OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs:

Client Characteristics and Program Outcomes

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Executive Summary

From October 1998 to December 31, 2000 eight sites in eight states (San Mateo County, California; El Paso County, Colorado; Baltimore, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; Cape Girardeau County, Missouri; Belknap, Hillsborough, and Merrimack Counties, New Hampshire; Pierce County, Washington; and Racine, Wisconsin) received Section 1115 grants or waivers from the Office of Child Support Enforcement/ACF to implement and test responsible fatherhood programs.

Objectives

The objective of these projects was to assist unemployed or low-income, noncustodial parents, mostly fathers, to pay child support by:

- Increasing employment or income;
- Encouraging more involved and better parenting; and
- Motivating child support compliance.

States were given wide latitude in program format, the services to be provided, and client eligibility. Although most states created or collaborated with community-based fatherhood programs, some programs were based in child support agencies and courts. Site strategies also varied, with some sites concentrating on child access and other sites stressing employment as ways to increase child support compliance. Diverse groups of clients were served: rural and urban; African-American, white and Hispanic; unwed and divorced; and noncustodial mothers as well as fathers. Over 1,800 fathers were ultimately served, of whom 1,674 are included in this evaluation.

Study Methodology

The study included two components: an assessment of implementation and a determination of program outcomes. Site visits and discussions with program administrators and staff were used to document program characteristics and implementation. The findings from that assessment were published in June 2001 in a report titled *OCSE Responsible Fatherhood: Early Implementation Lessons*. The outcome study relied on case data maintained at each site to generate a picture of

client characteristics, service delivery, and client outcomes. In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with project participants, and child support enforcement administrative records and employer-reported wage records were obtained from each state and analyzed. The results of this component of the study appear in this report, *OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Client Characteristics and Program Outcomes.*

Employment Services

Programs did a good job at delivering employment services. Slightly more than half (52%) of the fathers reported needing help finding a job, finding a better job, or both, and most of these individuals were served. Employer wage reports for one quarter prior to enrollment and two quarters post-enrollment showed statistically significant increases in the number of noncustodial fathers who were employed: employment rates went up by 33 percent in Maryland, 29 percent in Missouri, 16 percent in Wisconsin, and 8 percent in Massachusetts. Increases were also found at all but one of the other sites, although they were not statistically significant.

There were also statistically significant increases in client earnings for the quarter prior to enrollment and the second quarter post-enrollment. Largely due to earnings among those previously unemployed, earnings rose by 250 percent in Maryland, 58 percent in Wisconsin, 41 percent in Colorado, and 25 percent in Massachusetts. Increases that were not statistically significant were recorded at the other sites. However, both before and after enrollment, most noncustodial fathers continued to show low earnings with post-enrollment earnings across the sites, ranging from a low of $704 per quarter in Missouri to a high of $3,095, per quarter in Washington.

Child Support Enforcement Services

More than half (57%) of the noncustodial fathers wanted assistance with child support. About half of the fathers had not paid child support in the six months prior to enrollment, and median arrearages ranged from $3,600 to $9,881 by site. In the 12 months after enrollment, there were far more noncustodial parents making some payment. The increases in the percentage making payments were 31 percent for Colorado, 29 percent for Missouri, 26 percent for Washington, 19 percent for Massachusetts, 17 percent for Maryland, 11 percent for Wisconsin, and 4 percent for New Hampshire. Even though payments increased, most parents still paid less than the full amount due

and their arrearages did not drop. Among those making some payment in the 12 months following enrollment, parents paid an average of 36 to 72 percent of what they owed across the project sites.

Among parents with the lowest incomes, child support comprised a large portion of monthly earnings (21 to 61%). Although some programs referred clients for review and adjustment of their orders, few clients qualified. In California, which primarily offered clients the opportunity to mediate custody or visitation issues, child support payments increased among all parents referred for mediation, even for those who never participated in the process.

Improving Access to Children

Most of the noncustodial fathers wanted help getting to see their children more often (51%), improving parenting skills (39%), and improving their relationship with the children's mother (30%). At enrollment, a high percent of fathers were dissatisfied with their visitation arrangements and rights, even though in three states more than half the fathers saw their children once a week. Almost two-thirds (64%) lacked a visitation order, and 15 percent faced court-ordered restrictions on visitation. The most frequent interventions that programs provided were mediation, assistance to secure legal visitation rights, and client support groups aimed a improving parent-child relationships.

Follow-up interviews indicated that 58 percent of fathers saw their children about the same amount of time after receiving assistance; 27 percent said that contact increased; and 14 percent said that it decreased. Most noncustodial fathers remained dissatisfied with the amount of time they spent with their children, and wanted more contact. In California, the one-site that focused exclusively on mediation, divorced and never-married parents performed similarly with respect to mediation. About 40 percent of both groups appeared for mediation; among those who attended, about two-thirds reached an agreement.

Recruitment

At all sites, recruitment was difficult and time consuming. The sites varied in the clients they targeted and how they attempted to recruit them. Even those sites with the largest number of clients had to make tremendous efforts to identify and recruit low-income, noncustodial fathers. Child support agencies were a major recruitment source in California, Colorado, New Hampshire, and

Washington, and contributed 33 percent of the project participants across all the sites. In addition to recruitment from child support agencies, 24 percent of clients were recruited from community organizations and 19 percent were recruited from public agencies other than child support. No single recruitment strategy or referral source worked equally well across all sites. Most programs found that a wide recruitment approach, including both community organizations and public agencies, was necessary.

Case Management and Retention

Most of the programs aimed to deliver a set of services based on client needs assessed over a period of weeks or months. This goal required that individuals stay connected to the programs and for program staff to track the delivery of services to ensure that clients' needs were met. Many clients, however, were extremely mobile and were involved with the program for only a short period of time. As a result, staff lost contact with many participants who left the program before completing the full service plan that had been developed. High levels of client mobility make service delivery and program evaluation challenging.

Study Limitations

The study does have several limitations. First, it is largely descriptive and provides for only limited multivariate analysis. Second, because of the small size of many programs and the difficulties in recruitment, no treatment and control group design was employed. Thus, the true impact of the program interventions cannot be determined. Third, missing data from the administrative records and from the sites' management information systems meant that sample size for many variables were smaller than the number of participants, reducing the strength of any analysis. Fourth, due to out-dated client contact information, the response rate for the follow-up telephone interviews with clients was insufficient to ensure that the findings can be generalized to all program participants.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

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- Introduction to the Responsible Fatherhood Programs
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The Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration Programs

This report provides findings from an assessment of eight fatherhood demonstration projects funded by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), within the Department of Health and Human Services. These programs were located in:

- California — San Mateo County;
- Colorado — El Paso County;
- Maryland — City of Baltimore;
- Massachusetts — City of Boston
- Missouri — Cape Girardeau County;
- New Hampshire — Belknap, Hillsborough, and Merrimack Counties;
- Washington — Pierce County; and
- Wisconsin — City of Racine.

These demonstrations were designed to determine if activities such as job training, parenting skill development, improved access and visitation, and the provision of needed social services would increase child support payments and compliance. Each program used somewhat different strategies

to improve the employment and earnings of under- and unemployed noncustodial parents (NCPs) and to motivate them to become more financially and emotionally involved in the lives of their children.

Summary of Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation had two components. The first component of the evaluation was an implementation study. Site visits and discussions with program administrators and staff were used to document:

- The way in which each program was organized and administered;
- The services provided;
- The client recruitment strategies attempted; and
- The successes and failures that were encountered by the programs in developing a program and a client base.

The qualitative account of the origins and early implementation experiences of the demonstration projects can be found in the June 2000 report entitled *OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Early Implementation Lessons (*available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/rpt/process.htm).

The second component of the evaluation provides descriptive information on the services provided by and the clients enrolled in the programs and client outcomes. Specifically, this component of the evaluation focuses on the cross-site characteristics and outcomes for the largest single group of participants — 1,674 noncustodial fathers.

The outcome evaluation relies on data from four major sources:

- Case data maintained on individual clients by program staff at each site;
- Telephone interviews with program participants at each site;
- Child support administrative records maintained by state or local child support offices; and
- Employment and earnings records maintained by the state as a part of the Unemployment Compensation Insurance program (UI).

These data are used to describe the clients served at each program and the types of services received, and to measure the employment, child support, and parent-child contact outcomes, including:

- Changes in the percentage of clients who were employed at program enrollment and six months following enrollment;
- Changes in earning levels prior to and following enrollment;
- Changes in employment and earnings for specific subgroups of clients (such as younger and older clients, those with specific types of employment barriers, and those with various types of pre-program work histories);
- Changes in the percentage of clients with child support obligations prior to and following program enrollment;
- Changes in the level of child support obligations prior to and following enrollment;
- Changes in child support payment patterns prior to and following enrollment;
- Changes in the amount of client-child contact pre- and post-enrollment; and
- Changes in clients' levels of satisfaction with their child access prior to and following enrollment.

Summary of Program Implementation Lessons

Among the key findings from the implementation report are the following:

- It is important for architects of programs seeking to increase income and stimulate responsible fatherhood to serve a broad group of participants, be flexible about program design and recruitment, and generate services that match the needs of participants.

- Programs should take advantage of collaborations with other community agencies, but must be knowledgeable about eligibility restrictions imposed by other programs and funding sources.

- It is important to "customize" and "personalize" services provided to project participants by outside agencies to ensure that they receive adequate attention and appropriate treatments.

- Programs serving low-income fathers have identified important gaps in employment services to be filled : apprenticeships, on-the-job training opportunities, and jobs with wage growth. Parents with a history of incarceration and other barriers face particular difficulties.

- Programs are collaborating with child support agencies in new ways to educate parents about the child support program, understand their cases, and explore their options. Program staff would like the child support system to be even more responsive to participants' needs and financial limitations.

- Legal information and assistance on access, visitation, and child support has proven to be extremely popular at every site where it is offered.

- Peer support and case management help cultivate the sense of concern and dignity that participants appreciate experiencing.

- There is no single formula for recruitment and retention; many strategies need to be used to attract various populations. Referrals from child support agencies and mandatory referrals are important sources and should not be overlooked.

- Recruiting young or new fathers has not been easy. Efforts based at hospitals have not been successful where they have been tried; programs are experimenting with school-based referrals.

- Programs need to have dedicated and energetic staff who know about community services and are good at identifying resources.

Organization of The Outcome Study

Including this first chapter, this report has 14 chapters. Because of the lengthy and varied nature of the report, a brief overview of its contents is provided below. In addition, each chapter concludes with a brief summary of major points.

Chapter 2 discusses the importance of child support for low-income families and the special issues that make collecting child support from low-income parents problematic. Much of the current national discussion about responsible fatherhood activities has focused on low-income fathers and programs to serve them. Chapter 3 describes the eight sites that were included in the evaluation and provides some contextual information about the communities in which those sites operated and the structure of the state's child support program. Chapter 4 discusses the methodology for the evaluation, describing the data that was collected, its sources, and how it was analyzed. Chapter 5 discusses how clients were recruited in each of the demonstration sites.

Chapters 6 through 11 focus on the seven sites that provided services primarily to low-income noncustodial fathers. Chapter 6 provides information on the characteristics of the noncustodial fathers and their children. In Chapter 7 detailed information is provided about the employment and child support status of clients at the time of enrollment. Child Support and employment are two of the client characteristics of special interest in this evaluation. Chapter 8 reviews client needs and services at the time of program enrollment. Chapters 9 and 10 provide information on employment and earnings and child support outcomes, respectively. Chapter 11, the last of the chapters focusing exclusively on low-income fathers programs, addresses child access issues as reported by the clients at follow-up.

Chapter 12 is a case study of San Mateo, California, the one program site that focused exclusively on access and custody issues. It is treated separately from the rest because the program design was narrow in scope and its clients were not primarily low income. Chapter 13 provides the clients' assessments of the program services and assistance delivered for the eight sites. The final chapter, Chapter 14 provides a summary of findings from the evaluation and some conclusions.

Chapter 2: Background

In this chapter

- The special child support issues in low-income families
- Support, employment, and parenting issues

The Importance of Child Support in Low-Income Families

The collection of child support is credited with helping to reduce poverty and income inequality among children who live apart from a parent. For example:

- According to an analysis of the National Survey of America's Families, child support comprised 16 percent of income for all families that received it in 1996, 26 percent of income for poor families, and fully 35 percent of income for poor families not receiving welfare (Sorensen and Zibman, 2000).

- As a result of the receipt of child support, an estimated one-half million children were lifted out of poverty and the gap between income in poor and better-off families was reduced (Sorensen and Zibman, 2000).

- Families headed by single mothers who receive at least some child support during the year have a lower poverty rate (22%) compared to families who receive no child support (33%) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999).

- Garfinkel and his colleagues conclude that women on welfare who receive child support are more apt to participate in the labor force themselves and leave public assistance. As a result, each dollar of child support that is received increases the income of the custodial parent by approximately two dollars (Garfinkel, Heintze, and Huang, 2000).

- Strong child support enforcement programs are linked to reduced poverty, reduced welfare caseloads, and reduced rates of divorce, nonmarital birth, and teen births (Barnow, *et al.*, 2000).

Fathers' economic support has strong benefits for children, too. A recent meta-analysis of the literature on child support payments and child outcomes shows that:

- Child support payments are positively associated with children's educational success and negatively associated with children's acting out (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999).

- Children of both sexes and all races whose nonresident fathers pay child support have higher school grades, fewer behavioral problems, and more years of school attainment (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, and Lamb, 2000).

Issues in Collecting Child Support in Low-Income Families

Despite the importance of child support and the success of aggressive enforcement policies, many policymakers and child support scholars question their future efficacy, particularly with low-income families. For example, census data indicate only modest increases in the proportion of never-married mothers reporting receipt of child support from 1991 (15%) to 1997 (22%) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991 and 2000).

There are a number of reasons why child support enforcement has been less effective with low-income and unmarried, noncustodial parents (Johnson and Doolittle, 1996; Furstenberg, *et al.*, 1992).

- Many enforcement tools such as the Federal Parent Locator Service, automatic wage withholding, credit bureau reporting, or matches with financial institutions are effective with noncustodial parents who have stable employment and residence patterns, but are far less effective with parents who are low-income, lack housing stability, and change jobs frequently.

- Even if they could be located, it is questionable whether many low-income fathers have the ability to support their children. Fathers of poor children are often poor themselves and are "dead broke" rather than "deadbeat." According to the National Survey of America's Families, 24 percent of nonresident fathers were "officially" poor in 1996, and another 13 percent were classified as near poor, with earnings below the 1996 poverty threshold for a single person ($8,163) (Sorensen, Mincy, and Halpern, 2000).

Reflecting on their finding that 37 percent of nonresident fathers are in or near poverty themselves, the analysts of the National Survey of America's Families observe:

> About 70 percent of poor children eligible for child support were not getting it in 1996. In addition, it will probably be difficult to obtain child support for these children because their parents are, on average, more disadvantaged than the parents of poor children who already receive child support (Sorensen and Zibman, 2000:1).

Ethnographic studies of low-income fathers and mothers support the view that a father's economic marginality reduces both his paternal participation and the feasibility of obtaining reliable economic support from him. For example, based on in-depth interviews with parents, Edin, Lein, and Nelson (1998) conclude that:

- Poor men value fatherhood, but they frequently scrape together a living from low-wage and irregular jobs, including day labor, casual labor, and underground work that is incompatible with making regular and substantial financial contributions to their children.

- Unemployed fathers who are unable to provide for their children financially often separate from their families out of shame or because mothers are less supportive of their contact.

- Underemployed fathers are frustrated that women often use formal support as a "negotiation tool," while those who do pay child support have strong feelings toward its inflexibility and unreasonably high payments.

Interviews with eight low-income, African-American, new fathers show that work preparation and labor market experiences were the best predictors of paternal involvement (Johnson, 2000). There is also evidence that the loss of manufacturing jobs has lowered the economic opportunities for low-income, African-American men. A series of interviews with African-American fathers of all ages shows a steady deterioration in the percentage who had stable employment and families at age 23: dropping from 60 percent in the oldest cohort to 20 percent in the youngest. This researcher concludes that for low-income fathers, focusing on the importance of financial contributions may actually discourage paternal involvement altogether (Roy, 2000).

Addressing the Problem of Non-Payment

Recognizing that many noncustodial parents are themselves struggling financially, advocates, policymakers, and administrators of the child support program have suggested alternatives to following standard program procedures with poor nonresident fathers. For example, in an action

transmittal, the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) indicated that states could craft policies that are more responsive to low-income, noncustodial parents, including:

- Compromising arrears owed to the state;
- Making maximum use of improved methods of determining income and resources of noncustodial parents and limiting the number of cases where income is imputed;
- Choosing not to impose support orders for periods prior to the date of the support order or limiting the time an order can be retroactive; and
- Referring noncustodial parents to work programs and other "nontraditional approaches to assist low-income noncustodial parents" (OCSE-PIQ-00-03, 2000).

Based on estimates that 60 percent of NCPs who do not pay child support are limited by income, education, high rates of institutionalization, or intermittent employment, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) also concluded that the traditional policies and practices that states use to set child support orders for low-income, noncustodial parents do not generate payments. The OIG recommended that the Office of Child Support Enforcement engage in "systematic experimentation" to determine if payment is improved by:

- Changing the period of retroactivity used in determining the amount of support to be paid;
- Providing debt compromise;
- Offering alternatives to traditional income imputation; and
- Requiring unemployed, noncustodial parents to participate in job programs (OIG, 2000).

Experts[1] in the field of child support enforcement have echoed many of these suggestions by urging states to:

- Pass through all the child support they collect to families receiving welfare;
- Set support orders based on the father's ability to pay;

[1] The proposed changes do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement.

