there, I got raided at school twice, they busted me with a hash well and a couple of my buddies. And we ended up getting kicked out of school. Then I quit.

...

I got sick of working in the mill, almost got killed, like I worked there for five years, every year I almost got killed either by a flying log off of a roller belt in the wood room ... so I ended up leaving I was 24 at this time and I, I quit to go sell vacuum cleaners and I sold tons. Was making huge money and I got offered management stuff, to open up my own offices, and I was managing crews, the guys, and, and I got burnt out from that, went back to the mill, worked there for a little while ... got into campers and trailers and, and then, you know, the downfall kinda happened eh?

...

[I] was an honour student, then when I graduated, I had the most improved average, I had the highest average, for the co-op students, and they had a write up in the newspaper about me, I won awards, bursaries, all sorts of stuff. And I showed everybody, that you can, if you put your mind to it, you can, get what you want... And then I started working in the mill again. And I started getting advanced up and the jobs, and I got bids on certain jobs and I got more money, and, and I started you know, eating, eating acid again and well not acid, magic mushrooms. You know, 'cause it was organic. [laughs]

...

Well I started when I was eighteen, and then I went back to high school, I think I was nineteen, and did it right up 'til I was about twenty-three. And I got offered a, a job in, in Minneapolis to go fight professionally. And they, they offered, they, they were gonna give me a car and a, a condo, and, or apartment, I don't know. And give me so much, I forget what they were gonna pay me a month, but it was, it was a pretty decent wage at the time.

...

You know, I'm, I'm usually gone, you know, by eight, eight-thirty, and I'm, I'm usually home by six. So it's pretty consistent. But again, you know, we, we've gone more into the retail business, and we've done a lot of marketing and advertising and promotional with other companies and stuff like that, so we're really, you know, things have jumped and changed for me a lot in my business. And things have really come along. I would even think before Girlfriend's done school, I'll probably in the next year, I'll, I'll have maybe banked enough that we

can actually buy a nice size house for ourself. You know, I'd like to get something so we're, like we pay a lot of money for this place here.

...

I'm selling cellular phones, I do internet business phone systems, business services, data links, mega link, ABSL, V, IVVP and E, all sorts of VPN tunnel, LAN extension, things you, I don't know if you know what that stuff is or not. And then we do cellular phones, residential services, internet, computers, computer repairs, laptops. So it's a whole broad range of just communications, we design websites, we host websites.

...

I taught myself many and much of it, and, and again, because I'm a [telecommunications company] agent, [company] provides training for us, and it's been very helpful. But I, yeah I got into the industry five, six years ago, and I had really no experience in communications, just got started, working for a company, and started asking lots of questions. How does this work, how does that work, understanding things.

....

And it's been paying the bills ever since. You know, and we go, like I said, you know monthly, we go through a lot of money a month. And we don't, we don't live poorly you know, like so we've got a lot of luxuries I think that, that a lot of families don't have, and we're grateful for that, and we're grateful for everything we have, and you know, God willing, I will continue to be able to provide for my family. And provide, you know, good emotional and mental support along with that, but it's, I don't know, there's just so many things

Nigel: *I work in, I work in the printing business ... I [worked there] for six years ... I got that job in '98 because I knew I, at that time, when I'd just been divorced, that I would need a day job in order to see my kids ... and that's worked out very well ... I was just basically trying to find any kind of job. I had jobs through like an employment agency, and they'd say ok, this, you're here for three weeks. Now you're over here for two weeks workings nights, and then you're over here. You never really knew where you were, you're just sort of trying to find a job, right? And then finally I got this job ... now everything's gonna settle down, I've got a straight day job, right?*

...

And then I left home about eighteen, I went to college briefly, but didn't finish college. ... I've worked, since then I've kinda travelled around quite a bit. And I've lived in maybe eight or ten different cities in this country. And I've worked in construction, retail, sales, restaurant, bar industry. I was a roadie for a rock and roll band for a couple of months, and just all sorts of things, you know, and because I've lived in [western and central Canada] ... So you know, I moved around a lot ...

...

... when I met the children's mother we decided that it was, we wanted to go out West. So we ended up moving out West together. And then, we spent six years there and we came back. So I was, I was pretty stable for the time I was with her

... I had a couple of jobs in [western Canada] ... working as a bartender there at [a hotel] ... it was a well paid job, it was union, plus lots of tips and gratuities and everything else. And then so we were doing pretty good. And then in the, in the, in the winter, I actually had a job with doing advertising sales and, and, and I was doing sort of journalism for this small community paper and that sort of thing. . . . It didn't pay very well, but ... we were doing ok money wise. But at that time Christopher was just born and then, and that put a strain on the relationship, working because Maria would be working one shift, and then I'd go home be taking care, care of him and then she'd work the night shift ... we didn't see a heck of a lot of each other all that time . . . we were getting a bit homesick and ... we came back here ... in '94, you know, we were just kinda thrown into the deep end again and I ended up taking a job that I really didn't want, but you need a job right?

...
[What was it like, sort of, all of a sudden being out on your own and away from your kids?] Well it was, it was, it was difficult because . . . I'd got a warehouse job here ... I'd actually been there for four months and they were just gonna hire me on there ... And I go, you know what? I don't have a wife, a house and kids anymore, I, and I sure as don't want this, hell, don't want his crummy job anymore either ... Now in the meantime I had a, I had a part time job, working Saturday nights, at this banquet facility ...

...
... at that point, it was, I'm thinking I have to go, I haven't been back to [Europe] for ten year, I grew up in [Europe], so I gotta go back ... it was very liberating, I got to see my family again ...

...
So anyway, within two months, I've been back here, I said ok, first thing I do is get a full time job, days. And I did, and I got that job at [the copier place] in April I started at Easter ... and then I'll quit smoking. And sure enough, within a week of getting a job, I was able to quit smoking, cause then, or now I, I got something to latch on to and I can build from here. And I haven't smoked since ... it's been quite good, 'cause I got that job, straight days, got to see my kids.

...
I finished high school... and got some community college ... and then basically, you know I, I got the travelling bug my self ... I got a job in a factory and I remember when I was nineteen, thinking my God, there's gotta be more to life than this right? ... I headed out on my own ...

...
... to be honest, like the last six years are probably when I'm the most stable, 'cause I've had the same job for six years ... I'd say the last years, I've settled down quite well ... when I threw all those things away, and I'm thinking, well seven years later, like it's not so bad, you know, I'm back here in the same area. Kids are here, my, I've got my kids, I've got a job, I have friends, you know, I got a reasonably nice little place here.

...
I don't mind the job, I may actually not love it, but I, you know, as far as jobs go, I

did pretty good, I can't really complain. It's, it's not that bad. I know, people have a lot worse, yeah it's, it's not a bad job actually. You know, you could get paid more and all the rest of it, but you know, I'm sure everyone will tell you that right?

...

I'm paying like seven hundred a month, which is you know, it's, it's not chump change, but it's still ... It is reasonable for a place this size ... (So you, you're doing ok financially?) Yeah, it's pretty tight but I'm pretty good with money and I, 'cause I have to be, basically, and I'm always on a budget and I cook . . . and I make lunches every day, and I'm always planning ahead, that sort of thing, 'cause I have to, because I can't, can't just afford to go out and spend a hundred bucks without thinking about it. Because you know, it's, and then, still have responsibilities to my daughter, and you know, she can, she's coming over, and Christopher is getting older, and you know, bikes and, and new shoes and haircuts and sporting events and this and that and the other, you know, it's, it's expensive ... but I've got it under control ...

A bit less than a third of these fathers were unemployed at the time of the interview. In every instance, it appeared as if this unemployment was likely to continue for some time. Not surprisingly, the challenges of finding access to sufficient money for everyday living were most prevalent for these fathers.

Zack: *I didn't have a lot of money to be honest . . . I moved back in here [public housing] the day she [second wife] left . . . she said, "You know, you just have to go down and change the lease over to your name." So I did that, I did all the, I did all the paperwork, got everything all settled, went to court, had the kids' custody transferred from her to me . . . CAS, well they were still involved because they were still keeping an eye on her.*

...

I didn't go to high school a lot. I came home as often as I could. I didn't like it. I think I went to like to grade 11 and then I, uh, I ended up quitting and going to work for- for a company. Started working when I was 14 on a farm. And, uh, I think I told you that I had the perfect boss. He was an alcoholic [...] I don't have a car and it's really hard to take buses, I'm sick of it. Uh, I practically live on a bus. [...] I'm not, I'm not rich, I never will be. (Now are you on social assistance or?) Uh partial assistance, yeah . . . since I came out of treatment . . . after I got outta treatment it was like 430 dollars and my rent was 237 and I had heat and hydro-major heat and hydro on top a that. So I ended up, uh, so then Children's Aid came to my rescue and said "Look this guy has got kids every weekend, you know. Um, can you do something about this. He needs more money." . . . before the end of the business day they had a check for they'd had almost a thousand dollars put in my account. I hadn't seen that much money in for like a long time. So I'm very grateful to uh, to CAS. [...] they've set me up with a social agency to help me with the, uh, you know food and stuff when I needed the help.

...

I was a, a travelling salesman. (Ok) I did promotional work for a sports management company. (Ok) And I would come home, I would leave on a Sunday night, I would come home on a Friday night. I would spend the entire weekend playing with my daughter, 'cause we only had one at the time. Playing with my daughter and cleaning the house. And I'd leave for work on Sunday night, the place would be spotless, and I'd come back and it would be as bad, if not worse than it was the next, the next Friday. It was a repeating cycle.

