

# A Celebration Of Black Fathers

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

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We hear it time and time again, over and over again, about how far too many Black men aren't around to love and support the children they father. For a number of reasons, they simply walk away, apparently without a care or thought. And the disheartening statistics clearly indicate the disturbing truth that can't be denied: At least 35 percent of Black children live without their father in the home, a figure that's almost double the rate of any other ethnic group in the United States.

Unfortunately, that trend appears to be growing. But while we spend so much time focusing on those men who don't do the right thing, we often overlook the thousands of Black fathers who are devoted, dedicated and determined to give their children the love and direction they need to fully develop their potential.

From one side of the country to the other and in practically every community throughout, there are committed, reliable men who, no matter their socioeconomic conditions, embrace their fatherly responsibilities with the enthusiasm of Cliff Huxtable, the endearing character that Bill Cosby portrayed on *The Cosby Show*. For instance, take the case of Keith Coiley in West Chicago, Ill. He was already widely respected and held in high esteem as a devoted father, but he took his dedication to a new level after his wife died, leaving him to care for their two children, Matthew and Sarah.

As a father is supposed to do, he allowed nothing to interfere with his parental duties, helping his children cope with such a substantial loss while, at the same time, providing them with the encouragement they needed to continue navigating their young lives. Not only was he a father, he was a

mother, too. When the children were sick, he was there. When they needed advice, he was there. When they needed to be disciplined, he was there. When they needed to be protected, he was there. And although his children are a little older now and a little more independent, he's still there for them as they continue to display the admirable qualities he instilled in them.

There are many others like Coiley who have shown that when a loving, caring father is in the household, his input and influence are invaluable. Several studies already have revealed that children in a mother-only family, no matter the race, are more likely to be pov-

erty-stricken, more likely to be arrested as juveniles, and more likely to become parents themselves during their teenage years.

This dynamic has become far too prevalent, but those irresponsible men who have helped to create the situation shouldn't overshadow the thousands and thousands of honorable, taking-care-of-business kind of fathers who not only should be celebrated on Father's Day, but on each day of the year! □