- Manage uncollectible arrearages through debt compromise;
- Suspend orders during incarceration to avoid a build-up of arrears;
- Drop enforcement action in reunited families; and
- Expand case management to ensure that low-income, noncustodial parents receive services to address their barriers to employment (Turetsky, 2000; Reichert, 1999).

The need to enhance the employment status and earning capacity of low-income fathers is an often-repeated theme, and many states have developed programs to provide employment services to low-income fathers (Sorensen, 1997). As the writers of one guide for state policy makers note:

> One of the most promising solutions for reducing childhood poverty in the United States — and promoting the formation of married, two-parent families — is helping low-income unwed fathers find work (Sylvester and Reich, 2000: 21).

Several studies support the conclusion that steady employment is associated with marriage and strong parenting. For example:

- In a 1995 study, Testa and Krogh found that single African-American men with stable employment were twice as likely as their unemployed counterparts to marry the mother of the children they conceive out of wedlock.

- A 1990 study of 289 single teen-mother families on AFDC in Wisconsin found the father's work experience to be the strongest predictor of his remaining involved in the child's life (Danzinger and Radin, 1990).

- Findings from the Fragile Families and Child-Wellbeing Survey show that while many unmarried couples are romantically involved and intend to marry after the birth of their child, the father's employment status has the biggest effect on increasing the odds that the mother plans to form a family unit with him and, especially, to marry (Mincy and Huang, 2001).

- A 1996 study showed that unmarried parents who are employed are significantly more likely to acknowledge paternity on a voluntary basis (Pearson and Thoennes, 1996).

- Several studies find that most parents who are not paying child support regularly attribute nonpayment to unstable employment patterns and a lack of money (Pearson, *et al.*, 1996; Braver, *et al.*, 1993).

Another recommended way of promoting the voluntary payment of child support among noncustodial parents of all income levels is to improve their access to their children. Most studies find a positive correlation between visitation and support performance. For example:

- More than two decades ago, David Chambers (1979) found that fathers with little or no contact with their children after the divorce paid only about 34 percent of their child support, while fathers in regular contact paid 85 percent.

- A decade ago, Seltzer (1991) reached similar conclusions when she analyzed a national probability sample of adults in the United States. Two-thirds of those with frequent contact paid child support, while payments were made by only one-fifth of those with no contact.

- More recent census data show that noncustodial parents who owed child support in 1997 were more than twice as likely to have made payments if they had either joint custody or visitation rights (73.3% versus 35.5%) (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000).

Improving child support payment may also be a means of increasing access. It has been impossible to definitively discern a causal relationship because access and child support compliance are so interrelated and visitation is so difficult to accurately measure (Cabrera and Evans, 2000; Pearson and Thoennes, 1988). However, in her most recent analysis of the 1987-1988 National Survey of Families and Households, Seltzer (2000: 56) concludes that paying "child support may have a small direct effect [on access], even after father's visiting patterns have been established." Similarly, Edin, *et al.* (2000), conclude that fathers who could not provide for their children financially felt a sense of shame that often led them to withdraw from their children.

Whether payment leads to contact, contact leads to payment, or both contact and payment are the result of other variables, such as a sense of commitment, it is clear that fathers who see their children do a better job of paying support.

The Growth of Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Welfare, workforce development, and child support programs have all begun to adopt approaches that emphasize ability and willingness to pay and encourage more cooperative behavior through a consideration of the concerns and contributions of both mothers and fathers.

The Child Access Demonstration Projects

Some of the first experiments to increase child support compliance were the Child Access Demonstration Projects funded by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. Implemented in seven different states, the projects involved the use of mediation, parent education, counseling, and other measures to assist parents in communicating about the needs of their children following parental separation and divorce, and to increase the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. Although each site provided somewhat different services, all of the projects tried to increase child support awards and payments through the promotion of parent-child contact.

The evaluation of the Child Access Demonstration Projects revealed that although the interventions had only limited success in solving access problems among extremely disputatious and highly conflicted couples, they did assist many noncustodial parents in the resolution of their access problems. Specifically, the study found:

- Fully 65 to 70 percent of those who attempted to mediate reached an agreement.
- Mediation and other access interventions garnered high levels of user satisfaction from both custodial and noncustodial parents.
- Enhancing access appeared to encourage voluntary payment of child support obligations among obligors at all income levels.
- Ultimately, although the research evidence was mixed, payment was more closely aligned with the financial resources of the noncustodial parent rather than his access situation.

The evaluators recommended that courts and other agencies help parents with access problems by developing no- and low-cost dispute resolution interventions and that they be made available to

parents at the early stages of dispute, when it is most possible to get successful outcomes (Price, *et al.*, 1994; Pearson, *et al.*, 1996; Pearson and Thoennes, 1998).

The findings from the Child Access Demonstration Projects — and the recommendations contained in a Report of the U.S. Commission on Child and Family Welfare endorsing efforts at all government levels to promote parent-child contact — supported federal efforts to expand programs that promote parental access. Included in P.L.104-193 (1996), the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA), was a new provision to the Title IV-D of the Social Security Act (Section 469B), giving the federal Child Support Enforcement program authority to award funds to states to establish and administer programs that support and facilitate noncustodial parents' access to their children. Since 1997, Congress has appropriated $10 million each year to promote the development of a variety of programs designed to alleviate the problems associated with access and visitation. In 1997, these grants supported 131 local programs in 30 states that served almost 20,000 individuals (Fender, *et al.*, 1999). By FY2000, there were grant-funded programs in all 50 states that served about 50,000 individuals (OCSE-IM-01-03, 2001).

Parents' Fair Share Demonstration Projects

The first large-scale project on providing employment services to increase child support payments among poor, noncustodial parents was the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration (PFS). This demonstration was conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation with support from the Administration on Children and Families, the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, the Department of Labor, the Department of Agriculture, and the private foundation community.

PFS provided employment assistance, peer support, case management, and temporarily lowered child support orders to under- or unemployed noncustodial parents, with the objective of making them more financially and emotionally involved in the lives of their children. Launched in 1994 in seven research sites, PFS involved the random assignment of 5,600 noncustodial parents to treatment and non-treatment categories. The project focused on noncustodial parents at the point of court intervention for nonpayment of court-ordered child support.

The evaluation of PFS found that:

- Offering employment services helps to distinguish between those who are unwilling to pay, and those who are unable to pay, child support.

- The interventions were able to identify unreported employment and resources, with the result that the payment of formal child support increased.

- There was little effect on earnings and employment for most participants, except among the most disadvantaged fathers who lacked a high school diploma and had little recent work experience (Martinez and Miller, 2000; Johnson and Doolittle, 1996; Doolittle and Lynn, 1998).

- There was some evidence of trade-offs in formal and informal support among PFS participants. While parents in the PFS group increased their formal payment of child support, custodial parents reported some decline in informal support resulting in no changes in the total level of support available to custodial parents when both informal and formal support were taken into account (Knox and Redcross, 2000).

- There was no evidence of an overall increase in the amount of contact that fathers had with their children. Regular contact did increase among those with the lowest rates of pre-program contact, and there was evidence of increased engagement in parenting among noncustodial parents who had no high school credential.

Ultimately, the researchers concluded that there are complicated connections between financial and nonfinancial involvement and that the program often had effects on one type of support without affecting the other (Miller and Knox, 2001).

Ongoing: Partners for Fragile Families

Some observers contend that early intervention is the key to increasing fathers' involvement in both financial and non-financial aspects of their children's lives. Past programs have generally enrolled parents referred by the courts, who typically have substantial child support debts, and often have been separated from their children for a number of years. Targeting programs to serve unwed fathers at the birth of their babies, when they are attached to the mothers and their babies and have high hopes for raising their children, may produce more substantial results (McLanahan, 1999).

The Partners for Fragile Families (PFF) demonstrations are employing this early intervention approach by serving young, never-married, noncustodial parents who do not have a child support

order in place and may face obstacles to employment. The PFF projects test new ways for state-run child support enforcement programs and community-based organizations to work together to help young fathers obtain employment, make child support payments, and learn parenting skills; and to help parents build stronger partnerships and share the legal, financial, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood.

The PFF demonstration sites, through their state Child Support Enforcement agencies, have been granted waivers by the Secretary of Health and Human Services to allow private foundation funds to be used to match federal funds that support PFF program services. The Ford Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and five other foundations are providing funding. The project evaluation commissioned by HHS has three broad purposes: to increase knowledge about systems change; to build knowledge about program operations and delivery of services to fragile families; and to describe client behavior. Process and outcome evaluations will be conducted by interviewing all service providers, including child support enforcement, community-based organizations, and partner agencies; and by analyzing client data and follow-up surveys. Case studies will also be conducted.

Ongoing: Welfare-to-Work Grants

Another group of responsible fatherhood programs were implemented in connection with the Welfare to Work (WtW) program, authorized under the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. WtW aims to assist hard-to-employ welfare recipients, and other low-income individuals including noncustodial fathers, in order to move them into jobs and achieve economic self sufficiency. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, working with the Department of Labor, sponsored a study of 11 selected WtW grantees with an NCP focus to identify how some WtW grantees have designed and implemented programs that address the employment and other service needs of NCPs. The report, *Serving Noncustodial Parents: A Descriptive Study of Welfare-to-Work Programs*, prepared by the Urban Institute and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., found that programs for low-income noncustodial parents can be organized and operated by a variety of administrative entities and take many different formats as long as they pursue a collaborative approach and involve many local agencies. Like most programs serving low-income NCPs, recruitment is a critical challenge for WtW programs, and the most successful use multiple outreach techniques. Also among the report conclusions was the importance of using a mix of positive and negative incentives

to encourage program participation. Positive incentives might include case management and child support payment options; negative incentives might include the threat of incarceration. The report authors viewed helping NCPs understand and negotiate the child support system as important program services and suggested that the keys to job retention might be in the provision of ongoing case management and relevant support services (Martinson, Trutko, and Strong, 2000).

Ongoing Congressional Interest

Congressional interest in fatherhood remains high. The House of Representatives passed enabling legislation for projects to promote responsible fatherhood four times in the past five years. In the 108th Session, responsible fatherhood provisions were included in the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act of 2002, the re-authorization legislation for the TANF program. This bill provides $20 million to public and nonprofit community entities for activities to support responsible fatherhood and healthy marriages.

Bills to support various fatherhood activities also have been introduced in the Senate, but have not been passed. For example, in the 108th Congress, the Compassion and Responsibility Act contains fatherhood provisions similar to those passed in the House of Representatives. Senate Bill 604, the Responsible Fatherhood Act of 2003, would provide $50 million to states and local entities to fund programs to support responsible fatherhood and marriage. The bill also contains provisions for national and state media campaigns to promote responsible fatherhood.

Summary

- The collection of child support is credited with helping to reduce poverty and income inequality among children who live apart from a parent.

- Many enforcement tools such as the Federal Parent Locator Service, automatic wage withholding, credit bureau reporting, or matches with financial institutions are effective with noncustodial parents who have stable employment and residence patterns, but are far less effective with parents who are low-income, lack housing stability, and change jobs frequently.

- The need to enhance the employment status and earning capacity of low-income fathers is an often-repeated theme, and many states have developed programs to provide employment services to low-income fathers.

- Another recommended way of promoting the voluntary payment of child support among noncustodial parents of all income levels is to improve their access to their children.

- Welfare, workforce development, and child support programs have all begun to adopt approaches that emphasize ability and willingness to pay and encourage more cooperative behavior through a consideration of the concerns and contributions of both mothers and fathers.

Chapter 3: Profile of the Programs

In this chapter

- A description of the fatherhood program in each state
- A description of the child support system in each state

The OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Projects were based in eight locations.

- California — San Mateo County;
- Colorado — El Paso County;
- Maryland — City of Baltimore;
- Massachusetts — City of Boston
- Missouri — Cape Girardeau County;
- New Hampshire — Belknap, Hillsborough, and Merrimack Counties;
- Washington — Pierce County; and
- Wisconsin — City of Racine.

Each of the programs was designed to explore ways of improving parental involvement — both emotional and financial — among low-income, noncustodial parents. Seven of these projects were funded by OCSE in response to a solicitation to states for the design and implementation of demonstration projects that would increase child support payments and compliance by fathers through such activities as job training, parenting skill development, improved access and visitation, and the provision of needed social services. The solicitation sought innovative project ideas from states and did not set forth a specific project design for each of the projects to implement. In addition, the State of Washington received a waiver and funding for a similar project, but under a different process. Every site was at liberty to craft unique collaborations, determine the types of clients to serve, and the types of services to offer.

Each setting presented unique demographic, economic, and political features that helped to shape the type of program that evolved. The features of each state's child support program were also relevant since the state IV-D agency administered the OCSE grants and played a variety of roles in managing and implementing the programs. The child support agencies in the study included a mix of state and county administered programs. Details on the settings in which the Responsible Fatherhood Projects were conducted are presented in an earlier report, *OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Early Implementation Lessons* (Pearson, *et al.*, 2000). This chapter reviews some of the key features of each program, with special attention to the types of services they offered. Readers are referred to the earlier report for a more detailed discussion of program origins, operation, and implementation patterns.

Some of the most salient demographic features of each site are summarized in Table 3-1. Table 3-2 presents some of the key features of the IV-D programs in each of the states, and Table 3-3 summarizes highlights of the program. All summary tables are presented at the end of this chapter.

California

California's responsible fatherhood project, known as "Supportive Services for Noncustodial Parents," was administered by the child support enforcement agency in San Mateo County (known as the Family Support Division). San Mateo County was the most affluent project site. According to the 2000 census, the median household income for San Mateo County residents was $70,819, and 39 percent of adult residents held a bachelor's or advanced degree. The comparable national averages were $41,994 and 24 percent, respectively. San Mateo County had the lowest poverty rate of all the demonstration project sites, with 13 percent of single-parent families having incomes that fell below the poverty level. Unemployment rates in the nearest metropolitan area, San Francisco, were also extremely low and declined from 2.9 percent, when the project began in October 1998, to 1.8 percent in December 2000, when the process of generating clients for the evaluation ended. The national unemployment rates at these two time points were 4.5 and 4.0 percent, respectively.

Services in California

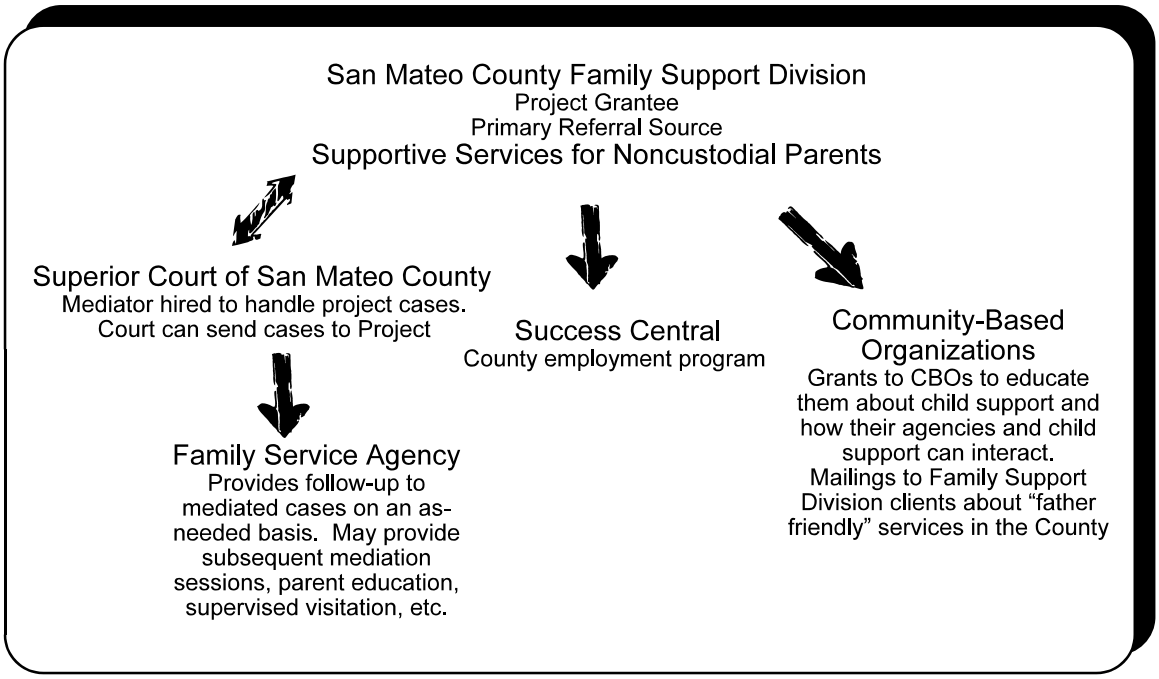
As originally designed, the program was intended to provide:

- Employment services;
- Mediation to help promote contact between noncustodial parents and their children; and
- Supervised visitation and case management in more complex cases.

As the program developed, it quickly became clear that the major focus would be on mediation. There was little demand for employment services, and little use of supervised visitation that involves third-party monitoring of access when there is concern for the welfare of a child during visits with a noncustodial parent. Because the California program was the only site with a primary emphasis on mediation, client characteristics and program outcomes are analyzed and discussed separately from the other sites in Chapter 12.

The OCSE grant was used to retain a bilingual mediator at the domestic relations court to serve clients of the Family Support Division. Although mediation is widely used to resolve parental conflict after a separation or divorce and to promote parent-child contact, it is traditionally reserved for cases set for hearing to either establish or modify a court order. Since many Family Support Division clients are never-married and lack a legally enforceable order for visitation, court-based mediation was not an option for them. As a result of the grant, all Family Support Division clients were eligible for mediation services at no charge regardless of whether they had a court-ordered agreement concerning custody and/or visitation.

Referrals were made by all types of child support personnel, including customer service representatives, attorneys, establishment technicians, and enforcement staff. Child support staff viewed the offer of free mediation as an effective way of responding to parents who mentioned access problems when discussing their non-compliance with child support. The mediation was conducted at the court, usually in a single session, although clients could pursue additional mediation at no charge with staff at the Family Service Agency, a community-based organization providing a variety of support services for families, including case management, parent education, and/or supervised visitation.