...

So I picked up odd jobs, like, you know, I work out at Today's Temporary, or whatever, you know, just picking up the odd day's pay. Anyway, I survived that.

...

And, uh, you know, like he just kinda said to- [Brother #2] one day said well we've, you know, 'I've got an older brother who, uh, or a younger brother who wants a job.' So he said, well come on down. We'll have, you know, pick, pick raspberries, which was the girls job at the time. But very quickly I got into doing, uh, you know cleaning out chicken barns and, and doing raspberries and, uh, you know I used to work 60 hours a week in the summertime for 30 dollars a week, which is a grand total of 50 cents an hour. And I used to come home and proudly present my Mom and Dad with 25 dollars. And I'd keep 5 dollars for myself. That's when I started smoking.

...

So I do this, I try to do this 6 hours a day whether I do it at midnight [So you assem-you assemble these restraints 6 hours a day? Yep, yep. [That's a lot] Yep. Oh yeah, and like- but see the nice thing is- because I'm at home I can do my housework.

...

I worked on farms most of my life. I- I hate factories. I hate factories. I hate working where there's hundreds of people in the same building. You know, several hours a day- 8 hours a day, I hated it. Uh, probably because of my alcoholic tendencies. I liked to be able to be free to drink. And, uh, working on the farm I was free to drink so I stayed there for as long as I could.

...

I did some work in a factory a couple a times. Then I spent 12 years working the phones for a company... Well we used to travel to various cities all over Ontario promoting, uh, minor hockey. Like the ki- well one that we used to do was the Kitchener Rangers. We'd put on the family days where businesses would buy tickets from us, they'd get a 2 line listing in a program and the tickets, once they bought them from us- they'd give them out free to their customers-

...

But anyway [Wife #2] told her I was burned out and the lady took one look at me and realized 'yes, he is burned out.' Not realizing that I was just simply hung over. And, uh, we got on welfare and we stayed on welfare- Christ I think we were bringing in about 1700 dollars a month back before (Right) the, uh, big cuts. (Right) And the big cuts came and I was sick of being on welfare and when the big cuts came I couldn't afford to live anymore.

...

I said 'I don't wanna be on welfare anyway. Can you make any suggestions?' So he called, called me back a couple of minutes later and said- he gave me the name of somebody to go see at, uh, Cambridge home support. And, uh, I did that, enjoyed that because, uh, what I- what I would do was I'd cut, uh, cut lawns and shovel snow for senior citizens. And, uh, I made good money. Um, you know, and it was my business. Again I didn't have to answer to anybody. I just had to be, you know, make sure the lawns were cut once a week. Didn't have to answer to anybody. Um, filled in my paperwork once a month. And, uh, I-I loved it. Um, you know, well they- when they first hired me they- they- when they first interviewed me they weren't gonna hire me. They- they had no intention of hiring me because I was so skinny. And they just didn't think I'd be able to do the work. And by the time I finally quit after [Wife #2] left and took the car and the kids. And I was pretty messed up on booze again.

...

I'll catch an hour here and then I'll get up and, uh, I'll try to relax, lay down. You know- lay back down, but most of the time it's, you know, I'm up for an hour- hour and a half then I- I go another 2 hours usually. And then I'm up for the night if I have to be. And if I don't have to be- even if I don't have to be, uh, doing anything it's still, you know, 5:30 I'll get back to sleep and, you know. I'm up by 6:25 or whatever. Cause I- cause I gotta make sure I got the kids ready and, you know, I did- when I was doing the parts [paid for the number of parts assembled] last night I did laundry and, uh, ah whole buncha other stuff, you know?

Peter lives alone in a small apartment in a run-down rooming house. Peter is unemployed, lives on social assistance, and is undergoing speech and physical rehabilitation for the debilitating effects of a stroke that he suffered a year ago. He laments the fact that his apartment is not large enough to allow the children to move in with him or to even stay overnight for weekend visits. Peter dreams of recovery from the effects of the stroke, gaining employment, and having a residence suitable and large enough to allow his children to stay with him. He is concerned about being able to stay in Canada because he is not a landed immigrant. Peter immigrated to Canada at in his late twenties. He worked as a musician in a large city and met his wife, Tanya, there within a year of his immigration. About four years ago, shortly after the birth of Amy, Peter lost his job and eventually also lost his house. This, together with his concerns about escalating violence in his neighbourhood, led to Peter and his family moving to this area

about three years ago. The family's transition after the move was difficult. They knew no one there and had little money. It was a difficult adjustment for the children, both at school and in the community. Peter and Tanya together got a job managing a local paper route; however, marital relationship difficulties soon developed. Within a year of the move, Peter says that Tanya told him she "didn't want him anymore" and she "kicked him out of the house". Peter moved but continued to see the children regularly.

Tarek: *Like my dad supports me like uh when I . . . got a scholarship prize. Cause I got that high school dream . . . I got a scholarship. It's free . . . And I got books that I have to read my own books. That the, that's the intuitional reading we have to do at our own pace. And for that he bought books for me . . . chemistry, biology that, that's just high school . . . You go on Sundays. (. . . So you went to college?) I did, uh, engineering degree at my school ...*

...
Yeah ... they [CAS] put them in a house for . . . (Like a shelter?) A shelter ... because I said I'm not moving from here because they want me to move out of the house ... And CAS tell them th-they that they want out- they gonna come home. I have to find somewhere to stay. So I said okay- let them come. I'll find somewhere. Cause I don't want my kids to be in that environment where- that they comes out and back. Who am I- I find a place and I move. Now that's the hard part. Now I have to support them here and I have to pay rent in another place.

...
(What happened- how did you get injured?) I fell down at work, um, injured my spine ... two years ago. (Oh- it happened while you were in the apartment?) Yeah (What do you do at work?) I'm machinist. (So that was a pretty bad injury.) Yeah- I had surgery but no there's no guarantee that I'm gonna get back on my feet. So- So all the time I spend in school just goes over with or whatever. I can't do the type of work and can't do that so it's all gone. I don't know why- [So you've been- receiving disability or?] (Provincial) disability) ... refuse my claim. I have to fight and everyone's gonna be open. [Do you have a lawyer or?] ... I ha-have a legal aid ... So like I couldn't walk, I ask them back to c-come home. They say wouldn't allow me. So I- I'm injured I can't- I cannot barely walk. Right? And I have pain in my hand.

...
[So you've been at home with them for the last two years? . . . Is your wife working or?] Well she have lot of pain too- but she working part time. Two- two days a week ... She work at a- a store ... 25 hours . . . It's like not much nowadays. Not-not much income coming in cause WS [worker's insurance] said we refuse my claim and what they are giving me from disability is no- nothing ... That little baby bonus I getting they- they did- did it up. Take from what I'm getting. My wife

is allowed to make \$250 a month. That's all, anything above that- they take 75% ... it's kind've a hard now ...

...

[So you got your first job here pretty quickly or?] Yeah, yeah- one week . . . I came here in 1988, April ... my wife she came 90. (So did you stay working at the same place for quite a while or?) He wasn't paying well. I worked there for six months- then I went to [work for another]... company . . . It paid more money so I took it . . . [it] was uh, security (company). So there I- I started there- they were paying more money. And I worked there 'til they close. ... [They didn't recognize your ... education] Yeah. ... So why- why do I need an education when I have a college ... I have education so ... when I applied for my, um, college application. Well they recognize it in [his home country] like I said ... well I got here they won't ...

...

. . . I didn't know what was going on like I don't know but I just comes up, you know was six- six after I couldn't walk. [You couldn't walk?] My legs like ... it is not steady so I said probably it, I standing all day at work you get tired-, you get starved. Well then when I go see my doctor he said I injured my spine and neck. Then- well then there's where I-I st- stopped work because I'll actually- they-he laid me off because I couldn't do my job properly ... he just ... laid me off ...

...

School too- so I was- I always had courses. It's like even now I can't work anymore no work so I started on a- now I'm doing, I'm doing a correspondence course. [Where are you taking your course?] ... Computer repairs. I don't know if I- I will be able to do it because like I can't use my hands. I still- even then you need to turn the screwdrivers or whatever it's- I don't know . . . my injury affect my legs . . . it's numb on my legs and right down. [So it's been pretty difficult physically since your injury?] Yeah like- shower- my wife she helps because I can't do it on my own. Like being- I can't rub my back or whatever. My legs- I can't stand for long- just walk.

Felix: Vince [my step-father].... he didn't, he didn't marry my mother until '82, I think it was. But he had been there since '71, '72. I remember going to his gas station, I would clean the toilets occasionally, I'd get a dime or a quarter for doing that I could get a can of pop and a bag of chips, couple other things. And then by '75 I was pumping gas [at] ten years old...

...

[How was school for you when you were younger?] I always thought I had problems, making friends. Because of moving. But I always seemed to have friends. I always thought I had problems, but at every school, I always had some, at least two friends in every school. [What kind of kid were you?] Oh, {Laughs} on the better side of well-behaved I guess. I wouldn't say that my grades, my grades could have been very good if I had applied myself, at least that's what the teacher's always said to me. Three sticks of dynamite, just to get you motivated

...

