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Moms group grows

Non-custodial mothers organization, founded in Clermont, becomes global support network

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Non-custodial mothers often feel like they are alone in their situation. One such mom, Beverly Morris of Clermont, has founded a national organization to give those moms a support network.

"One of the characteristics is that women feel like they are the only ones in the world this has happened to, and that's not the case," said Morris. "This is happening more and more now.

"That's what we're all about — to listen, to understand."

Morris founded the National Association of Non Custodial Moms Inc. in November 2004. In its first two weeks, the organization had 10 members. Now, the group has about 600 active members. It was recently granted 501 (c) (3) status by the Internal Revenue Service.

Morris said the new status, which exempts the group from paying taxes, opens many doors for the organization.

"It's mind boggling to see how far and how fast we've come in just one year," said Morris. "If you look at the support, the camaraderie — it's like no other."

NANCM's mission statement states the organization's belief that children have a right to both fit and loving parents in their life.

According to Morris, although divorce may bring conflict between the parents, the children should not lose the opportunity to share equal time with their parents.

That belief is shared by the Children's Rights Council, a national organization based out of Washington D.C. It has existed for more than 20 years, working to assure children have meaningful and continuing contact with both their parents and families regardless of the parents' marital status.

"Most people think of dads as the non-custodial parents, but there are 3 million non-custodial mothers



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out there too," said David Levy, CEO of the Children's Rights Council. "They are kind of the hidden folks."

Levy, who has worked in association with Morris, will be visiting Clermont in June to speak at NANCM's first-ever convention. He is scheduled to talk on the importance of co-parenting.

According to Levy, organizations like NANCM help make a difference in America because there is strength in numbers.

"Children are born with love and need for both parents," said Levy. "We need to totally eradicate the concept of a non-custodial parent — it needs to be a 50/50 thing."

NANCM has members from all over the world, including Germany, Australia and the United States. Members, or "angels," as the Web site calls them, are provided with a community of emotional support and educational and supportive resources to help them maintain a loving and nurturing relationship with their children.

In areas with local chapters, NANCM also offers materials and workshops on co-parenting and post-divorce stress.

Morris said she hopes to one day offer support to the children of divorced parents and, with the organization's new status, hopes to open a fund where money can be set aside to support members who come upon a financial burden or need a little emergency cash for bills, tickets to see their children or even tickets for the movies and dinner when they have their visitations.

Because the group's members are scattered across the globe, the Internet is an important resource to them, allowing members to visit NANCM's Web site and talk with people in the same situation.

NANCM has assisted in a custody battle involving model Bridget Marks, and was given special thanks on the Dr. Phil Web site for the help and support.

"The most important thing I found through NANCM is to know that I was not alone," said Tanya Bollin of Hendersonville, Tenn. "But I love Beverly. She took the initiative to step up and do something that needed to be done."

Another thing Morris wants to stress is that the group is not a mother's advocate group. She said that has been a common misconception of her organization.

"We get misconceived as a mother's rights group, but if anything, we're a father's rights group. But people don't understand that," said Morris. "We are the small minority of women who completely understand what non-custodial fathers go through because we are going through the same things."

Everything happens for a reason, said Morris. Her mother was raised by a grandmother, and Morris was raised by her dad. In 1998, a year after their divorce, her ex-husband moved with their children to Pennsylvania. All these things led her to form the organization.



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Morris said she knew she had found her calling when she saw the initial response to the Web site and discussion board.

"I was ecstatic to have other women I could talk to and that understood what I was going through," said Morris. "I didn't even have to try and explain; they just knew."

In June, NANCM will have its first convention at the Summer Bay Resort in Clermont, where for two days attendees will be able to gather information, insight and materials to help in their situations.

Guest speakers at the convention will include Morris; Levy; children's advocate Annie Armen, host of radio talk show Annie Armen Live; Dr. Kathie Mathis, director of domestic violence programs; and Annette Pagano, who wrote "Journeys of Women without Custody."

Morris is looking for sponsors for the convention and hopes to raise \$5,000, which would cover all the costs.

"When you tell people you don't have custody, they see you differently," said Bollin. "But I've come to the realization that I'm still a mom and still a good mom. And the more people knowing that, in my opinion, is more power."

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