Child Support in California

California's IV-D program is county administered. During this demonstration project, California undertook a major restructuring of its child support program, transferring enforcement duties from the district attorneys to a newly created Department of Child Support Services. A recent study of California's IV-D program (Sorensen and Zibman, 2002) resulted in the following profile of child support in the state:

- Among IV-D cases, 57 percent of those with orders had a child support arrearage.
- The state charges substantial interest on arrears. Effective in 1992, all California counties were required to charge interest at the rate of 10 percent per year. Collections are applied to the interest balance, before the principal is reduced.

- The child support agency will enter a default judgement for NCPs who fail to appear at order-establishment hearings. California has a default establishment rate of 68 percent. However, in San Mateo County, the figure is far lower: 42 percent (Jensen, 2002).

- If no income history is available, income is presumed in an amount that results in an order equal to the Minimum Basic Standard of Adequate Care (welfare eligibility amount). San Mateo County estimates that fewer than 1 percent of all orders are based on the MBSAC due to rigorous efforts to find actual income information (Jensen, 2002).

- San Mateo County generally asks for an order based on minimum wage if actual income information cannot be located. This translates into a monthly order of $247 for one child. In counties that use the MBSAC, the figure is $400 per month. If the order amount is too high, the NCP must act to have the default judgment set aside within six months. NCPs are required to pay a fee to answer a notice of paternity or support order establishment.

Colorado

Colorado's Responsible Fatherhood Project, called the Parent Opportunity Program (POP), targeted unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents in El Paso and Teller counties for job training and placement, parenting education, access assistance, and child support help. El Paso County is largely urban, while Teller County is chiefly rural. Both counties are predominantly white, non-Hispanic. In 1998, when POP was beginning, the El Paso County (Colorado Springs metro area) unemployment rate was 4.0 percent and median household income stood at nearly $46,844. When recruitment ended in December 2000, the unemployment rate had dropped to 2.3 percent. Thus, El Paso County was the second most affluent site in the demonstration project, and it had one of the lowest non-marital birth rates.

Services in Colorado

At the time of the study, POP was administered by the El Paso County Department of Human Services in Colorado Springs, and involved a collaboration among a variety of public and private agencies, including the Center on Fathering of the El Paso Department of Human Services; Goodwill Industries, which is the privatized employment vendor for El Paso County; the privatized child

support vendor for El Paso and Teller counties;[1] and the Women's Resource Agency. The key services that POP offered to its clients included the following:

- Assessments by POP staff to determine employment, child support, and child access needs;
- Assistance with job search and placement by Goodwill case managers;
- Informal guidelines calculations, child support modifications, negotiation of payment plans, and expedited income withholding services by child support technicians;
- Fathering classes and parenting support services by staff at the Center on Fathering;
- Informal outreach to custodial parents to establish and negotiate child access arrangements; and
- Formal mediation by court mediators to develop parenting plans and resolve disputes about access.

In order to participate in POP, individuals had to (1) reside in either El Paso or Teller counties; (2) be legally and medically capable of working; (3) have at least one non-resident child; and (4) be either unemployed or underemployed. The "flexible" definition of underemployment adopted by program staff was income at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level.

During most of its operations, the project was staffed by a coordinator and one full-time and one half-time case manager. Clients who enrolled in POP began with an intake interview/assessment with the POP case manager. This allowed the client and case manager to develop a case plan and identify the necessary service referrals, including referrals for employment assistance and child support interventions.

Project funds were used to help fund specialized POP workers within the key collaborating agencies. This allowed the program to utilize experienced service providers, while ensuring that the referral

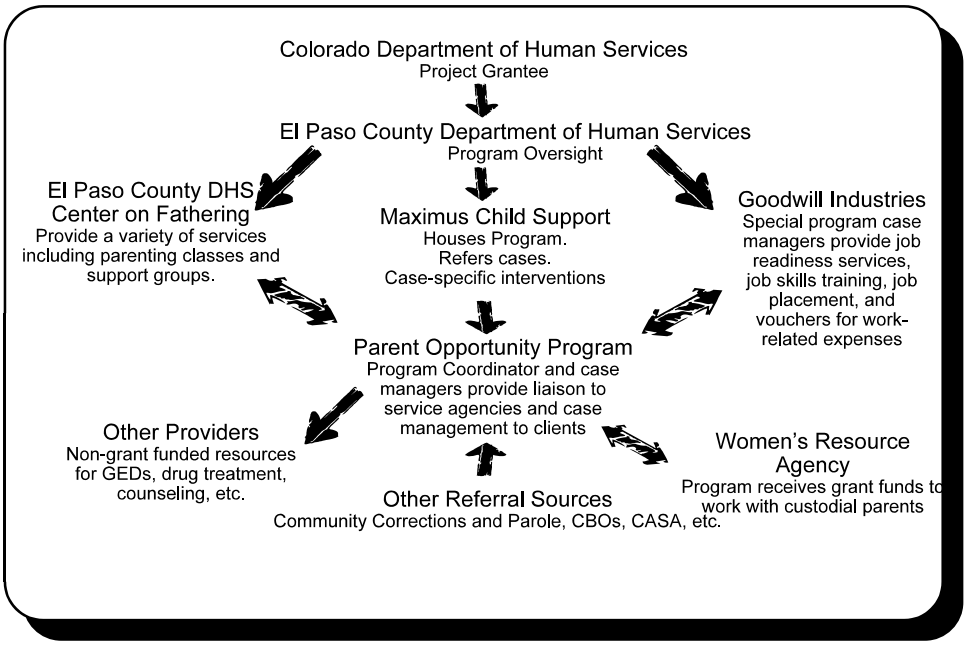
[1] Child support services in El Paso and Teller counties, Colorado, are delivered by a privatized vendor. When the project began, this vendor was Maximus. Midway through the project, Policy Studies Inc. (PSI) was awarded the child support contract.

agencies maintained close contact with POP case managers, and clients received individualized attention.

For example, by funding a staff position at Goodwill, POP ensured that clients received individual attention from a vendor with extensive experience working with hard-to-place individuals, including former felons. POP clients could receive a wide array of employment services: GED, job skills training, job readiness classes, and placement assistance. The POP case manager communicated frequently with the specialized worker at Goodwill to monitor client progress. Client compliance meant attending all scheduled meetings with Goodwill case managers and job developers, attending training sessions, and making at least four contacts with potential employers each week.

The child support office also designated a worker to serve as a liaison to the project and project clients. CSE staff performed informal calculations of the guideline to explore whether clients were eligible for child support modifications or new payment schedules. POP case managers routinely reported to the agency when clients obtained employment in order to implement wage withholding on an expedited basis, rather than waiting for the new hire reporting process to take effect. Although POP case managers and CSE technicians experimented with suspending child support obligations for 90 days while clients participated in job skills and job search activities, this was discontinued due to concerns about the abuse of the practice and a sense that wage withholding was easier for clients to accept if it was in place from the time of the first paycheck.

The Center on Fathering, which is a special unit within the El Paso County Department of Human Services, provided POP clients with peer support and/or classes on conflict resolution, fathering/co-parenting, and parenting. POP case managers also referred participants with parenting and access problems to El Paso County's Office of Dispute Resolution, which offered court-based mediation services. POP case managers, sometimes assisted by the Women's Resource Agency, worked with female custodial, as well as noncustodial, parents on the issues of access and visitation on an informal basis and attempted to set up, or reestablish, a mutually acceptable access plan when the custodial parent was reluctant to formally mediate.



Child Support in Colorado

Like California, Colorado's IV-D program is administered at the county level, with El Paso and Teller counties contracting the program to a private agency. Among the child support facts and issues relevant for POP clients are the following:

- Colorado uses an Income Shares child support guideline, which includes an adjustment for low-income NCPs.
- Colorado charges debt and retroactive support back to the birth of the child (or date of separation).
- Charging interest is a county option, and, like 29 other Colorado counties, El Paso and Teller do not impose it.
- A high proportion of Colorado's IV-D cases have arrears (84%), with Colorado cases comprising more than 2 percent of the national total of unpaid child support but only 1.1 percent of the national total caseload.

- Colorado imputes income to NCPs if actual earnings are unknown and, like 34 other states, attributes the minimum wage at 40 hours per week.

Maryland

The OCSE grant to the Community Services Administration of the Maryland Department of Human Resources funded two Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration Projects. In Baltimore, the grant built on the Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Program, a state-funded initiative in operation since 1994. The grant was also used to initiate father-focused programming in rural Charles County. However, program operations ended in Charles County by the end of the first grant year and that site is not included in this evaluation (See the report *OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Early Implementation Lessons* (Pearson, *et al.*, 2000) for more information about the Charles County program).

Baltimore City, Maryland, is an urban site that is heavily African-American. Among the sites in the present study, it has the lowest median income level, the lowest high-school graduation rate, and the highest single-parent poverty rate. For example, the median income for Baltimore's households was $30,078, compared with a U.S. average of $41,994. While 80 percent of U.S. adults had graduated high school, this was the case for 68 percent of Baltimore residents. And the percent of single mothers with income below the poverty level was 38 percent in Baltimore, compared with the U.S. total of 34 percent. Baltimore's unemployment rate at project start was 5.5 percent — the highest among the eight project sites — but dropped to 3.7 percent by December 2000, when project enrollment ended.

Services in Maryland

OCSE funding allowed for the expansion of the state-funded Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers to the southern quadrant of the city, which is economically distressed and geographically isolated. The OCSE funded program, known simply as the Responsible Fatherhood Project (RFP), collaborated with two key entities in South Baltimore: Harbor Hospital, which housed the project office and whose pediatric social work staff agreed to assist with recruiting new parents and pregnant teenagers; and the Southern Neighborhood Service Center, which had linkages to neighborhood associations and community groups in the area. Other major project collaborators

were the Baltimore Urban League and the Baltimore Employment Exchange, which provided employment services and weekly employment development classes.

RFP targeted unwed or expectant fathers (including those who were in intact families) ages 14 to 45 who "were at risk of forsaking their parental responsibilities…due to social and economic disadvantages." Primary referrals sources included the courts, the correction system, and word of mouth. Clients met with case managers for an intake assessment, during which they identified their needs, capabilities, and goals.

The key components of RFP included the following:

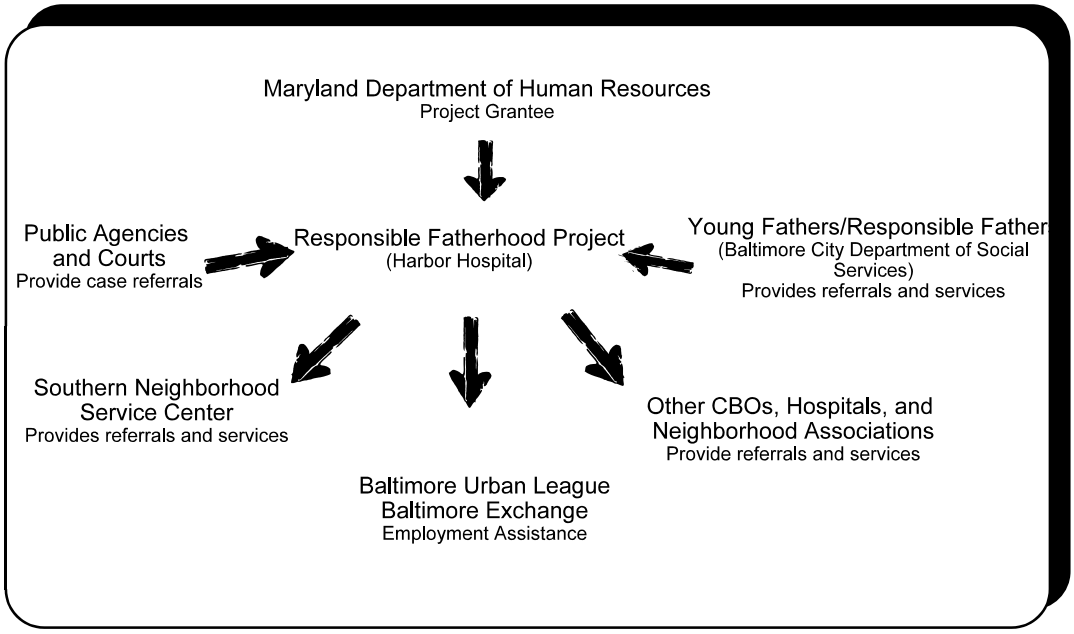
- A six-month program of weekly, two-hour parenting/peer support sessions. RFP used the Responsible Fatherhood Program curriculum developed by the National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership (NPCL), which includes parenting, life skills, and relationship components.

- Participants received two free bus tokens and a $4 McDonald's gift certificate each time they came to a class or meeting with a case manager.

- Clients also received a $50 stipend at graduation and an interim stipend of $50 if they attended parenting/peer support sessions regularly for the first four months.

- Clients who attended at least 80 percent of the class sessions received a certificate at a formal graduation ceremony, and the option of participating in an "After Care Program" for continued group support.

In addition to the parenting/peer support component, referrals were made for employment, anger management, and substance abuse treatment on an as-needed basis. Clients who were under- or unemployed could be referred for job search and employment skills training. RFP offered a court-approved treatment program for batterers at no charge to the participants, and could make referrals for services such as substance abuse treatment, mediation, or counseling.



Child Support in Maryland

The Maryland IV-D program is administered at the county level, and in Baltimore City, child support operations are provided by a private contractor. Salient facts about the child support system in the state and county, include the following (Conte, 1998):

- Like California and Colorado, Maryland uses an Income Shares model to compute the amount of the support order.

- Maryland uses minimum orders of $20 to $50 per month when the noncustodial parent's income is less than $447 per month.

- The economic recession of 1990 to 1991, which continued until well into the 1990s in Maryland, was largely responsible for a dramatic increase in the rate of default on child support cases and increased arrears.

- A simultaneous decrease in the percentage of public assistance cases, and decline in the state's AFDC collections, translated into a drop in the ratio of program revenues to outlays.

- IV-D debt appears to be a major factor in the collection of arrears. Research also ties child support collection to NCP income and employment, and perceptions of poor customer service.

Massachusetts

The Massachusetts program serves Boston, a large urban site with a racially mixed population, more than a quarter of whom are African-American. Like San Mateo, it has a high college graduation rate (36%) and approximately 44 percent of the work force is employed in professional and managerial occupations. At the same time, a substantial proportion of single-parent families have incomes that fall below the poverty level (37%). At the start of the project, the unemployment rate for Boston was 2.5 percent. In December 2000, it stood at 1.7 percent.

The OCSE-funded project, Father Friendly Initiative (FFI), operated under the Boston Healthy Start Initiative of the Boston Public Health Commission. It involved a collaboration between the Boston Public Health Commission and the Department of Revenue, which operates the child support program in Massachusetts.

Services in Massachusetts

FFI aimed to serve low-income fathers and enhance their participation in their children's lives. Designed to reintegrate the father into the family, the FFI case manager worked with each client to assess the barriers to family reintegration and to identify the appropriate mix of services needed.

FFI publicized its services aggressively and gained visibility through the use of radio commercials and bus advertisements, as well as giveaways in Boston Healthy Start booths at job fairs, concerts, and other public events that attract families. FFI also accepted referrals from a variety of community groups, as well as child support, health service providers, the court, the Department of Corrections, and other public agencies.

Key services provided under the program included:

- A weekly peer support group offered at four different locations. In most cases, participants attended the support group on a voluntary basis; about 15 percent of the participants who were referred by the criminal justice system reported that they were required to attend. The intervention was both educational and therapeutic. Adopted from the NPCL curriculum, there were 16 lessons covering the issues of self-esteem, child care, child development, relationships, and parenting. In addition to presentations and activities on these topics, there was also open-ended discussion about these and other issues relevant to the participants.

- Employment services, including job readiness, job training, and job search, were provided through a variety of collaborations. For example, FFI collaborated with STRIVE, a community-based nonprofit organization that serves the hard-to-employ, to offer basic employment training; and Massachusetts Rehabilitation, which offers longer-term vocational training programs. FFI also worked with a job developer retained by the Department of Revenue to cultivate employers willing to hire hard-to-place populations.

Individuals who participated in FFI were eligible to receive a variety of other services as needed. These services were provided through collaborations with local community health centers, public agencies, and on-site resources at FFI. For example, FFI offered participants assistance with paternity establishment, child support review, advocacy in obtaining visitation and custody rights, health services, and counseling.

Child Support in Massachusetts

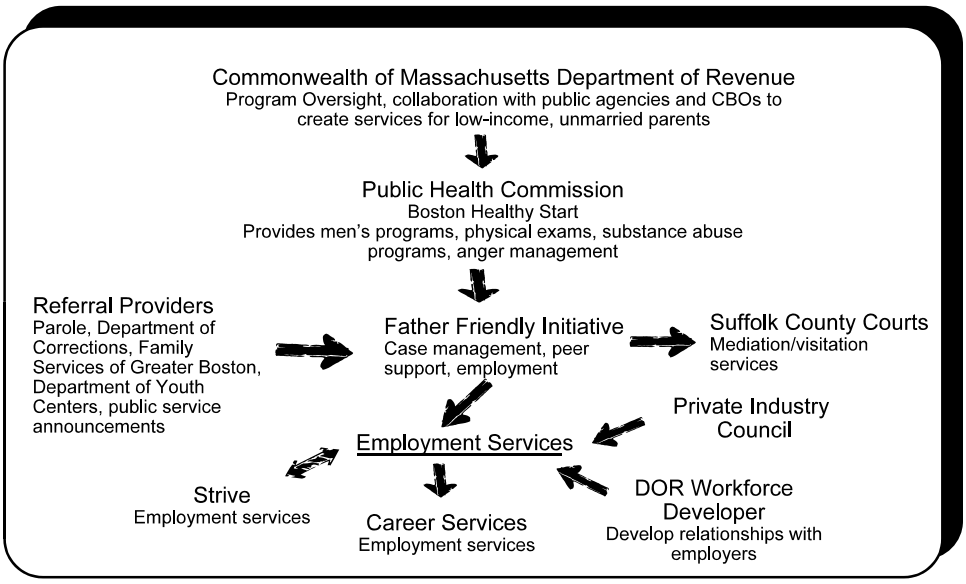
The IV-D program in Massachusetts is administered at the state level by the Department of Revenue. Relevant facts about the child support system in the state include the following:

- Massachusetts imposes an annual interest rate of 12 percent on unpaid child support balances and a penalty of 6 percent.