[So what was high school like for you?] It wasn't too bad. I guess. Although I was pretty consistent for English in grade nine. I wish the English grades would have been like the other grades, but, twenty, twenty, twenty, twenty-one. ... I started skipping off in grade ten. Was it grade ten or was it eleven? Well let's see now. Eleven. Started skipping off with a friend of mine. And, I don't know how many trips, I ended up with only sixteen credits. Half, half of what you get when you, for four years of high school, I only had sixteen. I got expelled from school, but because I was hanging around the area so much to visit with my friends, the vice-principal gave me another chance, he says, ok you do these exams, if you pass them you get the credits. I believe I got my math credit anyway.

...

I was twenty-seven before I went back to, to adult education. Somewhere around there. And I still haven't graduated. I got the life credits and all that, and I did good in most of the four credits that they said I had to do ... [So you went to work when you were done high school?]. ... I found a job working at [metal fabricators], started at ... six dollars an hour ... I was twenty ... I worked there a year and a half until they moved . . . I was living at home with my mother and then I had to move out. And I moved into my friend's place, - because of, being, my sister reporting me. So, yeah I worked there for about a year and a half, I broke my foot ... I'd done something stupid, I got drunk or something and, and went running through backyards and that. I think one of the police stamped on my foot. To get me to hold still or something. I don't know. All I know is waking up in the jail cell with a very sore foot.

...

... the company that I was working for then. Which was landscaping. I worked for them. That was right after [the metal fabricators] ... went into landscaping at six fifty. Three years later, I was making eleven fifty. It was cool. (And what did you do there?) Landscaping, laying, laying sod mostly. Putting in sprinklers. Planting trees ... [Did you like that work?] Yeah. I like being able to go into a neighbourhood, and say that I did that. ... I worked for [landscaping company] for about three and a half years. Then I made a mistake. I, I had been drinking one time. Drank for about six hours, didn't drink for another four and a half hours or more, drove [to city] looking for my dad. I got pulled over. And they said I blew a 1.51 ... almost double the limit. So the officer said, officer that arrested me said that I missed hitting the telephone pole by that much . . . I had to spend a hundred and forty dollars or so to get my boss, my boss's pick-up out of the impound ... I lost my licence for a year there...

...

I don't work no more. So um I haven't worked pretty well since Tashlin [step daughter] was born

Dylan: *[Q: So, you've talked in the past, that you've struggled with depression on and off throughout your life. (Yep) Did it start when you were young? Or-] Yeah. But I don't know how I couldn't be depressed with everything I lived with. Especially like losing my mom like that.*

...

I know that something I gotta do is eventually find a way to go back and at least get my grade twelve, or get my equivalency, but that's not one of my top priorities right now. My top priority right now is getting place of course, and make enough money.

...

[Q: And what did you do there?] Dickie Dee in about, at least five or six different cities...

...

But like I know with those days too, where, like that's when I used to drink, but I could never drink much anyway because of my size, plus for me I always drank too fast, always drank the hard stuff. And that's why to me, I call some of the youth today wimps. Because there is no way they would do what I used to do...I, this is why I had my nickname about Crazy Dylan, the crazy boy.

...

Well I ran away...Yeah, 'cause that's when I, that's why I lived in so many different cities too, as soon as things got tough, it's like bye-bye. Soon as I don't like a job or something, it'd be bye-bye. Just take off, don't tell anybody where I am. And of course that came back and haunted me when I was older... 'Cause like I could had, probably half the house, but I ended up getting nothing, hardly, once my dad left. So I got a lot of resentment about that.

...

And I blew that one...I ended up, my addiction, like it's a sex addiction, so lot of times I go on the chat lines too much. And that killed it...It was something that always, yeah that always came back and haunted, haunted me.

...

[Q: So you've been doing that for awhile though. 'Cause that was-] Too many years. I don't wanna say, it's too embarrassing. And it costed way too much money and other stuff that I don't want to get into.

...

[Q: Yeah, you were living with your dad last year? Is that, or sometime?] Yeah, until he passed away...And then, so then too, where, and then plus like I wasn't working for the longest time, so I actually started working again too. So I know now where I gotta keep working to, that's why I want to move to Toronto, because like I've been trying to get other jobs here, but no one's hiring here. And that does not help the self esteem. But then yesterday when I went to Toronto, that was just emotional...So then it's just the moving and like, too much other stuff has just caught up again.

...

[Q: Can you tell me about your job?] Well that's what's killed, killed this shoulder a bit too, but like what got it worse it when I worked in a grocery store recently. Like lifting up all the milk and everything else, it just killed it completely. Like I know I'm supposed to take it easy for a week, but I have a hard time doing that. But now like, but now where, when it comes to Dickie Dee, I don't think I'm gonna do it too much longer, because I'm losing the joy out of it. 'Cause I can't deal with the kids.

...

...like remember since I'm on ODSP, my rent is covered through ODSP.
[Q: I don't think you told me that you're on ODSP.] *I didn't? (No) Oh ok.*
[laughter] *No, I thought I, oh ok, I thought I did the first day. Oh. (No)*
[laughter]... *Oh ok, 'cause like I'm on there because of my back, and depression.*
So that's why I don't have to worry about that for rent, just...
[Q: How long have you been on ODSP then?] *Eight, nine years.*

Personal Challenges and Supports

Three fathers talked explicitly about having to manage serious ongoing mental health problems (Collin, Dean, and Dylan). Tarek and Peter had to cope with chronic disabling health problems. Four fathers (Carlos, George, Dean, and Felix) talked about their involvements with criminal or delinquent activities earlier in their lives. Illustrations of these challenges for these men have been presented in earlier sections of this document.

About half of these men described having to confront serious problems with alcohol or drug abuse at some point in their lives. Most common were their own struggles with addiction sometimes coupled with their partner's similar struggles. In other instances, the men had to confront the difficulties caused by other family members' excessive use of alcohol or drugs in their childhoods or adult lives. Substance abuse was often linked with criminal activity or conflict and violence in the homes. This profile was the reason for child welfare becoming involved with some fathers and their families. For a number of custodial fathers (Zack, Carlos, Rob, and George), ending their substance abuse was integral to turning their lives around. Both child welfare expectations and the needs of their children were important motivators in making these changes.

Zack: *I met my first wife [Sylvia], uh she was only 14 at the time ... I was 23, but I didn't know how old she was. ... I wasn't proud of the fact that she was only 14. But then she turned 15, then she turned 16 and ... I have this rescuing syndrome. She, you know, she said she was sexually abused and physically abused by her father and her brothers and uncles. And so she asked me if she could move in with me cause I had my own apartment by this time. ... Her life was so messed up when she was down there. Like she was into cocaine and stuff.*

...

My, uh, my dad drank. And, uh, and I really believe that he passed off some genes to me. Uh, unfavourable genes ... my idea, ... was to, you know, die by the time I'm 30 of alcoholism. And, uh, I have a feeling that I used to, I used to listen to his parties ... He was a weekend drinker for most of my life, and then when I started

drinking it kind've encouraged him to go for more than one- more- more than the weekend. Cause I was hooked on the stuff even before I started drinking...

...

I'm an off ag-, on again, off again alcoholic, but I mean, like I'm an alcoholic, doesn't matter if I, I mean I haven't had a drink now for, it'll be two years April 10th... I was a sloppy, miserable, pathetic, crying, horribly un-charming drunk. I hated myself. . . I was a blackout drinker right from the beginning.

...

... they apprehended my kids from me because of my drinking. And that was on April 10th, two years ago. They apprehended all five of the kids, or four of the kids. Because at that point my wife had left February 2nd ... They didn't give me five minutes, they just took the kids ... (So how long were they there?) Eight months. I got them back December 18th, 2002. And I've had them ever since. ... I went into detox ... same afternoon as [CAS] took the kids . . . I was in there for I don't know, six or seven days. And they got me into a [second] treatment centre ... I spent twenty-one days there.

Carlos: *Then it seemed so easy[selling drugs and new life style]. You know, I started first I started picking up for the girls at work [in erotic massage parlor where live in girl friend Chantal had begun to work], the owner and the girls, and they'd be like . . . I want a half, I want a half, I want a half, so everyone's giving me forty dollars, and I did the math in my head, well now I can get a bigger amount [of drugs] for a cheaper . . . Um, I started falling, started falling behind again . . . I think my judgement was starting to, to go. You know what I mean?*

...

I broke up with her. I kinda ran away. ... So I lived there [out of town] for a, a couple of months. I, I got my old job back, I had a construction job, I was doing machine operating there making fifteen dollars an hour ... I wasn't really using drugs or anything, I pretty much cleaned up my life ... it was kinda a break from all the chaos and I started making money again ... I was doing fine, maybe a month after I'm there I call Chantal to see how she's doing ... I kinda missed her, like physically we had a good, very good relationship, physically. She was more attractive than the girl I was with.

...

As soon as Chantal found out that she was pregnant she cut things out dramatically ... Then there was constant fighting as I didn't want my baby to come out dead, or come out with brain problems. It was hard for Chantal 'cause I was working during the day and I was still trying to sell drugs to make ends meet so that when Deidre was born, we'd be financially stable. I was happy that she was pregnant and she had had abortions in the past ... At the hospital, when my daughter was in the incubator, 'cause she was a couple weeks early, she was holding my finger, like I cried ... I was the happiest person on earth. When I left, you know, that day I was like, I can't believe I'm a father, and I said, 'You know, I'm, I'm gonna everything I can to take care of you and make sure you're ok.' ... But then going back into that, that, when you go back into your circle of stupidity

... all the things that are good and pure and all the things that make you happy, have now been changed to this partying mode...

...