- Massachusetts uses judicial processes exclusively to establish IV-D child support orders.

- Its guideline is a hybrid of Income Shares and Percentage of Income models where the custodial parent's income is not considered in setting the order amount until it reaches a certain threshold.
- The minimum order amount in Massachusetts was recently increased to $80 per month but was $50 during the time period covered in this evaluation.

- In 1997, Massachusetts created the Governor's Advisory Commission on Responsible Fatherhood and Family Support, an interagency effort to develop initiatives that increase fathers' positive involvement in the lives of their children.



Missouri

The Proud Parents Program was administered by the Office of Child Support Enforcement of the Missouri Department of Social Services and operated in Cape Girardeau County. Cape Girardeau County is fairly rural and is heavily comprised of white non-Hispanics. Median household income in the county is below the U.S. total and stood at $36,458. The educational profile of Cape Girardeau residents mirrors the U.S. average, with 81 percent being high school graduates and 24 percent having graduated from college. Unemployment in the St. Louis metropolitan area did not change during the project and remained at approximately 3.5 percent.

Services in Missouri

Noncustodial parents who enrolled in Proud Parents received the following services:

- A three-hour parenting workshop dealing with fatherhood issues;
- Referral to a statewide employment program for job assistance; and
- Referral to mediators for assistance with child access.

The goal of the program was to provide a three-hour workshop for noncustodial fathers to address a wide range of fatherhood issues, including self-esteem, father-child relationship, mother-child relationship, and financial responsibilities. In addition, participants who needed help with employment were referred to Parents' Fair Share, a statewide employment program that originated in the pilot phase of the national demonstration project of the same name, but is now an independent service. Workshop participants who needed help seeing their children were referred to family mediation through Mediation Achieving Results for Children (M.A.R.C.H.).

The project had major problems with recruitment, which are outlined in more detail in *OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Early Implementation Lessons* (Pearson, *et al.*, 2000). Initial attempts to recruit participants for the parenting workshop by mailing invitations directly to poor, unmarried parents in cases with children less than two years old and asking them to participate yielded virtually no attendees. Subsequently, the project hired an independent, part-time outreach worker to recruit unwed fathers with children under the age of five from child support agency referrals, Missouri's Parents' Fair Share, Department of Probation/Parole, Head Start, and other agencies. Outreach workers received a $10 bonus for each father they recruited to the parenting seminar.

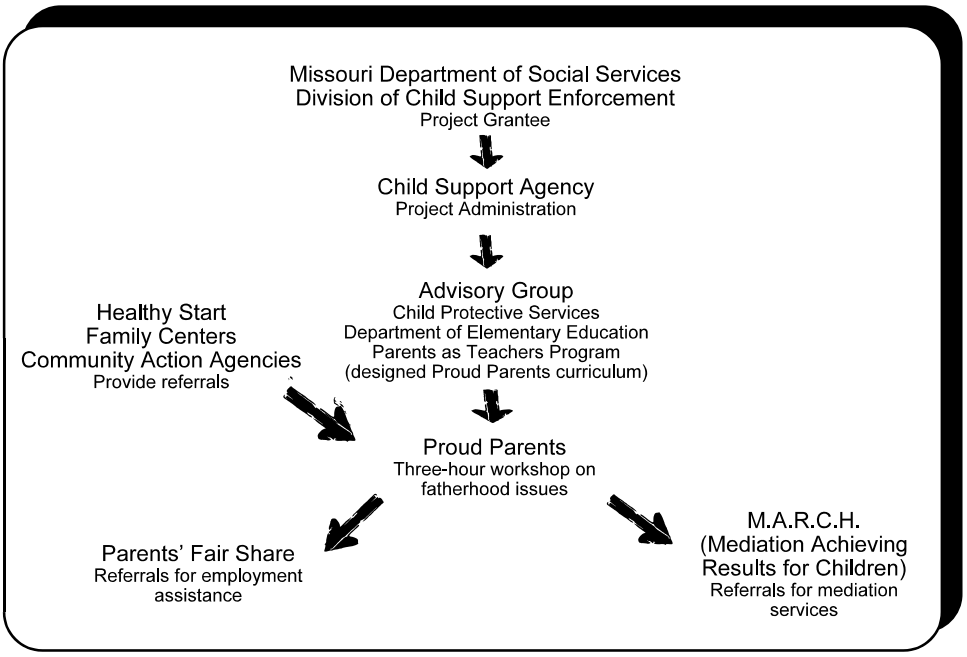
Child Support in Missouri

The Missouri IV-D program is administered at the state level. Among key aspects of the state's child support enforcement system are the following:

- Missouri uses an Income Shares model to compute the amount of the support order.

- Like Colorado and Washington, child support technicians can establish child support orders administratively.

- Missouri had one of the lowest cost-effectiveness ratios ($3.37), tied as one of the lowest percentage of ordered cases with collections (57%), the second lowest percentage of current support due that was paid (48%), and the lowest percentage of cases with arrears that paid (47%).



New Hampshire

New Hampshire's program was known as Phoenix Project and operated in three counties: Belknap, Hillsborough, and Merrimack. New Hampshire was the most rural site and was almost entirely comprised of white non-Hispanics (94%). The unemployment rates and single-parent poverty rates for the counties that participated in the project fell below the U.S. total and stood at 2.2 percent and 20 to 27 percent, respectively. At 87 percent, the high-school graduation rate for participating New Hampshire counties was higher than the U.S. average.

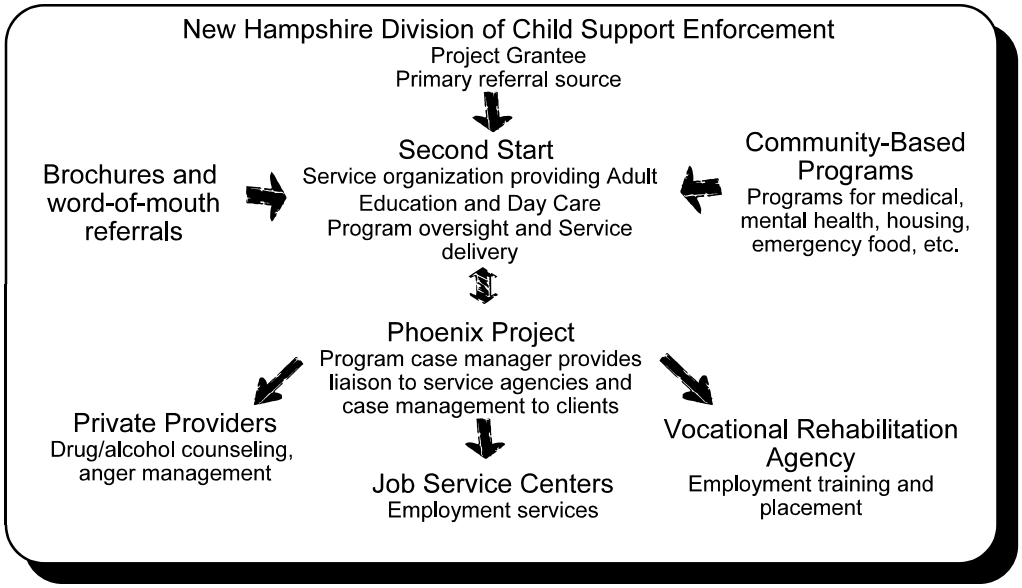
Services in New Hampshire

The Division of Child Support was the program grantee, but Phoenix Project was housed in Second Start, a community organization involved in a variety of services, including adult education and day care. The program design called for:

- Identification of unemployed noncustodial parents with minimum orders ($50 per month orders) by child support technicians.
- Technicians were to provide these parents with a brochure and some information about the program and encouraged them to call a case manager and enter the program.
- Participants met with the project case manager for an intake interview. At that time, the case manager determined the client's service needs.
- Clients in need of job services were helped to utilize existing community resources, such as job service centers. However, the case manager worked with each individual to provide a personal introduction to these resources and assisted clients with their effective utilization.
- Among the employment services available were vocational assessment; help with job readiness and résumé preparation; and assistance in using the community job center to find employment, or better employment at a higher pay level or with better benefits.
- The case manager also worked with every client to check on his or her child support situation. This could have included setting up and attending meetings or court hearings with the client and the child support agency to obtain information on paternity, order establishment, enforcement, or modification. Child support technicians had the authority to suspend payments on arrears during project participation, thereby reducing the monthly burden of child support.
- Clients could also be referred to adult education programs and community agencies such as those involved with consumer credit counseling.

The program did not focus on access. There were early attempts to hold parenting classes and peer support groups, but there were few participants. Nor did the program offer mediation or legal services, although staff could refer interested clients to relevant service providers in the community. Finally, in addition to the services described above, the New Hampshire program provided employment services to 17 noncustodial fathers in a one-time workshop. These individuals were

not enrolled for case management or entered in the database, and they are not included in this evaluation.



Child Support in New Hampshire

The IV-D program in New Hampshire is administered at the state level. Key facts about the state's child support system include the following:

- New Hampshire uses a Percentage of Obligor Income model to establish child support orders.
- As is the case in Massachusetts, the child support establishment process is entirely judicial in New Hampshire.
- Minimum order amounts are $50 per month.

- According to the federal performance indicators, New Hampshire was among the best performing states. In FY 2000, the proportion of current support due that was paid was 65 percent. Along with Washington, it had the highest proportion of arrears cases that paid (64%). It had one of the highest proportions of the IV-D caseload with support orders (78%), and one of the highest cost-effectiveness ratios (4.82:1).

Washington

Devoted Dads operated in the Tacoma area. This is an urban site, largely white/non-Hispanic (70%), with median household incomes of $37,879. The single-parent poverty rate was slightly higher than the U.S. average, and the unemployment rates at the start and end of the project were 4.5 and 4.6 percent, compared to 4.0 and 4.5 percent for the nation as a whole.

Devoted Dads was housed and operated by the Metropolitan Development Council (MDC) for Pierce County, an established, multi-service, nonprofit organization that operates more than 30 social services programs. Washington received federal child support enforcement matching funds for Devoted Dads. The Pierce County Health Department provided Devoted Dads with the non-federal funds that are needed to draw down federal dollars. MDC was responsible for program oversight, and several of the sister programs housed at MDC offered critical services to participants in Devoted Dads.

In addition to collaborations between and among the programs sponsored by MDC, Devoted Dads was a collaboration of agencies in Pierce County. The primary partners were agencies dealing with child support, health, economic development, and employment.

Services in Washington

The goal of the project was twofold:

- Increase public awareness of the importance of the role of fathers in the lives of their children; and

- Improve the ability of young, low-income fathers to participate responsibly in the lives of their children.

Devoted Dads conducted an extensive public education campaign to heighten public awareness about the importance of fathers. The program recruited participants through:

- Public service announcements on radio and television;
- Flyers and brochures;
- Presentations to community groups; and
- Through its contacts with staff at child support and health services agencies.

In addition, Devoted Dads received referrals from a jail diversion project offering early-release options to targeted offenders who participated in services leading to employment and responsible fatherhood.

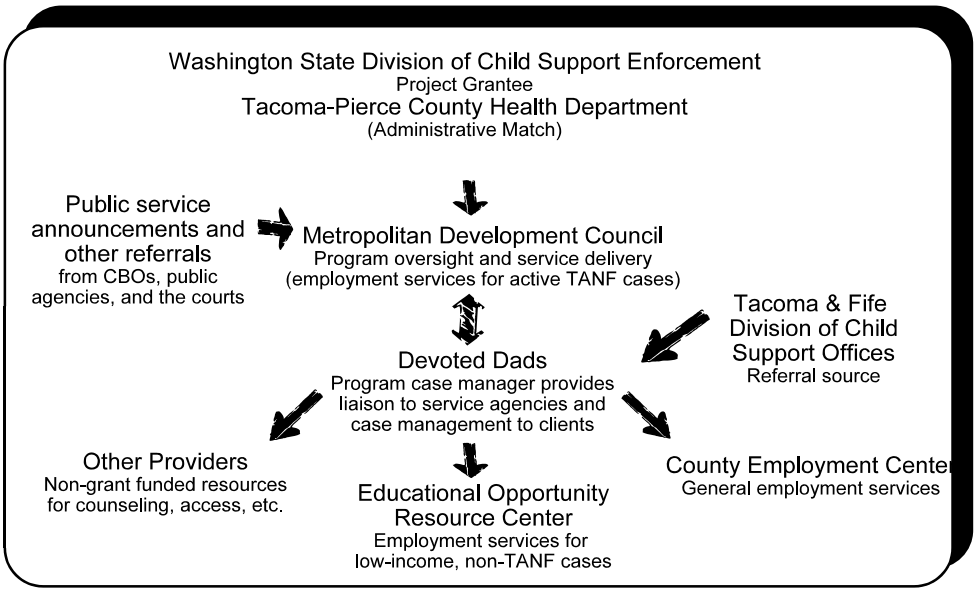
Devoted Dads provided clients with a variety of services that included:

- Screening for client needs dealing with employment, child support, access, and parenting;
- Referring clients to public agencies and community-based organizations for needed services;
- Conducting information sessions on visitation and child support issues;
- Assisting clients with *pro se* filings dealing with access and child support matters; and
- Conducting classes on a variety of topics, such as parenting, budgeting, and money management.

Program staff screened clients at intake for employment, child support, access, parenting, substance abuse, and other problems. During this intake, an individualized service plan was developed and referrals were made for services at other MDC programs and other organizations in Pierce County.

At various times, Devoted Dads also offered classes on parenting, childbirth, cooking, and budgeting/money management. Seminars were also provided by a contract attorney who provided limited individual assistance on access and child support issues. The attorney could also refer clients to legal aid, mediation, or other relevant resources.

During the time period covered in the evaluation, the Devoted Dads staff consisted of three full-time employees: a social worker and two fatherhood development specialists. They were assisted by two student interns. The contract attorney spent one day per week at the project office; a paralegal helped participants complete forms and other *pro se* filings two days per week.



Child Support in Washington

Washington's IV-D program is administered on a statewide basis. Key features of the program include:

- The use of an Income Shares model to calculate child support levels;
- Judicial and administrative establishment of support orders;
- High rankings on performance indicators. In 2000, 89 percent of its caseload had a child support order, and it obtained collections for 79 percent of its caseload with orders; and

- A statewide Special Collections Unit operated from October 1998 to September 2001 to pursue comprehensive and aggressive locate and collection methods for hard-to-collect cases (defined as debts over $500 with no payment activity within the preceding six months). This unit was funded by an OCSE-funded demonstration project on intervention in hard-to-collect child support cases.

This demonstration project documented the pervasiveness of serious, recurring barriers to collection. Among the findings were:

- Almost half of these NCPs had multiple child support cases leading to current support and total arrears balances that were thought to be impossible to pay.
- Almost a third of the noncustodial parents in these cases had been incarcerated in a state prison.
- Over 30 percent of these NCPs had received public assistance or SSI, with many revealing long histories of intermittent employment, physical or mental illness, chemical abuse, or other problems (Peters, 1999).

Wisconsin

Children UpFront of Racine, Wisconsin, served one of the least affluent sites in the study. The median household income of $37,164 fell below the U.S. average of $41,994. Its unemployment rate was among the highest of the project sites and rose during the study from 3.6 to 4.1 percent. Along with Baltimore, Racine had the lowest college graduation rate (16%). The single-mother poverty rate (36%) exceeded the national average.

Children UpFront was founded in 1990 by Jerry Hamilton, one of the pioneers of fatherhood programs and was administered by Goodwill Industries. During the time period covered in this evaluation, the staff consisted of Hamilton, a program coordinator, an administrative assistant, an outreach specialist, a marketing specialist, a job specialist, and four case managers.

Services in Wisconsin

One goal of the OCSE grant was to allow Children UpFront to extend its services to both mothers and fathers and pursue the concept of "team parenting." This approach aimed to reduce conflict between parents, increase the child's time with each parent, increase the earning potential of parents, and encourage voluntary child support and financial contributions of both parents to the child.

Children UpFront targeted young, unmarried, and economically disadvantaged parents under the age of 30. In some cases, the first overture was made with a young, unwed mother, and after establishing a relationship with her, the outreach specialist contacted the father. Alternatively, if contact was made first with a father, the outreach specialist tried to locate the mother and elicit her participation.

Children UpFront received referrals from a variety of sources, including:

- TANF workers: This was a primary source of referrals. Workers referred mothers who were not complying with agency requirements;
- Child protection workers: This was a second primary referral source. Child protection workers referred mothers who should be paying child support for children in foster care;
- Probation and parole departments also made a significant number of referrals; and
- Finally, many project cases were obtained through the efforts of a Children UpFront outreach specialist who regularly set up a table with fliers at key service organizations, such as WIC, health clinics, community centers, Planned Parenthood, and schools with teen parent programs.

Although referrals by child support workers were welcome, ties with the local child support agency were weakened when Children UpFront lost the contract for the County's Children First program, (an employment-related program providing mandatory services to delinquent noncustodial parents).

The key elements of the Children UpFront program were:

- A one-hour orientation session, followed by a meeting with a program case manager to conduct a full assessment and construct a "personal development plan."

- Required attendance at a course on parental responsibility. The course began with a co-ed motivational workshop on parental responsibility that covered the significance of paternity and the child support system.

- Sex-segregated Fatherhood and Motherhood Development classes comprised of 25 sessions that dealt with child development, anger management, and communication issues.

- Peer support meetings for open discussions of material covered in the classes on parental responsibility.

The individualized plan developed by the client and case managers could address a variety of other issues and problems for the parents. For example, case managers:

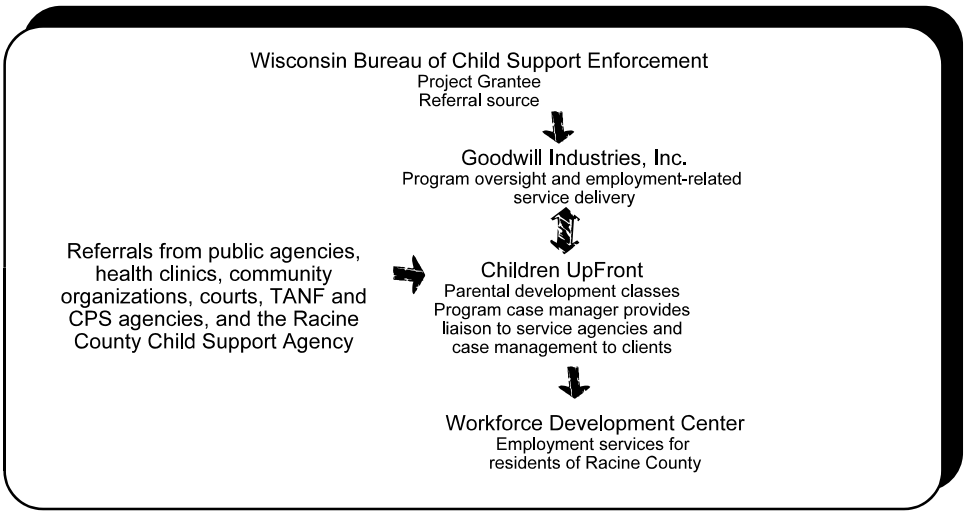
- Helped parents obtain vouchers for housing, clothing, and other living requirements;

- Informally mediated access and visitation problems and helped parents develop parenting plans that specified how the child's time would be divided between the parents;

- Accessed child support records so that they could inform participants of their child support status. However, the child support agency did not offer special accommodations for low-income project participants with respect to current support and/or arrears.

- Generally monitored client progress, suggested additional services, and pushed clients toward meeting their goals.

Children UpFront also tried to address the employment needs of its clients. For example, it furnished an employment resource room with computers and printers that clients could use for résumé and letter writing and to link to Wisconsin Job Net for local and national job listings. In late 1999, the project hired an employment specialist who offered on-site job readiness classes. The program did not have access to on-the-job training opportunities.



Child Support in Wisconsin

In Wisconsin, child support is administered on a county level. Among salient facts about the child support system in Wisconsin are the following:

- As in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, child support obligations may only be set by judicial orders.

- When setting orders, Wisconsin uses a Percentage of Income guideline based on the noncustodial parent's income. The Percentage of Income guideline assumes that the custodial parent will contribute an equal proportion of his or her income to the care of the child.

- Under the Wisconsin child support guidelines, order amounts are set at 17 percent of the NCP's gross income for one child, with the minimum order being $32 per week. The percentage drops for each additional family for which the noncustodial parent owes support. Prior to May 2000, Wisconsin charged interest at 18 percent per year simple interest. Effective May 1, 2000, the rate decreased to 12 percent per year simple interest.

- Unlike the other sites, Wisconsin does not allow adjustments to support order amounts for noncustodial parents whose incomes are below a certain level.

- Wisconsin has the best cost-effectiveness ratio (*i.e.*, $5.43 of IV-D child support collected for every dollar of IV-D administrative costs spent), but also has the lowest proportion of the IV-D caseload under order (58.5%).

Summary

- **The clients served at the eight program sites represent a diverse cross-section of the nation.**

  - Six programs were in urban settings that ranged in size from 90,000 to over 700,000. Two were based in relatively rural areas.

  - Three programs were based in communities with substantial African-American populations, while one had a service area with a significant Hispanic population.

  - Educational attainment and median household incomes also ranged widely across the sites, with some falling below and others rising above the national average.

  - While two sites (Baltimore and Tacoma) started the project with unemployment rates that exceeded the national average, three sites (San Mateo, Boston, and New Hampshire) had rates that fell well below the U.S. total.

- **The primary services delivered by the programs varied considerably across the sites.**

  - Seven of the eight sites offered employment, child access, and child support services, either directly or through referrals.

  - Child access mediation was the primary service provided in California, where there was little demand for employment assistance.

  - Child access and parenting services were also provided with some regularity in Colorado, Massachusetts, Missouri, Maryland, Washington, and Wisconsin.

  - Employment services were central to the programs in Colorado, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. Missouri, Maryland, and Wisconsin also provided referrals for employment services.

  - Child support was stressed at three program sites: Colorado, New Hampshire, and Washington. In Colorado, the program was housed in the CSE agency; in New Hampshire and Washington, day-to-day operations were closely coordinated with child support.

Table 3-1. Demographic Profile of the Counties in Which the Programs are Based

	California: San Mateo County	Colorado: El Paso County	Maryland: Baltimore	Massachusetts: Boston	Missouri: Cape Girardeau	New Hampshire: Belknap, Hillsborough, & Merrimack Counties	Washington: Tacoma	Wisconsin: Racine	U.S. Total
Population	707,161	516,929	651,154	589,141	68,693	573,391	193,556	81,855	281,421,906
White/Non-Hispanic	50%	76%	31%	50%	92%	94%	67%	64%	69%
African-American	4%	8%	65%	28%	6%	1%	14%	22%	12%
Hispanic	22%	11%	2%	14%	1%	2%	7%	14%	13%
18 and Under	23%	28%	25%	20%	23%	26%	26%	29%	26%
65 and Over	13%	9%	13%	10%	14%	12%	12%	12%	12%
High-school graduate	85%	91%	68%	79%	81%	87%	84%	77%	80%
College Graduate	39%	32%	19%	36%	24%	29%	20%	16%	24%
Median Family Income	$80,737	$53,995	$35,438	$44,151	$45,518	$50,510-$62,363	$45,567	$45,150	$50,046
Median Household Income	$70,819	$46,844	$30,078	$39,629	$36,458	$43,605-$53,384	$37,879	$37,164	$41,994
Single Mothers Below Poverty	13%	28%	38%	37%	32%	20%-27%	35%	36%	34%
*Unemployment Rate									
October 1998	2.9%	4.0%	5.5%	2.5%	3.5%	2.2%	4.6%	3.6%	4.5%
December 2000	1.8%	2.3%	3.7%	1.7%	3.6%	1.8%	4.5%	4.1%	4.0%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Census 2000 Demographic Profiles."
* Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Current Population Survey 2000."
Unemployment rate is based on nearest metropolitan area: San Mateo, California, based on unemployment rates from the San Francisco metro area; El Paso County, Colorado, based on data from Colorado Springs metro area; Cape Girardeau, Missouri, based on data from the St. Louis metro area; and New Hampshire counties based on data from Manchester metro area.

Table 3-2. Overview of the Programs

	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin
Title	Supportive Services for Noncustodial Parents	Parent Opportunity Project (POP)	Responsible Fatherhood Project (RFP)	The Father Friendly Initiative (FFI)	Proud Parents	Phoenix Project	Devoted Dads	Children UpFront
Program Start	1998	1998	1994	1999	1999	1998	1998	1990
Administration	Child Support	Dept of Human Services	Dept of Human Resources	Child Support	Child Support	Child Support	Child Support Health Dept	Child Support
Housed	DA's office	DHS, Child Support	Harbor Hospital	Boston Healthy Start	Child Support	Second Start	Metropolitan Development Council	Goodwill Industries
Primary Project Staff	CInvestigator C½-time coordinator C½-time clerical CMediator	C2 case managers at POP office CLiaisons at Goodwill, Maximus, Women's Resource Agency, Center on Fathering	CProgram manager C2 admin. CAssessment coordinator C6 outreach workers	CProject director CProject manager CJob resource coord. C2 outreach workers CCase manager	C1-2 Recruiters/Site workshop coord.	Project coordinator	CProject manager CProject supervisor C2 fatherhood specialists C1 contract attorney C1 paralegal C2 interns	CProgram director CProgram coord. C1 outreach worker C4 case managers C1 job specialist C1 marketing specialist
Primary Services [i]	access mediation supervised visitation	employment access child support case management	parenting classes employment child support peer support	peer support employment access child support	parenting employment access child support	case management employment child support GED	legal seminars parenting seminar child support employment	parenting programs employment child support peer support
Primary Referral Sources	Child support techs	CSE techs Community corrections Other community	Courts Other community Word of mouth	Media Courts Health centers Other community	Community recruiters	Child support techs	Child support Health centers Word of mouth Jail diversion project	Referrals pursued by outreach workers based at WIC, health clinics, schools

[i] "Employment" indicates the program plans assistance such as job training, job readiness workshops, job search; "child support" indicates that the program plans to work with the child support agency to revise orders, abate orders, establish paternity, reduce debt, etc.; "access" indicates that the program will provide assistance around access/visitation issues.

Table 3-3. IV-D Child Support Profile of States with Project Sites

	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin
State/County administered	County	County	County	State	State	State	State	County
Administrative/Judicial order establishment process	Judicial	Both	Judicial	Judicial	Both	Judicial	Both	Judicial
Guideline used to establish support order amount	Income Shares	Income Shares	Income Shares	Percent of Income/ Income Shares hybrid	Income Shares	Percent of Income	Income Shares	Percent of Income
Minimum order amount	Varies by # of children	$20-$50	$20-$50	$50	$20-$50	$50	$25	Varies by # of children
Cost/effectiveness ratio	$3.23	$3.23	$3.60	$3.50	$3.37	$4.82	$4.53	$6.51
Percent of caseload with orders	69%	78%	61%	67%	74%	78%	89%	77%
Percent ordered cases with collections	57%	67%	68%	66%	57%	84%	79%	83%
Average percent of current support due that was paid	40%	51%	59%	59%	48%	65%	61%	77%
Percent of cases with arrears	57%	84%	56%	60%	66%	79%	91%	N/A
Percent of cases with arrears showing payment	53%	63%	60%	55%	47%	64%	64%	N/A

Source: Office of Child Support Enforcement "FY 2000 Preliminary Data Preview Report" (Washington, D.C.: July 2001) and Office of Child Support Enforcement "Annual Statistical Report for FY 1999 and 2000" (Washington, D.C.).

Chapter 4: Methodology

In this chapter

- Number of program participants included in this evaluation
- Site case data from the electronic database system
- Follow-up interview data
- Data from the states' automated child support systems
- Data from the states' employment databases
- Limitations of the data
- Analysis of the data

Numbers of Program Participants

Between October 1998 and December 2000, a total of 2,279 individuals met the definition of "clients served" by the project for evaluation purposes. These were individuals who:

- Received some type of service during the specified period; and
- Had some baseline data recorded by the program staff.[1]

Most of the analysis in this report is focused on the cross-site characteristics and outcomes for the largest single group of participants: the 1,674 noncustodial fathers. This group represented 73 percent of all individuals enrolled by the programs.

[1] Not included in this definition are many individuals served by the sites who were not formally enrolled and had no baseline data collected. For example, it does not include those individuals in New Hampshire who participated in a one-time workshop for whom no baseline or follow-up data was generated, nor does it include over 300 individuals in Colorado who received information and service referrals without being enrolled. Nor does the definition cover individuals served at the sites before October 1998 and after December 31, 2000.

The programs also enrolled 158 noncustodial women. These women are included in the analysis of strategies used to recruit program participants presented in Chapter 4. However, they are not included in the subsequent chapters that deal with client characteristics and outcomes. The decision to exclude them was based on the assumption that the characteristics of noncustodial mothers, as well as their experiences in the programs and their service needs related to access, employment, and child support, would be substantially different from noncustodial fathers. This argued against jointly analyzing data from men and women. At the same time, the small number of noncustodial mothers served by the programs also precluded a thorough analysis of them as a separate group.

In addition to noncustodial fathers and mothers, the programs served a total of 147 men and 286 women who described themselves at enrollment as custodial parents to all their children. These individuals generally fell into the following categories:

- Fathers deemed to be at high risk of becoming a noncustodial parent, such as unmarried, cohabiting fathers.

- Mothers from the Wisconsin program, which attempted to enroll both the custodial and noncustodial parent in services; and mothers from the California program, where mediation necessarily served only cases where both the custodial and noncustodial parent participated.

- Parents (most frequently mothers) who had children in foster care were not always uniformly classified as noncustodial parents at each of the sites. This was especially true if the plan in place at the child protective services agency called for the reunification of the parent and child.

In addition, some of the individuals who described themselves as custodial parents may have been noncustodial parents in the past. As a result of their prior status as an NCP, they might have needed help changing their legal standing to match the informal change in custody and/or faced child support problems, either because they never officially changed their custody status or because they had outstanding arrears.

Clients who described themselves as "custodial parents" are not included in the analysis of client characteristics, nor are they included in most analyses of outcomes. There were too few custodial fathers to merit an independent analysis of them, and the custodial mothers represented too great a

mix of types (*e.g.*, truly custodial mothers served along with the noncustodial father, formerly noncustodial mothers, and mothers of children in foster care) to allow for an analysis of custodial mothers as a group. However, individuals who described themselves as "custodial fathers" who were found to have a child support case that required them to make payments were included in the analysis of child support outcomes.

Finally, there were a few cases (n=14) that were excluded from the analysis because the programs did not classify them as either "custodial" or "noncustodial." At least some of these are thought to be expectant parents, while others may have been step-parents or living with the children of their partner.

Table 4-1. Number of Participants Per Site, by Gender and Custody Status

	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Male Participants									
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	183	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,674
Custodial parent to all children	0	2	23	40	6	2	58	16	147
Other *	0	0	4	6	0	0	1	1	12
Total	183	165	124	330	59	26	819	127	1,833
Female Participants									
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	0	41	1	0	4	10	34	68	158
Custodial parent to all children	187	0	0	0	1	2	5	91	286
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Total	187	41	1	0	5	12	39	161	446
Total Participants (male & female, all custody types)	370	206	125	330	64	38	858	288	2,279

Table 4-1 provides a summary of the total number of participants "enrolled" at each site and breaks this total down by gender and self-reported custody status. The first row indicates the individuals who are the primary focus of this evaluation.

Data Sources

The evaluation relied on data from four major sources:

- Case data maintained on individual clients by program staff at each site;
- Telephone interviews with program participants at each site;
- Child support administrative records at each site; and
- Employment and earnings records maintained by the state Departments of Labor and Employment as a part of the Unemployment Compensation Insurance program (UI).

The data from each of these sources is described below.

Site Case Data

Staff at all eight of the sites collected information on client characteristics, client needs, and services provided. The sites worked together to develop a set of intake, assessment, and service forms that would gather the information needed to manage the programs and still generate comparable cross-site information. The program in San Mateo, California, developed its own instruments because the mediation services provided at this site required a different approach in collecting data on service needs and delivery.

Site case data was generated for 2,279 individuals, including 1,674 noncustodial fathers who are the focus of this evaluation. The case data generated by the sites is described below. The number of different types of forms available for analysis is also noted below, but is provided in greater detail in Tables 4-3, 4-4, 4-6, and 4-7.

The forms used to collect client information were compiled and automated as a public-use database system by the Lewin Group, under a contract with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Responsible Fatherhood Management Information System (RFMIS), as the database was called, was made available to sites, and seven sites decided to use the RFMIS as their case management system.

The RFMIS was divided into several sections, but they can be collapsed into those related to (1) Intake and Assessment (which were to be completed at program entry, although the assessment process might take more than a single session); and (2) Ongoing Activity (to be completed on a monthly basis and at the closure of a case).

1. Intake and Assessment Form

A. Client Background Information

- Contact information for the client
- The referral source
- Mandatory or voluntary nature of participation
- Demographics (including gender, age, and race/ethnicity)
- Education level
- Living arrangements
- Number of minor-aged children
- The types of services the client expressed an interest in receiving at intake, including access, employment, education, parenting, substance abuse, anger management, and peer support

B. Employment and Earnings

- Sources of income in the past 12 months
- Employment history (including the number of months the client worked fulltime in the past 12 months, the nature of the work, the longest time at a single job)
- Employment status at the interview (including the number of hours worked per week, the number of jobs held, whether the client was self-employed)
- Salary at the client's most recent job
- The client's self-report of the degree to which this salary met his financial needs
- Benefits (health insurance, paid sick leave, paid vacation, etc.) provided at the client's most recent job

- Barriers to potential employment (including the lack of a driver's license, health problems, criminal record, current probation/parole status, lack of a permanent residence, or substance abuse problems)

C. Parenting and Access

- Number and ages of minor-aged children
- Legal arrangements for parenting
- Amount of contact with the children
- Satisfaction with the amount of child contact
- The nature of any informal economic support provided to the children
- The nature of any restrictions on access
- The geographic distance between the client's residence and that of the child
- Marital history of the custodial and noncustodial parent
- The sources and degree of conflict between the parents
- The degree to which the custodial parent was seen as supportive or hostile to the noncustodial parent

D. Project Assessment of Client Service Needs

- Ratings by the case manager or project staff of the services needed by the client related to education
- Case manager rating of employment services needed by client
- Case manager rating of services needed by the client related to access or parenting
- Other service needs for the client (including those related to transportation, substance abuse, housing, medical care, and so on)

2. Ongoing Program Activities

- Case manager notes, on a monthly basis, of the services offered and provided to each client
- Case manager notes regarding changes in case plans
- Dates and reasons for case closures or terminations

As noted, the California program used a different approach to provide baseline data on clients for evaluation purposes. When parents arrived at the Family Court for their mediation session, they were asked to complete a survey. This instrument included questions about the issues in dispute, the family's litigation history, and the degree of conflict in the case, as well as demographic information about the parents and their children.