My bail terms [for an assault charge] was house arrest [at his parents' home], no firearms, illegal, all that stuff, no alcohol, drugs, without prescription. Not allowed to even walk into an establishment, like I wasn't allowed to go into a restaurant. I wasn't allowed for my parents to have liquor on the table. ... being under house arrest for so long and following through with it, it helped, because I'm not around those kind of people. ... I was kind glad that everything fell into the way it did. And it did, it helped, you know.

...

... we're driving to work, like she's driving me to go meet my, my boss. And I gave her a backhand ... because she was doing drugs all night, her nose started gushing blood ... I was at work, her sister calls her brother ... And so now you know he wants to kill me ... so that was the last day I lived with her, then I moved to my parents house that day ... I was twenty-four.

...

Chantal calls my mom's house at ten-thirty at night and says, 'I'm coming to get Deirdre.' [his daughter] And my mom was like, 'Well Deirdre's in bed, why don't you come tomorrow? If you really wanna come get her.' And then the next day my mom called Children's Services and said, you know, here's the situation ... I think that there's drugs involved ... [Did your mom do the right thing?] Well, if she didn't do what she did then Chantal probably would have come the next day and taken Deidre ... to a place that was terrible, like dirty ... Because my mom took that step, I'm here today. But my daughter's here [at his parents] today as well.

Rob: *...But then one of the things I couldn't afford before was drinking, you know, alcohol . . . But at this new job, I met new people . . . [we'd] go out after work . . . go over to somebody's place, have a couple beers . . . and then I, you know started you know, buying a six pack . . . Next thing you know, you're drinking three beers a day, and four beers a day, and my wife started drinking more because we were so much apart now, I was working seventy hours a week . . . the drinking got worse and, being on opposite shifts, we didn't try and keep either in check...*

...

... sometimes she would start swinging at me, or I would start swinging at her. Usually she started it... I remember thinking every day ... this is insane, like I'm drinking every single day. And it went from three beers a night, to like six beers a night.' Both were having a hard time functioning.

...

And, so we got into one fight ... at Christmastime, ... where I hit her, and well we both were fighting, but I hit her ... and then over the period of the next twelve months, there may have been two or three more, and there was one where it got really carried away, and the children witnessed it. And, my wife, she cut her head, I don't know what she cut it on, I don't remember if I cut her head, or if she cut it

... we were both drunk... Both of us the next day really had no idea what we'd done the night before...

...

... we were all out of booze at about five in the morning, and of course I can stay up 'til six because of the shift I'm on. So we got into an argument over a bottle of vodka. And I knew she'd hid it. And I didn't know where, so I got into an argument, I went into the fridge upstairs, and I was yelling at her and I was, you know, rooting through the fridge, where did you hide it? ... I grabbed ... a bag of groceries in there, and I just kinda swept it out on the floor. My wife picked it up and, and ... I didn't know this at the time, but she drilled the bag at me, and in the bag was a one litre bottle of ketchup. And it hit the side of the fridge and just blew up. And I had ketchup everything, and I'm looking at her, I just lost it on her. Didn't hit her, but I lost it on her right? ... I'm cleaning up and the ketchup bottle's on the floor and its broken open... I put it in the garbage outside, so I open the door to put it in the garbage, and my wife's sitting on the garage step. So I thought, and I'm standing behind her, and at this point... I wasn't that drunk... I remember this clearly, I thought to myself, what the hell? I just poured the ketchup on her head.

...

...when... the cops threw the handcuffs on me, and they started to tell me...you're getting charged with assault with a weapon. My children are in the house, my wife's nowhere to be seen, and I'm thinking to myself, this can't be, they can't be serious. Assault with a weapon, when I poured ketchup on her head? But, you know, it wasn't a nice thing to do, but you know ... I'm going to jail now, and ... I have no idea what's going to happen to me.

...

... everything in a way worked out so much for the better. Than if I would have continued on the evening shift, doing the, the crazy hours, and it just, it's kinda strange how it just worked out, because by me coming home after work and doing the the things with the kids, if they, you know, the homework, and, and not having a babysitter there for you know, three hours every day, that worked out good, I got on to day shifts, and being there for my kids every day after school really, you know, that, that was something I, I hadn't ever done. So, you know it was a good feeling, it was really good to be with the, the family in a normal sort of way...

...

... 'Cause I got a very stressful job. So. You know, you, in living with stress, you have to have a way of coping with it, and alcohol isn't a good way to cope with stress. And working more isn't a good way to cope with stress. So they made, made me recognize that the problems that I had, that you know, there's other ways to deal with stress . . .

Tarek: *I used to take my little drink after work. But then, like during the week, or say if I said something it wouldn't bother but I when I take a couple drink then it was a bigger fight. Because I- I had my drinks then we have an excuse and I drink and I- I fight . . . if I'm going to quarrel with something during the week when I'm not, when I don't have any drink it's okay . . . if I have a few drinks then they will*

start, go on from that... You save everything and you get into an argument, they'll call the cops, I get involved. So that's it all- when they, when they are near they're locked up. .. I pled guilty to everything- yeah I was doing this an- cause I didn't ...want to waste time in there...the longer I stay there- it's my job on the rope- what's gonna happen?

...

I'm convicted ... when that happened I started looking for some attention and I got in trouble. Some drinks then I drive I get stopped so that's all . . . they never got me driving. Right? ... [Samara and I] we had a quarrel so I just leave the house and I went outside . . . sat in the car, it is cold . . . only to be warmer. I was outside I didn't do anybody anything. Right? We had a quarrel inside, I just went outside to cool off ... The cops well went up and saw me in the car there, driving just more or less, and I had drinks. And the copper know that so it's right over there right? ... and then they charge me again. ...

...

... but still they call the cops on me, well because I had drinks right? They call the cops and I got in I gotten in jail. And I got in trouble, I got drunk, I had the paper I know ... they put me on probation... so that's how it goes ...

Dean: *I grew up with an alcoholic father. I've got a couple of brothers who are in and out of jail all the time . . . one's really bad. Like he's spent eighty-five percent of his adult life behind bars. Yeah. And yeah my dad used to just yell and scream. I used to hide in a little, a round, forty-five gallon drum in the closet, put clothes over my head. And we'd jump out the windows, and run when dad come home drunk. And that gave me a lot of anger.*

...

so then I generally just didn't bring women around the house, stayed away from them. And then Vicky was my first long term relationship, it was great. And then drugs got involved. You know, I never worked, we lived off her income. Things just got worse and worse, as money, money got tighter and jealousy became into the play, and are you cheating?

...

Yeah, Vicky woke me up at three in the morning and we'd been fighting earlier that day. And then she woke me back up at three in the morning, and I had to have my clothes packed in a couple of suitcases, and she didn't realize this earlier. And she came to bed at three in the morning, I'd been sleeping for about four hours. Exploded, just beating me up, hitting me, pulling my hair. And, 'cause the suitcases were there with the clothes, I didn't unpack them. And I had to unpack them and then that fight just got completely out of hand. And I ended up giving her a black eye...

...

...that anger management course, whatever it was, four month course, was really good. Showed me the things I was doing wrong and how I thought it was her fault, but you know, I set her up or I led her into it. And, or I was just plain denial. You know. So that course the Family Services made me go, I recommend that course.

...

But I stopped I (drinking) because I just don't wanna turn out like the way my dad was. He's better now. He only drinks a little bit on the weekends, you know, he works all the time, he doesn't get too rude ... he's changed his life around quite a bit. He still gets a little angry once in awhile, but I find alcoholics do ...

...

Like honestly I don't think I would have quit if this (child welfare involvement) didn't happen. I would have smoked weed the rest of my life. I was cutting down again because of Family Services . . . came in and came into the home and then I cut way back. (That must have really affected you then . . .) It shocked me . . . it's amazing what a little girl does to your life.

...

I started collecting unemployment, and then my brother got out of the penitentiary ... and [he] brought the strippers around, and then we all got a, a three bedroom townhouse and started partying with all the strippers and a lot of drugs then too, lot of alcohol and partying, and, and then he robbed the bank, and got eight years.

...

Then I moved out of that house. Moved that, out the townhouse. Moved into a full house. With the one stripper. And then we had two to three strippers moving in and out, constantly, need a room for a week, whatever. And they just kept paying money. I'd borrow cars and I'd drive the strippers all over . . . if it was a two hour drive there, two hour drive back, they'd give me like eighty, ninety bucks . . . they'd buy my lunch, couple of beers. You know, hook me up with some drugs. And I got, made good money off that, just driving stripper around . . . then that all just of course, went up in flames and everybody moved . . . (How did it go up in flames?) We all started arguing. We all started fighting.

...

I started drinking again with Vicky, that's how I met her, I started drinking, getting drunk and partying, but it was never really my thing. I don't like the hangover. I always get hangovers. And that's why I like the weed. And the drugs, you just wake up, it's a new day, there's no headaches, there's no nothing. No side effects really. Except, short temper, angerment, outbursts, moody swings .

...

... well if I'm gonna get accused of stealing, and I'm gonna get grounded, well I'm gonna do it. So then, my brother [Jake], like he'd take me and he'd show me how to steal, so then I just started stealing on my own ... (What kinds of things did you steal?) Um, tee shirts, hunting knives, clothings ... stuff like that. Trade for drugs. Go to the weed guys ... we'd be fifteen, they'd be like twenty-three ...

...