Following the mediation session, the mediator completed a form explaining what issues were dealt with during the mediation session, the nature of any agreements reached, and whether the agreement would remain an interparty agreement or would be formally entered with the court.

At least one parent appeared for the mediation session in 246 cases. However, there were only 189 cases where both parents attended and mediation could take place. All 189 cases had a mediator form, 181 (96%) had forms completed by both parents, six (3%) had forms for only the custodial parent, and two (1%) had only a noncustodial parent form.

Follow-up Interviews

Attempts were made to conduct telephone interviews with all clients who enrolled in the Responsible Fatherhood Programs between October 1, 1998, and December 31, 2000. The goal was to interview clients six months after their enrollment and assess their service experiences and their status with respect to employment, earnings, parent-child contact, and other outcomes. A total of 527 interviews were conducted with noncustodial fathers, and 123 interviews were conducted with custodial parents (see Table 4-4 for full information on response rates).

To facilitate a follow-up contact, clients were asked to provide at least one secondary contact person to call in the event that the interviewer could not directly reach the participant. In addition, clients were offered a $25 incentive payment in the form of a grocery store certificate to complete the 15-minute telephone interview.

In order to generate comparable information at each site, the Ford Foundation provided a grant to the cross-site evaluation team for the Responsible Fatherhood Programs. The grant allowed for the development of a single interview schedule and covered the costs of interviewing clients and paying incentives at each site.

The interview elicited information about the client's experiences with the Responsible Fatherhood Programs, including the types of services received. The interview also collected information about the client's contact with his children six months after program enrollment and the nature of the relationship with the custodial parent at this time point. Similarly, clients were asked about

employment and earnings. Finally, the interview collected information about major life changes in the six months following program enrollment, such as arrests, new births, or marriages.

Child Support Record Review

Research indicates that parents are often confused about whether and what they owe and often do not accurately report payment behavior. To generate a more reliable and comprehensive picture of the child support status of clients and the impact of the programs on child support payment behavior, we obtained child support data for clients enrolled in the various programs using the states' automated child support enforcement records (CSE). This data collection effort, like the telephone follow-up interviews, was supported by Ford Foundation monies.

In Washington, all child support information was generated through an extract of the state's automated child support records. It was distilled in an anonymous fashion, and none of it was linked to other information about clients generated from intake records maintained by Devoted Dads staff and/or follow-up interviews conducted by independent researchers. In California, automated data was extracted electronically on every case referred to mediation. This allowed for a comparison of payments among those who successfully mediated, those who were not able to reach an agreement, and those who failed to appear for mediation.

For the five remaining programs, data collectors reviewed automated child support records and manually extracted information for every client who could be found in the child support system. The review documented the client's child support status at entry to the program, and six and 12 months following entry. Among the data extracted were:

- Numbers of child support cases that appeared in the CSE system;
- Number of child support cases with an order;
- Order level per case;
- Arrears balance per case; and
- Total payments per case.

By adding across the multiple cases that clients had, it was possible to calculate the total monthly obligations that each client faced. By comparing payments with child support obligations, it was

possible to calculate the percentage of child support that clients paid prior to and following their enrollment.

Table 4-6 contains detailed information regarding the cases for which child support system reviews were conducted.

Employment Data

Although clients were asked about their employment status and earnings at program entry and at the follow-up interview, the lack of follow-up data for many clients made it difficult to rely on client self- reports for the analysis of program impacts on employment and earnings. In addition, it was feared that clients who were experiencing problems with child support might be motivated to under-report their earnings, even to an independent researcher.

To supplement the information provided by clients, researchers, with funding from the Ford Foundation, reviewed employer-reported wage records maintained by the states' Departments of Labor and Employment as part of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system. The goal of the review was to determine:

- Whether clients displayed earnings in the UI system; and
- The amount of employer-reported earnings for specific time periods prior to and following enrollment in the Responsible Fatherhood Programs.

There is often be a lag of six months in posting employer wage reports on the UI database. To avoid confusing posting delays with a true lack of employment activity, the analysis of post-enrollment employment and earnings was restricted to UI data reported two quarters following enrollment. Even the last clients to enroll in the Responsible Fatherhood Programs (in December 2000) would have had enough time to reliably exhibit two quarters of post-enrollment earnings in state UI databases by the time that data collectors reviewed records in the summer and autumn of 2001. The pre-enrollment time period against which post-enrollment patterns were compared was the quarter immediately preceding client enrollment in the programs.

Limitations of the Data

One general limitation to the data employed in this evaluation is the absence of a non-treatment control group. Without tracking the child access patterns, child support payment patterns, and employment and earnings of a group of comparable noncustodial fathers who did not participate in a responsible fatherhood program, we cannot be certain whether differences observed from pre- to post-enrollment are due to participation in the program. Rather, we must compare patterns across the program sites and determine whether effects are replicated in various program settings.

In addition, each of the major sources of data used in the evaluation posed special challenges and had their own limits. Some of the key limitations are discussed below.

Site Case Data

The program staff at each site was responsible for collecting data from clients when they enrolled. Table 4-2 compares the incidence of missing data on selected variables. The variables chosen to highlight the problems that missing data posed to analyses related to client referral source, client characteristics, and the outcomes related to child access and employment.

Table 4-2 demonstrates that there was considerable variation among the sites with respect to how complete the RFMIS — or in California, the baseline parent surveys — appears to be. However, the Table also shows significant differences *within* each site in the completeness of data from one area of the RFMIS to the next. For example:

- For level of education, the overall incidence of missing data was fairly low (7%), but some specific sites — Missouri and Wisconsin — were significantly more likely to be missing data on this item (21%).

- The incidence of missing referral source information ranged from a low of 4 percent (Colorado) to a high of 26 percent (Wisconsin).

- On one baseline variable employed in the outcome analyses — amount of contact with the youngest away child — most sites tended to have relatively high percentages of cases with missing data (20% overall).

- The incidence of missing RFMIS information on self-reported employment at program entry ranged from a low of zero percent (Maryland) to a high of 29 percent (New Hampshire).

Given the relatively high incidence of missing data (consistent across all sites on some variables, and limited to selected sites on other variables), it is important to view the results of this evaluation with caution.

Table 4-2. Missing Site Case Data for Noncustodial Fathers, by Site

	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Male Noncustodial Parents	183	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,674
Number of cases with referral information	i	157	82	231	46	20	711	81	1,328
Percent missing referral information	i	4%	15%	19%	13%	17%	6%	26%	11%
Number of cases with education level information	178	150	90	262	42	24	724	87	1,557
Percent missing education level information	3%	8%	7%	8%	21%	0%	5%	21%	7%
Number of cases with contact with child information i i	178	127	73	191	8	16	672	72	1,337
Percent missing contact with youngest away child information	3%	22%	25%	33%	85%	33%	11%	35%	20%
Number of cases with employment status at intake information	178	161	97	266	49	17	715	91	1,574
Percent missing employment status at intake information	3%	1%	0%	6%	8%	29%	6%	17%	6%

i California is not included in this analysis. All clients were referred by child support; the source was not asked.
i i In California, the question was asked for all children; in the other sites, the question had to do with the youngest child.

In addition to entering data on clients collected at intake/assessment, the RFMIS also required program staff to provide monthly updates on client participation in various services and other case activity and to record case closures. Although program staff agreed to enter case activity data on a monthly basis, Table 4-3 shows that a significant number of cases were missing this type of information. Across the sites, monthly tracking forms were available for 86 percent of the noncustodial parents who enrolled in the programs. The incidence of cases with at least some monthly information on client activity ranged from 45 percent in Missouri to 91 percent in Washington. The average number of months for which client case activity was tracked ranged from

one to ten at the program sites, with all but two sites providing information for three months or less. California, which did not use the RFMIS, is not included in Table 4-3.

The final monthly tracking form had fields for the case managers to note the date and reason for case closure. In actual practice, the sites varied in the degree to which they closed cases. Some sites "successfully" closed cases when the needed services were provided and the case was viewed as stable, while less successful cases were closed when the client failed to stay in contact and/or did not participate in services. At other sites, enrollment was more fluid, and cases were allowed to remain open indefinitely. As a result, no case closure information was provided for clients in Maryland and Missouri, and staff in Washington furnished it for only 6 percent of those who enrolled. The sites with the most complete case closure records were Colorado, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin.

Table 4-3. Monthly Program Data and Case Closure Information for Noncustodial Fathers, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites Except California
Number of Noncustodial Fathers	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
Percent with monthly case tracking forms	87%	82%	86%	45%	55%	91%	85%	86%
Average number of monthly tracking forms	3.6	3.2	6.5	1.0	10.0	1.2	3.6	2.8
Percent of clients with case closure information	52%	0%	68%	0%	47%	6%	99%	30%

Interview Data

At the time the follow-up interviews were conducted, it was not clear whether the analysis would include noncustodial mothers or custodial parents of either sex. As a result, the names of all individuals enrolled in the programs were sent for follow-up interviews. However, Table 4-4 only presents the interview completion rates for noncustodial fathers, since this is the only group for which interview data were analyzed.

Of the 1,674 noncustodial fathers served by the sites, just under a third (31%) were interviewed. Refusal rates were very low: 4 percent. The primary obstacle was that fathers could not be located This problem was exacerbated by missing secondary contact information. Program staff completing the RFMIS were instructed to collect secondary contact information from clients when they enrolled and to check the accuracy of and update the contact information every time they met with a client. However, most clients did not provide a secondary contact, and the client contact information was rarely updated. In addition, in California, the form completed by parents prior to mediation asked for a home and work number, but not for a secondary contact number. As a result, interviewers were only able to attempt to phone a secondary contact person for approximately 22 percent of the noncustodial fathers.

Interviewers made up to eight call-back attempts to reach respondents, with an average of 2.6 calls to clients who were successfully interviewed and 3.5 to clients who were not reached. More than 50 percent were phoned three or more times before it was determined that they could not be reached.

Table 4-4. Telephone Interviews Completed With Noncustodial Fathers, by Site

	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Number of Noncustodial Fathers	183	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,674
Number of completed telephone follow-up interviews	32	63	45	110	13	4	232	28	527
Percent of male NCPs with a completed telephone interview	17%	39%	46%	39%	25%	17%	31%	25%	31%

Table 4-5 compares various subgroups of noncustodial fathers to determine whether there were any significant biases with respect to who was reached for an interview. The results suggest that there were some biases. The probability of an interview being completed was greater if the noncustodial father was:

- Over age 40 (compared to under 25);
- Ever-married (versus never-married);

- Better educated (some post-high school training versus less than a high-school graduate or GED);
- Employed at program entry (rather than unemployed); or
- In a more contentious relationship with the mother of the youngest away child (describing this relationship as hostile rather than friendly).

The first four items above (age, marital status, education, and employment) probably help to differentiate between noncustodial fathers who were interviewed and those who were not simply because they are correlates of geographic stability. In other words, the telephone numbers for the older, better educated, ever-married, and employed fathers were probably more likely to still be valid numbers at the follow-up. It is not clear why fathers with more hostile relationships with the custodial mother were more likely to have been interviewed.

Overall, Table 4-5 suggests that the results of the interviews should be viewed with some caution. Those interviewed are probably not completely representative of all noncustodial fathers. However, the Table also suggests that in terms of the measured variables, those who were interviewed were quite similar to fathers who could not be located.

Table 4-5. Comparison of Noncustodial Fathers Who Completed Follow-up Telephone Interviews by Case Characteristics

	Age		**Marital History**		**Education**	
Interview	Age 25 years or less *(n=277)*	Age 40 years or more *(n=296)*	Ever married *(n=691)*	Never married *(n=753)*	No highschool diploma or GED *(n=319)*	Some post-high school training *(n=186)*
Completed	23%	35%	30%	25%	22%	32%
Not Completed	77%	65%	70%	75%	78%	68%
	Race		**Employment**		**Age of youngest away child**	
	White, non-Hispanic *(n=515)*	African-American *(n=729)*	Reports employment at intake *(n=757)*	Reports no employment at intake *(n=628)*	Less than one year *of age* *(n=149)*	Age 12 or older *(n=153)*
Completed	29%	26%	30%	24%	32%	27%
Not Completed	71%	74%	70%	76%	68%	73%

Table 4-5. Comparison of Noncustodial Fathers Who Completed Follow-up Telephone Interviews by Case Characteristics

	Number of women with whom he has had children		Frequency of contact with youngest away child in the 12 months pre-enrollment		Satisfaction with access at enrollment	
	One woman *(n=838)*	More than one woman *(n=451)*	Never saw the child *(n=234)*	Saw child once a week or more *(n=481)*	Very satisfied *(n=198)*	Very dissatisfied *(n=576)*
Completed	29%	27%	22%	29%	28%	29%
Not Completed	71%	73%	78%	71%	72%	71%
	Court-ordered access to youngest away child		**Relationship with mother of youngest away child**			
	Has ordered access *(n=382)*	Court has not ordered access *(n=741)*	Friendly *(n=346)*	Hostile *(n=311)*		
Completed	28%	27%	25%	34%		
Not Completed	72%	73%	75%	66%		

i T-tests between the two groups are significant at .05.

Child Support Data

Table 4-6 shows the number of cases reviewed to determine whether the father had a child support case. All fathers with a Social Security number (custodial, noncustodial, and unknown) were checked in the automated systems maintained by state child support enforcement agencies. This was done because, in a relatively small number of cases, parents who did not describe themselves as noncustodial parents at program entry were found to have child support obligations.

There are several limitations to the child support data:

- New Hampshire and Wisconsin had large percentages of cases that could not be reviewed. At most sites, relatively few cases were missing Social Security numbers and therefore eliminated from the child support check. The percentage of cases reviewed, overall, stood at 94 percent. In California, Colorado, Massachusetts, and Washington, at least 90 percent of all cases were checked. In Maryland and Missouri, the figures were 81 and 75 percent, respectively. However,

in New Hampshire and Wisconsin, only between 50 and 60 percent of the cases had Social Security numbers and could be reviewed.

- In Washington, the Division of Child Support Enforcement generated an automated extract of child support information for clients in Devoted Dads. The extract was conveyed to evaluators without case identifiers.

Thus, although the Washington child support information was combined with employment information, no other information on client characteristics, background factors, or access patterns could be added to permit an analysis of client characteristics associated with payment behaviors.

- Automated child support data were not merged across the sites, and as a result, no cross-site totals are presented.

Each site collected comparable information, but in somewhat different formats. Although it would have been possible to create a single standardized data file, it would also have been extremely time consuming and costly.

Table 4-6. Reviews of Automated Child Support Data for All Fathers, by Site

	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Total men served by the program (custodial and noncustodial)	183 [i]	165	124	330	59	26	819	127	1,833
Number that could not be checked	0	0	23	33	15	12	32	43	158
Number of fathers checked in the child support system	183	165	101	297	44	14	787	84	1,675
Percent of fathers checked in the child support system	100%	100%	81%	90%	75%	54%	96%	66%	91%

i Reviews were also conducted on additional cases referred to mediation that failed to attend. Those cases are not shown.

Employment Data

Table 4-7 shows the number of cases and percentage of cases checked in automated employment (UI) databases. As in Table 4-6, all fathers — not simply noncustodial fathers — were included in the review. This was done because (1) in addition to providing information about changes in earnings prior to and following program enrollment, the employment data was intended to help understand any observed changes in child support payment patterns; and (2) we knew that some fathers who described themselves as custodial parents had child support obligations. Reviewing employment databases for all fathers would provide the best chance of accurately matching earnings data to every father with a child support case.

Of the 1,833 men (custodial, noncustodial, and unknown) served by the programs, employment checks were conducted on 89 percent. There were a variety of reasons why cases could not be checked in the automated wage and employment databases; the primary problem was the lack of a Social Security number.

In California, individuals had to provide informed consent for their Social Security numbers to be released for review. A total of 62 of the 183 fathers who participated in mediation did not sign the form and/or did not provide a Social Security number. At the other sites, reviews were conducted for all fathers who had Social Security numbers in the RFMIS.

In Washington, the Human Research Review Section of the Department of Social and Health Service in Washington would not permit UI wage information to be released in a manner that would allow it to be linked with other client-supplied information dealing with employment, earnings, or background characteristics. In addition, in order to ensure that the data had no unique identifiers, the data released by the Department of Social and Health Services did not show the client's actual enrollment date. Instead, the date of enrollment was replaced by the quarter of enrollment. Clients enrolled in the first two quarters were all shown as enrolled in a single quarter due to concerns that the small number enrolled in the first quarter would serve as a unique identifier for these clients. Unfortunately, this meant that data for these early clients could not be used because it was impossible to be certain that the earnings shown for the pre-enrollment period were truly pre-enrollment.

Table 4-7. Reviews of Automated Employment Data for All Fathers, by Site

	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Total fathers served by the program	183	165	124	330	59	26	819	127	1,833
Number that could not be checked	49	0	23	33	15	12	32	43	207
Number of fathers checked in automated employment system	134	165	101	297	44	14	787	84	1,626
Percent checked	73%	100%	81%	90%	75%	54%	96%	66%	89%

The primary source of employment and wage data at each site came from the Unemployment Insurance (UI) programs administered by the states' Departments of Labor and Employment.[2] While UI data provide the best estimates of employment and earnings, it is generally agreed that this data source underestimates actual earnings. Among the limitations of this data are the following:

- Only employers subject to the state Unemployment Insurance Tax are required to report earnings to the state.
- The database excludes those who work in another state, the self-employed, independent contractors, those working for cash (*i.e.*, "under the table" or "off the books"), the military, nonprofit institutions, and the federal government.
- Some employers who are required to report employee earnings probably fail to do so.