And when I got with Vicky and had a child, and fell in love, all them bad dreams went away. And it took me about a year, I was like, hey, I haven't had a bad dream in a year. They're all gone . . . 'cause of the love. It's not all the fear and the anger and the hate and, the crap I grew up with in my life, jumping out windows and running and hiding, hiding in barrels, and hiding in the closet, and put clothes over your head, 'cause you could hear dad's cowboy boots coming. You know . . . [. . .] (What do you feel like when you wake up after something like

that?) . . . I'm very, a lot of energy, very, I don't know, like hyper shaking . . . when I wake up, like I'm full sweats. I'm completely drenched.

...
[What was it like being a teenager?]. . . That was just all drugs and booze. From the age of fourteen to probably twenty. Was a lot of drugs, acid, coke, weed, mushrooms. Beer, whiskey, lager, you know, just everything. Partied like six days a week all the time, and then when I hit twenty, I was like, whoa, this ain't working. And I went back to high school, for two years, got my grade twelve. And then got a job for two years, then got laid off, and then that's where my brother got outta the pen. And introduced me to all the strippers. (Right) And then that's when my whole life, every time, Jake keeps bringing me down.

Felix: [Was that hard for you when [your father] left? Do you remember] No I kept telling my mother I wanted to live with him. For even when we moved . . . in '74, 'til about '75, and my mother said . . . "You're never gonna live with your father. Um, he was a drunken alcoholic. He's been to jail. So just wipe it out of your head. You're not ever gonna live with your father." So after that I think I gave up . . . and after 1978, that's when I think I started to abuse my sisters . . . I was thirteen...

...
I found a job working at [metal fabricators], started at . . . six dollars an hour . . . I was twenty . . . I worked there a year and a half until they moved . . . I was living at home with my mother and then I had to move out. And I moved into my friend's place, - because of, being, my sister reporting me. So, yeah I worked there for about a year and a half, I broke my foot . . . I'd done something stupid, I got drunk or something and, and went running through backyards and that. I think one of the police stamped on my foot. To get me to hold still or something. I don't know. All I know is waking up in the jail cell with a very sore foot.

...
I worked for [landscaping company] for about three and a half years. Then I made a mistake. I, I had been drinking one time. Drank for about six hours, didn't drink for another four and a half hours or more, drove [to city] looking for my dad. I got pulled over. And they said I blew a 1.51... almost double the limit. So the officer said, officer that arrested me said that I missed hitting the telephone pole by that much . . . I had to spend a hundred and forty dollars or so to get my boss, my boss's pick-up out of the impound . . . I lost my licence for a year there...

George: Well I guess before any of my three daughters were born, I was quite involved with, with drugs and I was a bit of a gangster myself. Um, got involved with all types of different types of drugs and weapons and dealing with bikers, and I ended up losing a lot, you know, we, through it, it really it bottom and I lost a house and lost all my property and all I was left with was my girlfriend who was pregnant with my, my daughter and she [my girlfriend] ended up running away, couldn't stop using drugs. I had tried to track her down, you know in crack houses and whatnot. And ended up getting stabbed, bottle smashed over my head.

...

my ex-wife [Abigail was in labour] ... with my first child [Faith] . . . I guess she [Abigail] hadn't eaten for a few days, and she was drinking and . . . heavily using a lot of drugs . . . and when they got to the hospital ... [Abigail's] eyes were like saucers, she was talking like she was on another planet and they had run some tests and stuff and they, they found there was, you know, high levels of barbiturates and marijuana and cocaine in her system, along with alcohol.

...
Shortly around that time, my mother and my father and the rest of my family saw my devotion to my child and how I tried, and like I was going to show Children's Aid, look I'm not using drugs, I was peeing in a cup every week, I did that for like almost two years, 'til they finally said, "Man well you've gotten a lot of support from your church and the community and your family, and we just want you to keep on going. And, and you know, we see you've got your own business, and, and all this stuff. We just wish you the best, we're closing the book on you."

...
... my ex-wife had come back to my church, in front of my pastor and, and his wife and a couple of the other people that were involved, she just bawled in front of everybody at the church, I'm sorry, forgive me, I'll never do it, I want my family back, it's just been killing me not having you, and bringing her back into my life, re-opened the books with F & CS because she had still a serious drug problem. ... well before we moved we got pregnant again right away with my second child, Grace...

...
I got a call from a guy who was there. Said, "Man I know how much you love your kids and how you fought, and you know", I sent him a picture and letters of my newborn, he said, "I see your child, she's just a gorgeous kid, but your wife is here in a crack house, leaving the child in a room full of people shooting cocaine, smoking crack cocaine, and she's going into the bedroom with the dealer of the house for a half an hour at a time, to pay for her cocaine with whatever she was doing. And coming back out."

...
... but anyways, Abigail and I fought for a few months and, and then we decided, she decided to try and make it work ... I said "Look, you know, I'll give you one last chance, if you're gonna, you know, come clean and admit everything, we'll take you back ... " Well I still loved her, you know, even though she betrayed me and done a lot of bad things, I still loved her and I know my children loved her and I, it was, I thought to keep the natural family together, you know, I just thought that was what God would want to happen. ... And were going to counselling, and we had some romantic dinners and we got pregnant again with our third child, who was born after we were separated ...

...
All I know is, is you know, I had all three of my kids, I was single up until about a year ago ... (Were any of the other ones affected, 'cause your ex was using at the time?) Well [Abigail] ran away . . . through the second pregnancy, and we're testing Grace ... I've been going through testing for her, for a year and a half, her speech is behind a bit, her motor skills are off, I think she's possible ADD or

ADHD ... Psychologist looked at her and, you know, suggested maybe Ritalin, and I said no, I'm not gonna do that until I know for sure that's the only solution left. So we're, we're working with her very closely and she's coming a long ways, we have people sit in with school with her, and help her at school ... she's been in tons of [hospital out-patient] programs there, so it's, it's been helping. The littlest one, Joy ...

...
[So were you sort of in one of the biker gangs?] Not at all, no, they wanted me to get involved, I never did. I never used needles . . . Smoked a lot of grass . . . Used a lot of cocaine ...

Dylan: *[Q: You've mentioned your dad a few times. Can you tell me about him, what he was like?] I know deep down he was a good person and did love and care about us, but he cared more about his drinking all the time, and that's why he hit us ...*

...
...he was sixty-four last year. And that's how skinny the past two years, like since his liver was shot, his mind was shot, he went downhill.

...
[Q: So, you've talked in the past, that you've struggled with depression on and off throughout your life. (Yep) Did it start when you were young? Or-] Yeah. But I don't know how I couldn't be depressed with everything I lived with. Especially like losing my mom like that. Because that, and then seeing my dad drunk all the time...

...
It's like I feel like I'm worthless, nobody, loser, like I've been called that numerous times too. So it just feeds into it, it's like, what the hell is wrong with me? Like that's what started me into being anti-social. That's why a lot of times I isolate myself, because I have a hard time trusting people. I know that affect, really affected it with the kids too.

...
[Q: When did you move out of your family?] About fifteen, sixteen. 'Cause I just couldn't take the yelling and the fighting anymore. Especially since my dad used to hit me, my mom and my sister. So I was like, ok, bye-bye.

...
But like I know with those days too, where, like that's when I used to drink, but I could never drink much anyway because of my size, plus for me I always drank too fast, always drank the hard stuff. And that's why to me, I call some of the youth today wimps. Because there is no way they would do what I used to do...I, this is why I had my nickname about Crazy Dylan, the crazy boy. I got, I liked that, that nickname. Ok, 'cause like I knew we ended up, my friends and I, we ended up drinking after work, three days, we had no sleep for three days, and we kept working. Not once did we complain.

...
But that's why I had to give up on my case, 'cause I knew I could have helped the adoption and everything, but I just couldn't deal with it at, like last year, plus I

got, going, like with everything that I told you. It was just too tough on me, mentally, and plus for me too, where I suffer from depression a lot too, and I was suicidal before, and I don't want to get to that point again.

...
'Cause I try not to think about them as much as I used to, but I can't help it. Especially like with Mother's Day and then Father's Day coming up. And then their birthday coming up in August and then plus remembering last year, around this time, still being able to see them. I know next year will be easier, because like when it's two years, it's not as powerful as the first year. At least that's what I'm telling myself and hoping.

Raymond talked about growing up with an alcoholic father, which made him very cautious in his use of alcohol. He didn't think that it had a major negative impact on his life.

She [ex-wife] would come to my place, we'd talk to Max [oldest son] because Max was, was drinking like when he was sixteen. And again, she would, and he has the lackadaisical teenager attitude, where- "What's the big deal, I don't really give a shit."

...
Sarah [daughter] actually moved more over to her mom's because we were having more trouble with Sarah and we were having trouble with Max so we thought we could, try to concentrate more parent time with, individually to each child ... I kicked Max out a couple times ... he was sixteen and seventeen, for alcohol and different things like that, I just kicked him out ... He went to friends houses. He's never ever been too fond, I mean, since he's been about sixteen, going over to his mom's that much.

...
Going back to when Sarah tried to commit suicide ... I think Sarah was depressed at a lot of things. She was a teenager, going through a lot of teenage girl shit, with boys and she didn't think boys liked her. She, I mean she's a really beautiful girl. Gorgeous girl. But she had it in her mind that boys just didn't like her and she had a hard time making friends and it was mainly because of her attitude. She treated people, she treated people like her mom treated people.

...
Sarah's made one bad decision, last October. And we find out what it is in July of this year. She's pregnant ... But I don't know whether it was a bad decision because that has even changed her more ... last September she sort of recessed back a bit and one day she just decided to quit school ...

She started school back up the next semester ... She was at best, normally a fifty-five, sixty student. Like, yeah I'll do my homework, yeah maybe. Right now, before her exams, right now, she's got an eighty-nine. Yeah. She's like, totally different. She's, comes home, she does her homework, she studies. That's why I said, it, I don't think it's all that bad. She gave up a lot of her childhood because of her pregnancy, but I don't think it's gonna be a bad thing. And that's the other,

I mean, I accepted what happened. I didn't get mad at her for getting pregnant. ... Her boyfriend is still in the picture. He actually just got a job. So, he's gonna help support. (Is she gonna stay at home?) Yeah, I rearranged my whole household.

...
Never been in jail. Never been arrested. (... any problems, would you say with addictions ...) No. No. Now, my father was an alcoholic - and that's why I'm really careful about how much I drink ... I always watch what I, what I drink. So. (Did that impact your whole life much?) Um, to a, not very much, he was a, he was a sleeping alcoholic, like he'd get drunk and he'd sleep. He wasn't abusive or anything like that ... So it didn't really affect, like it wasn't a really bad, bad environment ...

...
Well the best parts in my life is my family life. Worst part is probably my personal life right now, 'cause I don't have one. [laughs] So I haven't been in, I've been in a couple relationships since I've got divorced. Couple serious ones, but they, they only lasted six, seven, eight months. Now the kids are growing up, I'm trying to get out more, but maybe I put too much emphasis on the kids.

Outside of their homes and jobs, these men talked sparingly if at all about friendships or regular social involvements. Only a few fathers talked about friends with whom they could discuss their concerns. More but not most described access to extended family members for encouragement and social engagements. A small number described other avenues for their creativity.

Caleb: *During the summer, my fun is getting out and doing things like cut the grass, trim the shrubs and stuff like that ... I'm trying to teach myself a bit more, more and more about trying to fix up cars and stuff like that. Not just for the economics of it, but just, I don't know, anything I can't do, I find somewhat interesting on that level ... So, I'm trying to, trying to teach myself stuff like that. . . I piddle around on the computer. Mostly it's just talking, I have a friend in the States that I met after my ex left ... pretty much been talking with her since the first night I was on the chat line. And we talk pretty much every night ... it's just something I do for about an hour at night. ... I've never had a lot of social connections, I mean, when you're growing up, most all anybody wants to do is go out to bars, they wanna party, they wanna drink. That was just never my thing. ... one thing I like to do is write. ... (So what do you write?) Several different things. Most of the stuff I like is fantasy. I do have one sort of futuristic cop story; that in total is probably about a thousand pages or so now ... between like six books. [Really]) Yeah. ... I'd do the whole chain mail thing. That used to be a hobby I used to be in to . . . a lot, not into it as much right now ... Chain mail. The, the armor ... You've seen in the, a few medieval movies, when they have the armor... you make the, you make the rings and you put them together... it gets very heavy. And there's just little patterns, I make little key chains like this, and there's*

various patterns ... I made my friend actually a, a wine bottle holder out of one of those. I lined it with velvet and made it large enough to hold a wine bottle

...

... we lost contact for a number of years . . . she [his mother] had a major breakdown . . . still suffers from high anxiety, depression . . . and [agoraphobia] more than anything right now. ... there's a lot of stuff I didn't realize that I found out for a few years when I got back in touch with her

...

I've never really had much of a family. My uncle lived with us for quite a number of years, um, and my dad and I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. But other than that...

...

... so I grew up with my dad ... Was a-a-a promise that he'd always made that he was, he was gonna take care of me and gonna do everything that he could for me. So he, you know, he put me through school. ... And he still does, we uh still have a very good relationship.

Eric: *...we go bowling as a family ... I bowl, and the kids bowl ... Yeah, I, I bowl for one league, and the kids are in their youth leagues. Yeah, but my leagues, it's, it's a family team, it's six bowlers and that's all brother and sisters and parents ... Yeah, well, I bowl twice a week, but, depends who, on the team there, it's only week ... The other one is um, it's a men's league. And I actually bowl with my dad on that one. So, on that team ... [So family, that whole idea of family and maintaining connections, {Yeah} is something you work hard at?] Yeah, we all, we all do it actually, we just, you know, so, and the kids like going up north, it's, 'cause it's, fishing and they like to, they like to go fishing, so it's, I'm not much of fisherman, but I, I take them.*

...

... Which [apprehension of his children by CAS] is still haunting me now with this, you know... at work sometimes I just gotta shut the machine off and pace the floor and, just my mind goes, you know, wanders, and I phone my therapist now and again...

...

... so he [his son during summer] stays at home alone, or he goes over to my mom's. And if my cousins are down, and, so, but it's been ok, it's, you know. And babysitters aren't cheap now.

...

I have to keep moving ... yeah the, for, for what they [CAS] did to me, it's, I had to, to resolve, resolve some negative things, so I had to keep my head clear by going for walks and bike rides and garden work and, but there the things I always have done, it's just, I did a lot more of, you know ... And that's the way I relieves stress I guess. You know. 'Cause, 'cause I, I don't really talk about it, any of my problems ... it's gotten better, and you know, they're, they're out of my hair, and out of the kids head, their hair, and so as long as they leave us alone, it's, we should be ok.

David: *We do tons of socializing . . . it's all within the neighbourhood . . . You've never seen a neighbour-hood like it . . . it's incredible. They're all, all about the same age . . . everybody makes pretty good money, so there's never, wouldn't matter to me if somebody came without a case of beer, do you know what I mean, with, some people would get offended on that. If somebody, if we went home tonight, said lets, we got a party Saturday night, and that's it, the party's on. No ifs ands or buts about it . . . they all know of, of what we've been through in the last three years. Amber ran away for a week, nobody knew where she was, she wasn't keeping in contact, and that was really weird that time, with anybody, and I had, one, two, three, including myself, four cars out looking for her one night. So. Good neighbourhood.*

...
Yeah, I can't stand [Paige's] dad ... her mom's a wonderful lady... Paige and my mom get along well ... I'll be sociable... doesn't make any difference to me. Not much for the family part of life. Like we all have our problems within our own families and I don't need to listen to other people's crap...

William: *My dad died about seven years ago. My mother broke her hip, I'd go to pick her up groceries every week. Do the groceries, have some time with her and carry on from there This happened at a time in our lives where everything was crazy. Marie's sister had lost her job. She was out of work for about six months...*

...
He [son] went to court the next day and if my sister in law wasn't there to take Richard it would have been much harder, he would have gone to a home somewhere else. And the contact wouldn't have been there. Richard went to Marie's sisters to live and Tiffany was here. Marie's sister is kinda a Godsend because he would have been sent somewhere else eh? And who knows what, where he would have gone eh?

Raymond: *Lately I have been, it's only been about the last two months I've been making sure I myself get out on Friday nights ... but Sunday or Saturday, there's a, oh there's housework, there's laundry, there's groceries, there's, I have a motorcycle, I like to get out on it every once in awhile ...*

...
I have a couple friends that have really been with me for the last six years. And they've really helped when I went through the divorce and then through this, and then now, they've always been, always there, and I can always phone them and they're always there ...

...
I never got along with my parents, my mom or my dad . . . there was nothing wrong with them, I mean they were, they were strict, but there's nothing, there was nothing really, really bad, I was a teenager, I just didn't like the rules. ... So, but even now, we're not, we're not close, I go down and see them once, twice a year. And that's it. And they, I call. And I should be closer, 'cause my mom, my

mom's great, my mom, with the kids, she'll, she doesn't remember a single, she doesn't forget a single birthday, she doesn't forget school, when they finish, she doesn't forget Christmas, Easter, every holiday, there's a cheque in the mail to my, to the kids.

...

I got an older sister, I haven't seen her in probably ten years. She had a fight with my mom and she doesn't talk to any of us now. So, I don't know

...

What do I do, what do I do? I have a street bike. I like riding my motorcycle. We all have motocross bikes . . . the kids have motocross, we go out, we live near trails. And so we go out in the trails ... We ski, my kids board, I ski.

Woodworking. I build furniture. So on the side, I just build, like pine furniture, I don't do any hardwood, but I build like pine tables, and boxes ... golf, I got into golf last year. Squash, I play squash. I haven't played much this year, last year I played once or twice a week, we'd go out and play squash. Pool, that I'm not good at. I, I love playing it, but I'm just shitty at it. We usually go out and play pool on Fridays. What else do I like doing? Reading, watching movies.

...

Well the best parts in my life is my family life. Worst part is probably my personal life right now, 'cause I don't have one. [laughs] So I haven't been in, I've been in a couple relationships since I've got divorced. Couple serious ones, but they, they only lasted six, seven, eight months. Now the kids are growing up, I'm trying to get out more, but maybe I put too much emphasis on the kids.

Burt: *But, yeah he was, he's like, I'm very close with him [his father] . . . (What about your mom?) I'm close to her too. She looked after Thomas for me for and then she came down here in, actually well, my sister in law, my sister and Mom all took turns looking after Thomas up North.*

...

I usually read books for at least twenty minutes before I put him [his son Thomas] to bed . . . a lot of the times I go to bed myself right after, when I'm beat. I usually stay up for another half hour or so just to make certain he goes down ... The odd time, like when, when we're up North at my folks, a lot of weekends we go up North ... once a month we make it up North. He sleeps in good up, up North.

...

I don't, don't like going to, I don't go out to bars ... I've got a lot of interests, hobbies that I used to do and I'd like to do, but I don't have time for it ... I love playing guitar and haven't been able to pick one up since, well since pretty much, Thomas was born. Like I dug a couple guitars out this last winter and tried playing a bit. It's just that I'll never get a chance to play [with ease] when Thomas's around, he's always up poking at it, and he's, Thomas's always wanting to fiddle with whatever I'm fiddling with, so. ...