Several studies have documented the limitations on UI data. For example, the authors of a study comparing UI and survey responses for 12,318 individuals who participated in services provided under the 1982 Jobs Training Partnership Act (JTPA) conclude that UI wage records are a cost-effective and reliable way of assessing program effects for most groups of employees, but warn that UI appears to miss a good deal of employment activity for male youths with prior criminal records

[2] In California, additional sources were consulted, including the Employment Development Department, the Franchise Tax Board, Social Security, and the Department of Social Services.

who may be most apt to work in the underground economy and/or to hold short-term jobs (Kornfeld and Bloom, 1999).

In a similar vein, a study in Illinois concluded that 13 percent of all employees who should have earnings reported to UI were not reported by their employers (Blakemore, *et al.*, 1996). Employers who were especially likely to under-report were those with few employees and/or high turnover. To the extent that these employers hire low-level, low-skilled workers, they may be the very types of employers most likely to hire clients of responsible fatherhood programs.

Table 4-8 suggests that there probably are discrepancies in the present evaluation between self-reports of employment and employment status in UI data. The Table shows only those fathers who self-reported being employed at enrollment (full- or part-time). At each site, many of the fathers who reported employment in the months prior to program enrollment did not appear in the UI system. For example, in Colorado, 39 percent of those who said they were employed at enrollment did not appear in the UI database. Some of the discrepancy may be due to posting lags in the UI database, but it also is likely that some of those fathers with employment did not appear in the UI system.

Although PFS researchers found discrepancies between UI-reported employment and employment reported by men themselves, the findings were the reverse of what we found. That is, in PFS, the UI data suggested higher rates of employment (but lower rates of earnings) than those reported at the 12-month follow-up survey (Martinez and Miller, 2000). The evaluators suggested that although the PFS survey achieved a response rate of 78 percent, it contained a "select group of fathers who, for example, had more stable living situations and thus were easier to locate." In addition, because PFS stressed the payment of child support, it may have had the unintended consequence of increasing "off-the-books" jobs and lower levels of UI earnings.

Having noted the limitations of the UI data, we should also note that self-reported income information, even if it had been available for a greater proportion of the individuals in this study, has its own limitations and problems and is no more accurate or precise than estimates from sources such as UI. Such estimates are especially prone to error among respondents who work varying hours (such as taxicab drivers) or do day labor or occasional/pick-up jobs (Camerer *et al.*, 2000).

Table 4-8. Earnings Shown in the Employment and Earnings Database (UI) in the Quarter Pre-Enrollment for NCPs Who Self-Reported Being Employed at Program Intake, By Site [i]

	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin
Percent showing earnings in the UI database		61%	26%	53%	40%	80%		52%
Percent showing no earnings in the UI database		39%	74%	47%	60%	20%		48%
	[i]	*(n=80)*	*(n=38)*	*(n=141)*	*(n=10)*	*(n=5)*	[i i]	*(n=25)*

[i] California is excluded from the analysis because multiple data sources were consulted for earnings data.
[i i] Washington is excluded from the analysis; data were not provided. At all sites, cases lacking a Social Security number could not be reviewed and are excluded from the Table.

Data Analysis

The most basic issues in the analysis of the data have already been touched upon: the absence of a non-treatment control group, low response rates, and uneven data quality. Other issues include the following:

- Most of the analysis in this evaluation was limited to noncustodial fathers. Although the programs served male custodial parents, female custodial and noncustodial parents, and parents expecting their first child, there were not enough parents in any one of these other groups to allow an analysis, especially on a site-specific level. The employment, child support, and access experiences of these various groups of parents were likely to be too different from one another and those of noncustodial fathers to allow all the groups to be merged. As a result, all parents are considered only in Chapter 5 (Referrals) and noncustodial fathers are the focus of all the remaining chapters.

- The programs offered a wide variety of services and had a wide range of goals for their clients. No cross-site evaluation could do justice to all the nuances of each individual program and their unique objectives. We focused on services and goals related to employment, child support, and child access — the major services and goals that the programs held in common.

- We have presented most of the analyses by site. In some sites, especially New Hampshire and Missouri, the total number of clients served was relatively small, which resulted in some

extremely small cell sizes for these sites. We have tried to be consistent in alerting the reader when the Table contains small cell sizes. We generally chose not to eliminate the small sites from the Tables for two reasons: (1) we view this as a largely descriptive study that should be treated as somewhat exploratory in nature; and (2) sites that were expected to have small volumes of cases were deliberately selected for funding in order to represent the experiences of programs that operate in sparsely populated settings. In light of these two points, we felt that the sites with small case volume should be included in Tables whenever possible; however, readers are warned to treat the data from these sites as suggestive only.

- We relied on automated data from the child support system in our analysis of both baseline and follow-up child support patterns. This data was generally available and felt to be more reliable than client self-report.

- The manner in which the automated child support data was maintained at each site made merging the data across sites extremely problematic. As a result, the data were analyzed by site, and no cross-site totals are provided.

- For information on employment, we presented both self-reported patterns and patterns from automated wage and employment databases. We felt that both data sources had some shortcomings, but combined they provided the best estimates available.

- For child access patterns, we relied only on self-report by noncustodial fathers. No external source of information was available. While it might have been useful to present self-reported data from both parents, this was beyond the scope of the evaluation. With the exception of the California site, where both parents participated in mediation, custodial parents were not interviewed.

- Washington data had to be eliminated from any analysis drawing on both earnings data and information from clients (either follow-up interviews or RFMIS data) because the Human Research Review Section of the Department of Social and Health Services in Washington would not permit UI wage information to be released in a manner that would allow it to be linked with other client-supplied information.

Summary

- A total of 2,279 individuals met the evaluation definition of "clients served" by the project.
- Most of the analysis in this report is focused on the cross-site characteristics and outcomes for the largest single group of participants: the 1,674 noncustodial fathers. This group represented 73 percent of all individuals enrolled by the programs.
- The evaluation relied on data from four major sources: (1) case data maintained on individual clients by program staff at each site; (2) telephone interviews with program participants at each site; (3) extraction of data from the child support administrative records at each site; and (4) employment and earnings records maintained by the state Departments of Labor and Employment as a part of the Unemployment Compensation Insurance program (UI).
- The incidence of missing information in the case site data varies significantly both across sites and within sites from item to item.
- Follow-up telephone interviews were completed with 31 percent of the noncustodial fathers.
- A total of 86 percent of the noncustodial fathers had some monthly tracking data available.
- Child support reviews were conducted for 91 percent of the noncustodial fathers, and employment databases were checked for 89 percent.

Chapter 5: Recruitment of Program Participants

In this chapter

- The challenges of recruiting clients for fatherhood programs
- Referral source for noncustodial fathers
- Perceptions of mandatory/voluntary participation
- Referral source for noncustodial mothers

Recruitment Challenges and Goals

When the Responsible Fatherhood demonstration projects were funded in 1997, it had already been documented that recruitment presented a significant challenge for such programs (Achatz and MacCollum, 1994; Bloom and Sherwood, 1994). The role of the child support agency in the recruitment process was controversial. For example, the Public/Private Ventures Young Unwed Father programs were reluctant to have any relationship with the local child support agency, or even to discuss child support for fear of driving clients away.

There was also mixed evidence on the utility of obtaining participants through mandatory court referrals. Participants in the Parents' Fair Share (PFS) projects consisted exclusively of unemployed or underemployed, nonpaying obligors whose children received TANF benefits, who appeared at court or an administrative hearing, and were ordered to enroll in the program (Doolittle and Lynn, 1998). Yet, even these mandatory, court-connected programs served far fewer individuals than were potentially eligible. Program administrators and evaluators learned that many individuals did not appear for court hearings, and those who did frequently would not attend a fatherhood program despite a court order to do so. PFS researchers estimated that at some sites, only 5 percent of the located, eligible noncustodial parents appeared in court or before the administrative agency for a hearing and were referred to the project. The number of actual participants was further reduced by

the fact that one-third of the qualified individuals who were ordered by a judge or hearing officer to attend PFS never showed up for an orientation (Doolittle and Lynn, 1998).

The OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration Projects encouraged applicants to propose and test innovative strategies to recruit clients into their programs. The projects were to explore:

- Broad recruitment efforts, including recruitment from community-based organizations serving low-income families, faith-based groups, and health providers;
- The efficacy of engaging noncustodial parents voluntarily; and
- The feasibility of enrolling fathers at time points close to the birth of their children, including prenatal, at-birth, and postpartum settings; and in cultivating referrals from hospital-based paternity programs.

Recruitment of Noncustodial Fathers Across the Sites

The eight sites approached recruitment through a variety of methods. Table 5-1 illustrates the major ways that fathers were referred for enrollment. There is, of course, overlap among the referral categories. For example, if a client learned about the program by talking to a staff member at the program's booth at a community event, the program might attribute the resulting enrollment to "staff outreach," "media event," or both. However, Table 5-1 does convey the diversity of ways in which programs reach potential clients.

- The primary referral sources were child support agencies, word of mouth, community organizations, and courts and criminal justice agencies.

If all sites are combined, participants were most likely to learn about the fatherhood program from child support agencies, word of mouth, community organizations, and courts and criminal justice agencies. However, combining the sites masks the fact that there is actually tremendous variation in the referral sources used at the different sites. While some programs relied almost exclusively on referrals from child support enforcement, other sites did not use this source at all. Similarly, referrals from criminal justice agencies were common at some sites and rare at others.

Table 5-1. Recruitment Sources for Noncustodial Fathers, by Site

	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Number in the evaluation	183	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,674
Number of cases with referral information	183	157	82	231	46	20	711	81	1,511
Referral Source [i]									
Friends	0%	5%	49%	20%	33%	5%	21%	22%	21%
Spouse/girlfriend	0%	4%	0%	1%	0%	5%	4%	6%	3%
Child support agency worker	100%	41%	5%	2%	9%	80%	23%	1%	33%
Department of Social Services (non-child support)	0%	11%	13%	3%	2%	5%	3%	5%	5%
Court or Department of Corrections	0%	16%	27%	18%	2%	10%	12%	16%	14%
Community organization	0%	17%	9%	33%	15%	0%	27%	11%	24%
Staff outreach	0%	1%	2%	6%	37%	0%	2%	33%	6%
Hospital paternity program or health professional	0%	0%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Media and advertisement	0%	2%	0%	18%	2%	10%	7%	3%	8%
Referrals from professional community	0%	5%	1%	2%	0%	5%	5%	7%	4%
Other	0%	1%	6%	4%	0%	15%	7%	9%	6%

[i] Columns may exceed 100% because a single client may have referrals from multiple sources

The variation in program referral sources is discussed in greater detail below. The experiences of selected states are highlighted, along with insights from program staff about their experiences in generating referrals and enrolling clients.

Word-of-Mouth Recruitment

As noted above, when the sites are combined, referrals by friends accounted for 21 percent of the enrolled clients. The number of word-of-mouth referrals ranged from 49 percent in Maryland to 33 percent in Missouri, and about 20 percent in Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Washington. In

contrast, only 5 percent of New Hampshire and Colorado participants reported learning about programs from friends.

- Word-of-mouth referrals were key sources for the oldest programs with the longest track record.

Wisconsin: It seems likely that word-of-mouth referrals become more common as programs become more established. For example, staff at Children UpFront, Wisconsin's fatherhood program, believe that their relatively large number of word-of-mouth referrals can be attributed to the fact that the program is well known among poor, vulnerable families. Founded in 1990, Children UpFront is one of the oldest fatherhood programs. For nine years, the project was also the vendor for the county's Children First program, which mandates nonpaying obligors with high arrears to engage in 32 hours per week of employment-seeking activities or face incarceration.

Maryland: Baltimore's responsible fatherhood program, another program that relied heavily on word-of-mouth referrals, grew out of Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers (YF/RF), which began in 1993 in Arundel County. YF/RF was expanded in 1994 to five additional counties, including Baltimore city, where it enjoys high visibility. Consequently, as a result of its association with YF/RF, Baltimore RFP enjoys this same visibility and half of its participants were generated by personal referrals.

Other sites: Word-of-mouth referrals were also a substantial source of clients at the projects in Massachusetts, Washington, and Missouri. For example, program staff in Washington reported that many new clients came to Devoted Dads because friends had told them about the legal seminars and free assistance offered by the project's contract attorney and paralegal.

Child Support Referrals

While referrals by child support technicians accounted for 19 percent of participants across the project sites, child support workers were primary sources of referrals in California, Colorado, New Hampshire, and Washington. At all of these sites, the child support agency was heavily involved with program organization and operation.

- Child support referrals were heaviest in settings where the agencies were deeply involved with program organization and operation.

California: The program was administered by the child support enforcement agency; the mediator hired with project funds, however, was actually based at the court. All types of child support personnel, including customer service representatives, attorneys, and establishment and enforcement staff, could make referrals to the mediator. The objective was to offer free mediation services whenever custodial parents or NCPs who were seen for establishment and enforcement action mentioned that access was a problem. Particular attention was paid to those cases where the NCP was not complying with the child support order and the issue of visitation denial and/or non-contact with the children was raised as a reason for non-payment.

Colorado: The child support agency in El Paso County, Colorado,[1] housed and served as the primary source of referrals for the Parent Opportunity Project (POP). Nearly half (41%) of male NCPs referred to POP were referred by technicians in the child support program. Noncustodial parents who were delinquent on their child support payments and who were either under- or unemployed were told by technicians to contact a POP case manager to avoid other, more serious enforcement remedies. Those who ignored this advice were at risk of being referred to the court's contempt calendar. The technicians also sent the noncustodial parent's name and phone number directly to the POP case manager via e-mail. If the potential participant failed to contact the POP case manager on his or her own, the case manager typically contacted him or her directly to offer services.

Although child support technicians were a primary source of referrals to POP, the court that hears child support matters was not. POP staff made special efforts to recruit clients from the litigants who appear in court on child support matters, and supportive judges even offered to consolidate child support matters on certain days so that POP case managers could be in attendance at court. Despite these efforts, no referrals were generated from the court. POP case managers discovered that many individuals do not show up for court hearings, many court appearances are at the advisement stage when parents are not yet in contempt and cannot be ordered into services, and many parents who are ordered to attend programs fail to follow through.

[1] Child support services in El Paso and Teller counties, Colorado, are delivered by a privatized vendor.

New Hampshire: Fully 80 percent of participants in New Hampshire's Phoenix Project were referred by child support technicians. According to the project brochure, Phoenix Project "works with unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents who are referred through the Division of Child Support Services." Child support technicians told delinquent noncustodial parents who were unemployed, and those with minimum child support orders, about the project and gave them the case manager's telephone number. The judge who heard child support cases could order parents into the program. Child support technicians relayed information about potential clients directly to the case manager, and project intakes were typically conducted at the child support agency.

Washington: Project staff at Washington's Devoted Dads project estimated that about half of its referrals were from child support, and about 23 percent of the 711 male NCPs who actually participated in the program were sent by the child support enforcement agency. Although most child support referrals were made by technicians, the agency also alerted potential clients to the program by distributing flyers about the project throughout the office and even posting them in the elevators.

Other Sites: The child support agency was a little-used source of clients at the other sites. Only 1 percent of Wisconsin participants and 2 percent of Massachusetts participants in the Father Friendly Initiative were referred by the child support enforcement agency. In Maryland and Missouri, the proportions of project participants referred by child support enforcement stood at only 5 and 9 percent, respectively. The child support enforcement agency played a somewhat different role at each of these sites, but the common element was that the agency was not involved in the day-to-day operations of these programs.

For example, although the state child support agency (CSE) collaborated with Goodwill Industries to obtain the Wisconsin grant, there was little subsequent involvement by the local child support agency, and project administration clearly rested with Goodwill, an experienced provider of fatherhood services. By linking with a public health organization to organize and operate the fatherhood program, the state child support agency in Massachusetts deliberately pursued a community-based approach. Although the state Department of Revenue, which houses the child support agency, and its regional offices were supportive and provided needed information and interventions pertaining to the child support status of participants, the recruitment effort was channeled through the outreach efforts of the community health program that administered the fatherhood program.

Department of Social Services Referrals

- Referrals from social services workers (other than child support) were relatively rare except for TANF workers in Maryland and fatherhood program staff in Colorado.

Referrals could come from a number of programs within the social services agency, in addition to the child support division. For example, referrals could be made by workers providing public assistance and other welfare benefits, those involved with child welfare and protective services, and other departments offering services to parents. In practice, only two programs received any notable volume of referrals from non-child support workers within the social services agency.

Maryland: Baltimore's RFP obtained 13 percent of the noncustodial fathers it enrolled through referrals by TANF workers. These individuals were typically applying for benefits when they were directed to the RFP program to obtain employment.

Colorado: The Colorado POP program also received a few referrals from TANF workers and secured 11 percent of its participants from the Center on Fathering, which is a unit of the El Paso County DSS that provides supportive services to custodial and noncustodial fathers of all ages and backgrounds. Located in an independent community setting, the Center on Fathering addresses parenting issues and offers support groups. Center staff referred to POP those noncustodial fathers of low income and in need of parenting and/or employment assistance.

Court and Correctional Agency Referrals

- In several settings, criminal justice agencies and courts were important sources of referrals, with some using participation in the programs as an alternative to incarceration or a mechanism for early release.

Across the sites, 14 percent of participants were referred by a court or correctional worker, including community corrections officers, parole officers, and/or probation personnel. At four sites, the proportion was higher — 27 percent in Maryland; 18 percent in Massachusetts; and 16 percent in Colorado and Wisconsin, respectively. The success these programs had in recruiting clients from correctional sources may be a factor in explaining the relatively high number of clients with felony convictions.

Maryland: Maryland aggressively pursued court-mandated referrals, and some judges used the program as an alternative to incarceration for misdemeanors. In addition to child support nonpayment cases, judges reportedly sent individuals to Baltimore RFP if they had been involved in domestic violence matters and child abuse and neglect filings. The program also received referrals from parole officers and case managers at the juvenile court and the Department of Juvenile Justice.