...

[... do you have sources of support ... ?] My family and my friends. My family especially. I talk to my mom on the phone. My dad, once or twice a week...

...

I get along well with my coworkers, I, I don't, I don't get upset at the job, I, like I don't, can't remember the last time I had a falling out with anybody at work.

...

I have a partner. Him and I have been working together for about the last six years. But I'll be on different jobs as him.

...

I don't really think too much other than just surviving the here and now for ... The worst things are ... in the last year and a half I've found that some friends aren't as good of friends as I thought ... I've just realized that I don't have that much in common with these people anymore. I'm not gonna sit at work and drink all night with the boys ... that's not what I envision being a dad.

Paul: *[You've been through a lot ... So what's, what's been the toll on you?] Um, I'm just hoping it will end. I haven't seen no light at the end of the tunnel . . . (So has it been a living hell for you? You haven't, like how do you cope?) Well it's, I, like I say, I have my wife, we can talk to each other, kinda thing, like that. And I don't go to, I haven't been to counselling, I thought about it one time . . . But, basically, you know, a couple of mates at work ... I talk to, like I know them enough time, you know, we'll talk about it . . . but mostly it's with my wife, to be honest with you, it's with my wife, and we both talk about it. It's hard on her too...*

...

I like, I like reading. Like, I like going to the library. ... [So what do you like to read?] Um, well how other people think, like theology, (Really?) like, yeah, like different faiths, different denominations, how they exist or how they came from. Well basically it's, a lot of religious books, like...

Nigel: *I have friends here. Actually of couple buddies of mine, we, we're like amateur filmmakers, we made a, like we were working on couple of film projects we, just for, for our own benefit, it's not like, it's just for fun basically, and the kids are in it and stuff like that, sort of thing, so. We, that's, that's one of my hobbies, and I also play soccer on a, on a men's team. Every other Sunday. And it works out, 'cause I get my kids every other week, and I've got soccer every other week ... (So what kinds of films?) We made one, we're working on a second one. It's, it's basically a comedy about, about of all things, soccer ... 'So we ended up making this film about the World Cup. ... But it's a hobby because you know, we get to write it and direct it, and film it and edit it, and choose the music and you know, it, it's, it took us awhile to do it, and we were quite happy with it ... It takes about a year, year and a half 'cause it's hard to get it altogether ...*

...

Kids are here, my, I've got my kids, I've got a job, I have friends, you know, I got a reasonably nice little place here.

About a third of these fathers talked about the importance of religious or spiritual faith and participation in a faith community in their lives. For many this was not only

seen as a source of personal solace and support but also important to the identity and continuity of their families.

Paul: *I'm kinda mad at God right now. [laughter] ... I believe in God. I believe in, you know, definitely believe in God. Um, it's not just because I didn't have a car, but when I had the car, when I, I haven't been to mass in about the last four months. ... I'm Catholic, well we're all Catholic. ... I was really pissed off at God. Because of all this bullshit that's going on. My wife will, will pray every morning when those kids go off to school. Like looks at the sacred heart of Jesus on the wall there, and prays to him, and stuff like that. I'm not overly religious, but I do, I was going to mass, I tried to get my, getting our kids to go to church is like pulling teeth. ... I was taking them [his kids], and I then when they got a bit older and stuff like that, they get a bit nancy about it, about going to church. ... It's very peaceful. I find it peaceful. So maybe it's what you call uplifting, or something like that. ... she [his wife] said, I've got Jesus hanging up in the living room, and stuff, and oh she says if I get pissed off at him, I turn his picture around, she says, I won't look at you. I, you know, I, and then after I've cooled down I'm fine, you know. And maybe that's why I turned his picture back around, you know, it helps. But she said, all in all, she said you're allowed to be, she says you're allowed to pissed off.*

Zack: *So I have a, a recovery group that meets once a week, at [church]. I hang out with a bunch of sober people. That's my AA. ... Christian based recovery group and it's, it's just, it's first rate, I, I just love it. ... I love the Church. I love the people. You know . . . I love the Lord so . . . [Do you have most of your, uh, most of your friends are through the recovery program at Church?] Yeah. Yeah, in fact they're all through the recovery program at Church...*

...
[Brother #1] is very much like myself- very quiet, very reserved. And, uh, like I said- family's extremely important to him. Family and God and that's the two things that, uh, he and I both share. Like we both have that in common- that family and God are the most important things in our lives...

...
Actually I became a Christian when I was with my first wife. Well, uh, actually we were separated at the time. And- her brother in-law's mother- step-mother, pardon me, was a very devout, happy, blossoming Christian. And she led her son- her stepson to the Lord, and then she led, uh, uh- her- her st- daughter in-law to the Lord. And then she led my wife to the Lord

...
Well we had a- we had a great pastor. His name was [Pastor #1] ... and, uh, he was- like he- he was just full of the holy ghost and he was just a-a-a- a great teacher, a brilliant teacher. ... I can't say my life really made, you know, like a 180, like it does, you know, a lot of people they accept the Lord and they're delivered from everything that, you know, all their bad habits. Well I wasn't. I struggled with everything.

...

[You've been going for quite some time then?] Probably about 3 years. And, uh, you know, I- I love the place and, you know what? I- there's- there's a lot of people there, but there's a lot of people that know me. And that's nice. You know it's nice to be, uh, to be known and to be liked. You know ma- kinda like a family that I never had, you know. My own family didn't care too much for me so it was nice when these people, uh, accepted me and, uh- I mean they've helped my family, like through a lot of bad times. ... these people, like I say- they didn't take the- the kids, but they made sure that the kids- they kept up on their progress, they made sure that, you know, like if-if they were st- if the kids were struggling they had somebody to talk to. And, uh, I was just really impressed with that. Um- you know, and it's been good. I, you know, I- I love the Church. I love the people. You know- and I love the Lord so...

...
[Child #2]'s growing up the way I did. No friends, but she's got friends that attend this Church called, uh, I think it's Calvary or it's United- it's a United Pentecostal Church. It's a little different from our Church, but she really, really loves it. She's, uh, she goes every Sunday when she's here. Uh, [Child #4]'s the only one I have a problem with, she just does not want to go.

Eric: *... they[his kids] were in captivity for a year [in care of CAS] and then they were home for a year. [So do the kids ever talk about that time]) Not now. No, they, they don't really talk too much about it. The, the one part I don't like is, right now, is when they were in captivity, they never took them to church. Now, I'm having a heck of a time to take them to church. [Were you, you were going pretty regularly before?] Oh yeah. Every Sunday, you know we'd go to church ... Catholic church ... Now, yeah I'm having a heck of time trying to get them to go to church ... [So it looks like religion's pretty important to you?] Yeah. Yeah*

...
[Do you go on your own?] Oh yeah. [Yeah] Once, I go about twice a month right now, it's, because it, depends what we do Saturday night. [Yeah] Late nights, or whatever. ... [So what, what do you get out of that?] Oh, makes you feel better. Much better. You know, so. [Was that important when you were going through all of this stuff?] Yeah, yeah that helped me a lot.

William: *We were Roman Catholic. I went to [Catholic schools].*

...
So you have to have faith, and I guess maybe that's why we go [to church]. . . to get recharged. I go as much as possible. I can only go every other week 'cause the work or whatever and Marie's home the other weekend. So we kinda work it that somebody's home with Tiffany. Going to church, means a lot. [laughs] 'Cause if I don't go to church I don't feel right or something, I just think everybody needs that special hour a week. ... I still find it hard to go to church when I can't take two kids to church.

...
[What does it do for you, what does it make you feel like?] Um, proud of myself, and like I, belong to that place, and, it just gives you that, one hour to reflect on

the week, and start for the next week, eh? {Religion: Do you think it's helped you through this, past couple years?}

Through this, oh yeah. Granted, out of nine kids [childhood family], I think only three or four go anymore, so, but that's, the mixed marriages, and whatever so, Wife and I are both Catholic, so ... we just, do our best I guess, so.

...

Sometimes that's where your religion comes in too, so, you have to have faith, and I guess maybe that's why we go every Sunday. To get recharged.

...

I'm a Catholic, you know we've heard, be able to forgive people, sometimes eh? And I think you know that Daughter can, see in time, she'll forgive Son, and hopefully carry on, because we don't want that situation where, Son wants to see Daughter when, when she's twenty one, or something like that ... I have faith that they will get together again, someday.

George: *So I ended up just praying to God, it was Christmas, my family had disowned me, I had betrayed them and deceived them and ended up owing them money, and I, I had established a, you know, a new place, with new furniture, and I was all alone, I had no, you know, wife, no child to, to be, with me, so that's when I prayed to God, to just protect my child. You know, and I didn't know what else to do. Offered my life to God and said if you do anything, you know, I'll give you my life if you save this child, 'cause the child needs protection. I couldn't do it and I was healing from these wounds.*

...

Or Job, I don't know if you've read the Bible, but I said, you know, they were up far lonelier place that I was, was a lot less, for a lot longer time. So I said, for me, this is just a temporary thing, I think, you know, I had to find out really what being humble was all about, you know. And finding that God was still there. You know, was, was amazing, I, I just, you know, some of the things, that I've experienced, for me were, miraculous, you know, like I, I think praying, for God to tell me where I should go and then having all this furniture show up the next day. Was to me, nothing but God, you know.

...

And, and then I went to bed, I just prayed and said God, you know, show me the way. And it's probably the most, one of the most humble points in my life. You know. Not having really any money, you know, my family still didn't want anything to do with me. I had overly burdened them with debt. You know, when I lost my house and there was a loan that had get paid out, financially like it just killed my parents. So I went to bed, literally crying. Cried myself to sleep. And the next morning I, I get woken up from my phone ringing. And it was this, the St. Vincent de Paul, said yeah man, we're just, we're in the neighbourhood. We heard you needed a few things.

...

I had a lot of support from my church. And, and I had a lot of help from food banks and that, and then my parents had actually came into the picture and helped me out a little bit.

...

I was, at this time going to Narcotics Anonymous [NA] meetings . . . I had brought my child there . . . and I'd said, "This is why I really believe in God . . . this is an experience that changed my life" ... with NA [I] didn't get a lot of support from them, they weren't really into my righteous attitude about God, God to them could be anything. Pumpkin, a tree, whatever helps keep them clean ... I ended up leaving there and I, I stayed clean and started fighting for custody.

...
Well I still loved her [ex-wife], you know, even though she betrayed me and done a lot of bad things, I still loved her and I know my children loved her and I, it was, I thought to keep the natural family together, you know, I just thought that was what God would want to happen. To give her every last bit of energy I had to try and keep the whole family ... together.

...
I believe God is there. And I think he has his hand on my life ... maybe it's genetics . . . my bloodline, like you know, my grandfather comes right from Norway. My grandmother and this is on my mother's side, she was a pure Ojibwa Indian...

...
[Are you ever violent in your relationships?]. . . I never took that road. You know that my grandfather and my uncles did ... So like I, I ultimately broke that chain ... I'm working and I ask God, I say, you know I, "I need your help here, you know. I need your, your spirit to come inside my heart and soften it so that, that I'm not as hard with my kids." (Are they happy, happy kids?) They're pretty happy kids ... loving kids, they're, you know, we try and give them a lot of affection and love and hugs and kisses ...

...
... if they really understood the permanency of death you know, like of your body when it's gone. And if you don't come to God before that time, you know, like I, I just can't, like it, it makes me, I'm, I'm overwhelmed with, I don't know, anxiety, because I don't really want to get to that. And I fret with myself at times. Like you know, sometimes you wonder if you know, and again, the devil gets in your head, and he, he says, you know, do you think he's really there? Do you think he really exists? And certain things happen, you wonder like, you know, how God, how can he let this happen? You know, but things like things happen. And the devil takes advantage of that. And, but you have to address that and, and again just pray. To get over that, you know, and hopefully things will come the way you want them, but not everything does, and but, again, God has his own (I'm sorry-) course for everybody-

...
I'm gonna go check out a new church, a Baptist church, like I, we've gone to a few, Freedom and Christ, we've gone there. We've been going to the Glen Cairn, Mennonite Brethren Church, and it's good.

...
I do have a short temper, a bit of short fuse. And I can be a little abrupt with my kids, and I can grab them by the arms and say, look at, you stop that right now, and it just startles them, and they'll cry. You know, and I have to think and say

*gee, I'm sorry after. You know. I don't know what I was thinking. You know I, I [*pace it*] like that sometimes, but you, I don't know. And I, and I'm working and I ask God, I say, you know I, I need your help here, you know. I need your, your spirit to come inside my heart and soften it so that, that I'm not as hard with my kids. You know, and it must be hard for them.*

Carlos: *I go to church, not every Sunday. Um, I'll watch church on TV, you know, and I listen to the stuff that they say, and a lot of things that they say is, especially on, on the TV, it's very, it's straightforward stuff, you know what I mean? I think if everybody just took ten minutes, or took a half hour out of, out of a week and just sat down and listened, you know, they're not getting brainwashed or nothing, they're just learning about normal stuff, right? But I look around, and I look inside of me, and there had to be something that made all this, you know what I mean? I don't think that we're like, I don't think we came from monkeys, you know what I mean, like we're just too smart, we're too much different, I think we, I think we're on earth and we must have some, I don't think we're just here on earth and we're gonna die and that's it. I think there's gotta be some reason why we're here. So for whatever that reason is, we'll only know when we die. You know. [laughter] [You'll find out if your theory's right or wrong.] Exactly.*

Concluding Remarks

At the beginning of the chapter, evidence was presented from the literature that fathers are frequently ignored by child welfare service providers, even when they are living in the home. Among the more disturbing reasons suggested for excluding fathers were that they cared less about their children than mothers and they were less important in their children's lives. There were assertions that fathers were transient in their families' lives and not willing to make commitments to their children. As fathers ourselves, it is hard not to bridle at such reasoning. The findings from this study question its accuracy and usefulness.

Excluding fathers from service plans would not be part of the official guiding principles of a child protection agency. Nor would many child protection service providers voice the above assumptions about dads. In principle, there would be some interest in expanding constructive engagements with fathers among many child protection administrators and service providers. Yet, in practice, dads are often excluded. These exclusions have to be at least informally rationalized by child protection personnel: there is a lack of time; dads won't cooperate; service providers are afraid; our priority is

protecting kids; and so on. More than a few fathers are aware of their lesser importance to child welfare service providers.

Most fathers involved with child protection authorities care about their children and would be willing to engage with child protection service providers on their children's behalf. This does not mean that learning how to meaningfully engage with fathers would be easy. There is much that has to be learned and unlearned. Yet there is much to be gained through such connections. This engagement process might begin by reinforcing in child protection service cultures that "fathers matter to children". A natural corollary would be creating a strong expectation of front line service providers talking with fathers about family circumstances whenever this can be done. This would involve more service providers becoming comfortable talking with men. Ideally, there would be greater openness to fathers' perspectives on their families and what should be done.

There are suggestions from this research that the process of engaging fathers will not be identical to engaging with mothers. A substantial obstacle to engaging men is that so little is known about their lives and how they experience child welfare services. This study is a small contribution to understanding these realities. There is clearly a need for much more information and dialogue about fathers and child welfare.

In engaging fathers, unique aspects of their personal lives and family relationships would have to be accommodated. This research has suggested some aspects to consider. The caution is that these are general patterns with lots of individual variations. Indeed, a core message from the life stories of both fathers and mothers in this program of research is that the more we understand about the everyday realities of their lives, and how they make sense of their experiences, the less credible the common stereotypes about men and women involved with child welfare services become. If such simplifications are allowed to substantially colour service delivery priorities and practices, they can easily do more harm than good.

Not surprisingly, verbal conflict and physical violence between partners and substance abuse were common reasons for these men coming into contact with child protection authorities. Less expected was that many of these men linked child welfare entering their lives and the ending of destructive fighting and substance abuse within their children's homes. While some were not pleased with how the child welfare agency

carried out this work, most saw the changes as overdue and essential for the well being of their children.

In situations of domestic violence, while acknowledging the need for intervention, fathers had two major criticisms of child welfare's involvement. First, it took much too long to resolve the domestic situation. They felt they were kept away from their homes and children longer than necessary, and the restrictions on contact with their children or partners were excessive. In particular, dads eventually reunited with their children felt that this lengthy separation was hard for their children and partners as well as for them. Second, fathers felt that child welfare service providers had little interest in fathers' versions of events or their opinions about what might be done. They thought often that their partners' explanations about the violence were simply accepted.

Most of the fathers in this study had been separated from their children at some time during their involvement with child welfare, through placement of the children, separation from their partners or court-ordered removal of the father from the family home. In such instances, men talked movingly of the pain of separation from their children and of their intense desire for more access to their children. Most were strongly motivated to do what they could to be reconnected with their children. About one-third of these dads talked explicitly about how the needs of their children and the possibility of losing them led to them "turning their lives around".

What these fathers appreciated and did not like about their experiences with child welfare service providers were consistent with the patterns in the broader Partnerships for Children and Families program of research. They appreciated service providers who they could get in touch with and who kept them informed. Things as simple as returning phone calls, telling them about their children or their court proceedings, and explaining intervention plans were very important to these fathers. They also wanted to be listened to and treated respectfully. Several dads commented favourably on service providers who were "straight" with them, even when this involved challenging them, being intrusive, or denying them something they wanted, as long as the worker made an effort to listen to their side of things. Service providers who made efforts to connect them with helpful resources were appreciated.

Not surprisingly, what fathers resented was the converse of these processes: not being kept informed or not being able to contact their service providers. More than a few felt that their service providers simply lied to them. They resented service providers who seemed not to care or who they thought made judgements about them without talking to them. More than a few believed that they had to do more to overcome an “anti-male bias” among child welfare service providers.

Many fathers found some of the programs that they accessed because of their child welfare involvement to be helpful (e.g., counselling, parenting education, anger management, addictions treatment, legal assistance). What they did not like was not being involved in deciding what should be done. Most did whatever child welfare said that they had to do whether or not it made sense to them.

There is ample evidence that front line service provider discretion is quite tightly constrained by formal child protection system expectations. Engaging fathers is not as simple as expecting service providers to do their jobs differently. Service providers’ service orientations and the service possibilities open to them are shaped substantially by the system that employs them. Undoubtedly, knowing more about fathers’ lives and their experiences with child welfare will enable some front line service providers to be more productive in their approaches to fathers and families. Also, individual child welfare agencies have some capacity to create innovative program approaches. However, in the end, success meeting the challenges of engaging fathers is linked to the broader issue of creating a child and family welfare system that can be more focused on providing assistance to children, parents and families.

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