In response to its domestic violence referrals, Baltimore RFP added treatment for batterers to the array of services that it offered. Individuals who were required to attend a program for batterers could do so at Baltimore RFP without paying the $35-per-session fee charged by other community providers. Fathers involved in child protection matters were sometimes required by the juvenile court to take RFP's parent education curriculum.

Wisconsin: Staff at Wisconsin's Children UpFront project also served court-referred populations; the number of such referrals dropped, however, when Children UpFront ceased to be the entity handling the county's court-ordered program for delinquent child support obligors. Most of the mandated referrals that Children UpFront received came from the child protective services agency and the juvenile court. Some parents in the program who were involved in dependency and neglect cases attended the Motherhood and Fatherhood Development classes to try to regain custody of their children. Children UpFront also obtained referrals from probation officers and parole workers for parents who had been convicted of other types of offenses.

Colorado: Staff at Colorado's POP found that community corrections staff were a good source of client referrals: over 15 percent of the fathers participating in POP were referred by a community corrections organization. However, case managers found it was more difficult to elicit referrals from parole and probation officers. Despite numerous attempts to present information about POP to these workers, there was relatively little interest expressed in return. POP staff felt that corrections workers were resistant for a variety of reasons: a focus on monitoring and surveillance rather than service provision, a sense that POP was a child support program, and reservations about enforcing child support.

Washington: Some incarcerated noncustodial parents who were eligible for early release were referred to Washington's Devoted Dads for job development and assistance with parenting. While participation was not mandated, there was a strong incentive to attend since only those who were actively involved with the program could qualify for early release. The program targeted lower-risk offenders at the Pierce County Correctional Facility, but included domestic violence offenders and others who had committed serious assaults.

Community-Based Organization Referrals

- Through outreach efforts and collaborations, programs can attract referrals from a wide array of community-based organizations, including housing and health programs, substance abuse treatment providers, and employment services.

Across the sites, about 24 percent of participants were referred by public agencies, community organizations, schools, or churches, but these were more important sources of clients for some programs.

Massachusetts: The Massachusetts FFI program received one-third of its referrals from various entities in the community. The community organizations that referred NCPs to FFI included housing programs, health clinics, providers of employment services, and programs offering substance abuse treatment. As part of the Boston Healthy Start Initiative, FFI combined its recruitment efforts with the agency's aggressive public-health outreach efforts. The large number of participants generated by other community organizations reflects the health program's visibility in the community and its extensive network of ties.

Colorado: The Colorado POP program also generated a substantial number of referrals from community organizations. To cultivate referrals, case managers made presentations at shelters and formed partnerships with several key community entities that not only provided services, but also made referrals to the program. Such entities included Goodwill Industries, a community-based organization providing employment services; the Fatherhood Foundation, a community-based fatherhood program that referred low-income NCPs to POP; and the Women's Resource Agency, which assists custodial and noncustodial mothers.

Washington: Staff at Washington's Devoted Dads reached out to many community agencies and organizations through its brochures, flyers, and networking. A key source of referrals were the sister agencies that are located at the Metropolitan Development Council or within a few blocks of the Devoted Dads. These include an employment program for noncustodial parents (Work First); a career center (Educational Opportunity Resource Center); a substance abuse treatment clinic; and adult education providers. Staff said that geographical proximity made it easy for Devoted Dads to collaborate with such agencies for referrals and service delivery.

Among the other community outreach efforts Devoted Dads pursued were brochures at Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program sites, presentations to schools, and outreach to area recreation centers and youth agencies serving young, low-income men. While Devoted Dads attempted to recruit at HeadStart programs and preschools, this tactic proved to be less effective since fathers were rarely present at these settings and/or they fell outside the age and income range targeted for project participation. Staff reported more success reaching young fathers by recruiting at a class offered at the Urban League and by using its young staff interns to do one-on-one outreach at area churches and organizations that attract young people. Some referrals came from a substance abuse treatment program operated by the Puyallup Tribe.

Other Recruitment Strategies

While word of mouth, child support enforcement technicians, Departments of Social Services, courts, criminal justice agencies, and community agencies were the major sources of referrals, projects tried a variety of other techniques to generate referrals. The following is a discussion of the less commonly used methods of generating clients and the experiences of the projects with each technique.

Direct Outreach to NCPs with Child Support Cases

- Mass mailings and cold calls to noncustodial parents in the child support system produced few enrollments.

Several programs experimented with cold calls and mailings to introduce the program to noncustodial fathers in the child support system. The results were generally disappointing. For example, when the case manager for a project in Charles County, Maryland, phoned 120 noncustodial parents who were delinquent in their child support, he found that only about one-third of the phone numbers worked. The remaining numbers were out of service, or the parent had moved. Less than half the fathers who could be reached agreed to set up an appointment to discuss their service needs in more detail; ultimately, only about 10 percent of the calls led to a personal contact.

In El Paso County, Colorado, the Parent Opportunity Program began operations by mailing information about the program to all noncustodial parents who appeared in the automated child support system as located but not paying support. Noncustodial parents were invited to call the POP case manager to receive services dealing with employment, parenting, and child support. The tone of the letter was positive and helpful; there was no sanction for failure to contact POP. Only three intake interviews resulted from over 300 mailings; this approach was subsequently abandoned due to a lack of response.

Finally, Proud Parents in Missouri used lists generated by the child support agency to invite parents to its parent education program. In its original format, the target population for Proud Parents was to be unmarried parents with a child under the age of 24 months (later extended to five years) who were receiving public assistance and were known to the child support agency. Evaluators for Proud Parents at the University of Missouri mailed fliers to 800 parents, inviting them to attend a program and attempted to extend phone invitations to as many of these parents as possible. The program was not identified as a child support-sponsored event. Parents were offered a dinner, child care, and gifts for the children as incentives to promote attendance. In Kansas City, ten mothers and their families registered, but only six actually attended. In the Cape Girardeau area, letters were sent to 22 parents, but none called to reserve a spot and no one showed up on the designated date.

The University of Missouri evaluators noted several difficulties with their recruitment approach. Due to the transience of the populations being recruited, address and telephone numbers for urban residents were frequently incorrect, making phone contacts virtually impossible, and many letters were returned as undeliverable. Another problem was the individual's lack of knowledge about the sponsoring organization. The mailed information was released under the name of Proud Parents, which was unrecognizable to participants. And although there was no mention of the child support agency, the phone number to call to make a required reservation for the dinner/program was a state agency number. As a result of these experiences, program architects decided to refocus the program to serve low-income, unmarried fathers and rely on paid community recruiters to identify relevant participants.

Direct Client Contact at Community Agencies

- Two programs hired recruiters who were based at relevant community organizations to publicize the programs and attract participants.

Several projects used program staff to conduct direct outreach with potential clients by stationing them at community organizations. For example, Wisconsin's Children UpFront employed an outreach specialist whose job was to solicit participants at other service organizations. With the consent of agency directors, the outreach specialist regularly set up tables with project flyers at designated agency settings. He also met with agency staff to explain the program and elicit their support in making suitable referrals. The settings targeted for recruitment activities were WIC offices, health clinics, community centers, Planned Parenthood, and schools. Ultimately, a third of the men who participated in Children UpFront reported learning about it from program staff at outreach settings.

After its disappointing experiences with direct mailings and phone calls using lists maintained by the child support agency, Missouri's Proud Parents hired a part-time recruiter whose job it was to cultivate relationships with key organizations that serve low-income fathers in Cape Girardeau, the site of the project. The recruiter focused on pediatric centers that served low-income populations ("Healthy Start"), the child support agency, the agency that provides employment, and other organizations involved with community action. More than a third (37%) of Proud Parent participants were obtained by the program recruiter.

Program staff were responsible for generating only a handful of participants at the other program sites; overall, they accounted for only 6 percent of participants. While outreach and recruitment were part of the case management duties that staff maintained, none of the sites other than Missouri and Wisconsin employed designated staff for the recruitment process.

Hospitals and Birthing Facilities

- Although several programs made concerted efforts to attract new parents at hospital maternity departments and clinics offering infant care, these settings produced no referrals.

Staff at several of the projects attempted to generate referrals from maternity departments at area hospitals, but none had much success. For example, case managers at Colorado's POP project had a representative of a hospital maternity ward serving on the advisory board. They were also successful in including a project flyer in the packet of information given to all new parents at the area's largest birthing facility. Case managers were in regular contact with the maternity department to determine whether there were any new parents who might fit the program's requirements (low-income, unemployed or underemployed, unmarried, or at risk of family dissolution). They also made regular visits to the hospital to keep the program visible to staff at the maternity department and to explain POP to parents. Despite these efforts, there were no referrals from the hospital. Although POP staff pursued the possibility of making presentations at prenatal hospital orientations, the prenatal program staff were reluctant to include POP in the curriculum.

Staff at Washington's Devoted Dads were also unsuccessful in their efforts to generate referrals of young, new fathers from hospital and postpartum settings. The approach used by staff in Washington was to develop a collaboration with maternity support nurses based at decentralized health offices in 13 different locations in Pierce County, known as Family Support Centers. Maternity support nurses attempt to conduct home visits or telephone interviews with all newly delivering mothers in Pierce County. One of the objectives of these visits and calls is to refer new parents to relevant community services, including Devoted Dads. Staff also did outreach to maternity support nurses located at WIC offices, which provide nutritional supplements for pregnant women, infants, and children under the age of five, as well as refer parents to various community services.

Despite these efforts, no client was identified as being referred from a hospital paternity program or a maternity nurse. One impediment to reaching new fathers at Family Support Centers and WIC offices is that fathers are rarely on scene. At both sites, maternity support nurses tend to interact with mothers, who do not always relay information about Devoted Dads to the baby's father. Another obstacle is the sheer number of rival concerns that maternity support nurses have when they meet with mothers during their pregnancy and soon after the birth of their babies. In addition to trying to address the health and nutritional needs of mothers and babies, maternity support nurses are expected to deal with immunizations and screen for a variety of risk factors, such as child abuse and neglect. While father involvement is valued, it is a newer focus for overworked and understaffed hospitals and health agencies. Devoted Dads staff concluded that in the absence of a tradition of interviewing mothers about the father's involvement and referring him to programs like Devoted Dads (or a mandate to do so), it is an easy topic to overlook.

Media Events

- One program based in a public health organization with an aggressive publicity department used the media effectively to generate program visibility and enrollment.

Massachusetts' Father Friendly Initiative was the most successful in using the media and other marketing techniques to make itself known and generate referrals, with 18 percent of project clients produced this way. Based in a public health organization that serves low-income populations, FFI piggybacked on Boston's Healthy Start's aggressive outreach efforts to reach low-income men. During its first summer of operation, FFI staff and Healthy Start outreach workers "blitzed every public event that might attract families and men." At Healthy Start booths, staff distributed t-shirts, tote bags, and water bottles advertising FFI to every man who filled out a brief survey. They went to job fairs, jazz concerts, and street fairs. They also ran radio commercials on a popular radio station. By teaming up with radio stations, FFI co-sponsored some popular events like baseball tournaments and barbeques. Program ads featuring photos of fathers and their children were displayed on buses and trains. According to FFI staff, these partnerships, along with FFIs popular giveaways and its presence at community celebrations, generated a great deal of program visibility and name recognition.

Finally, Washington's Devoted Dads invested a good deal of project energy in publicizing the program to the general public. Like FFI, staff at Devoted Dads prepared public service

announcements to air on local television and radio stations. In its early months of operation, staff distributed over 1,200 pamphlets advertising the program. Staff also attended relevant events and conferences such as the state conference on responsible fatherhood where the project was featured.

Referrals by Professionals:

- Professionals who were the target of outreach efforts by program staff referred small numbers of participants at every site.

Professionals, such as attorneys, therapists, mediators, and counselors, were another source of clients for some programs. These professional referrals were generally the result of outreach from project staff to acquaint members of relevant professional groups with the program. Although no program received substantial numbers of clients through professional referrals, most did receive a small number of referrals that resulted in program enrollment.

Noncustodial Fathers' Perceptions of Mandatory Participation

- Overall, participation in the programs was viewed as voluntary by most (93%) noncustodial fathers.

- About a quarter of the clients at the Maryland, Missouri, and New Hampshire sites reported that they were "required" to participate.

In Maryland, 27 percent of clients were referred by courts and correctional programs who used the program as an alternative to incarceration, and an identical percentage reported being required to attend RFP.

New Hampshire relied heavily on child support referrals, and some fraction of these clients viewed their participation as mandatory. It is relevant that Colorado also relied heavily on child support referrals, but only 2 percent of clients classified their participation as "required."

It is unclear why 23 percent of Missouri clients termed their participation status as "required" since the program's recruitment effort relied heavily on outreach by paid recruiters and referrals by friends.

Table 5-2. Perceived Mandatory/Voluntary Nature of Program Among Noncustodial Fathers, By Site

	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Number in the evaluation	183	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,674
Number with mandatory/voluntary information	[i]	132	71	219	44	16	707	80	1,269 [i]
Participation seen as mandatory		2%	27%	15%	23%	31%	2%	12%	7%
Participation seen as voluntary		98%	73%	85%	77%	69%	98%	88%	93%

[i] California is not included. Participation in the mediation program was voluntary in California, but clients were not asked whether they believed participation was mandatory or voluntary.

Referral Sources for Noncustodial Mothers

Before concluding with the issue of client referral, we present a brief overview of the referral sources that brought noncustodial mothers into the programs. As was noted in Chapter 3, several of the sites served noncustodial mothers as well as noncustodial fathers, although most served too few to allow for a meaningful discussion of referral sources. Table 5-3 presents data from the three sites with the most referral information for noncustodial mothers. The 5able compares the referral sources for noncustodial mothers in Colorado, Washington, and Wisconsin to those of noncustodial fathers.

- Certain referrals were equally effective in attracting male and female participants.

Word-of-mouth referrals from family/friends were equally effective in reaching men and women. Men and women were also equally likely to report having heard about the programs from the media or to have entered as the result of a corrections-related referral.

Table 5-3. Recruitment Sources for Noncustodial Fathers and Noncustodial Mothers, By Site

	Colorado		Washington		Wisconsin		Sites Combined	
	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers
Number in the evaluation	163	41	760	34	110	68	1,033	143
Cases with valid information	157	40	711	32	81	48	949	120
Referral Source [i]								
Friends	5%	3%	21%	19%	22%	15%	18%	12%
Spouse/girlfriend	4%	1%	4%	3%	6%	4%	4%	3%
Child support agency worker	41%	35%	23%	13%	1%	4%	24%	17%
Department of Social Services (non-child support)	11%	18%	3%	3%	5%	15%	4%	13%
Court or Department of Corrections	16%	15%	12%	13%	16%	21%`	13%	17%
Community organization	17%	13%	27%	53%	11%	21%	24%	27%
Staff outreach	1%	3%	2%	0%	33%	23%	4%	10%
Hospital paternity program or health professional	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Media and advertisement	2%	5%	7%	3%	3%	2%	6%	3%
Referrals from professional community	5%	15%	5%	6%	7%	4%	5%	8%
Other	1%	3%	7%	0%	9%	6%	6%	3%

[i] Columns may exceed 100% because a single client may have referrals from multiple sources

- Male NCPs were more apt to be referred by child support workers, while female NCPs were more apt to be referred by workers in the child welfare system.

Compared to noncustodial men, noncustodial women were somewhat less likely to have been referred to the programs by a child support worker. They were somewhat more likely to have a referral from an agency within the Department of Social or Human Services other than child support. At some of these program sites, staff did presentations for TANF workers, which seems to have

generated some referrals. However, in both Colorado and Wisconsin, most of the referrals seem to have been made by child protective services workers. These workers deal with mothers who have children in foster care due to an abuse or neglect report. Many workers saw the services provided by the Responsible Fatherhood Program as a way to help their clients with supervised visits or with employment and child support issues.

Summary

- The OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration Projects encouraged applicants to propose and test innovative strategies to recruit clients into their programs.

- The programs tested broad-based recruitment efforts, including recruitment from:
  - Community-based organizations serving low-income families;
  - Faith-based groups; and
  - Health providers, especially hospital serving parents at time points close to the birth of their children.

- Participation in the programs was viewed as voluntary by most (93%) noncustodial fathers.

- If all sites are combined, participants were most likely to learn about fatherhood programs from child support agencies, word of mouth, community organizations, or courts and criminal justice agencies.

- Referrals by child support technicians were primary sources of referrals in California, Colorado, New Hampshire, and Washington. At all of these sites, the child support agency was heavily involved with program organization and operation.

- Across the sites, 14 percent of participants were referred by a court or correctional worker, including community corrections officers, parole officers, and/or probation personnel.

- Across the sites, about 14 percent of participants were referred by public agencies, community organizations, schools, or churches, but these were more important sources of clients for some programs. Several projects used program staff to conduct direct outreach with potential clients by stationing them at community organizations.

- Massachusetts' Father Friendly Initiative was the most successful in using the media and other marketing techniques to make itself known and generate referrals, with 18 percent of project clients produced this way.

- None of the sites obtained referrals from hospitals or pre-natal clinics, although these referral sources were actively pursued at several sites, especially in Colorado and Washington. At both sites, program staff reported that nurses were generally amenable to presenting program information to mothers, but that mothers do not always relay information about the program to the baby's father. Another obstacle is the sheer number of rival concerns that maternity nurses have when they meet with mothers during their pregnancy and soon after the birth of their babies.

- Compared to noncustodial men, noncustodial women were somewhat less likely to have been referred to the program from a child support worker. They were somewhat more likely to have a referral from a child welfare or TANF agency within the Department of Social or Human Services.

Chapter 6: Characteristics of Noncustodial Fathers

In this chapter

- Characteristics of the noncustodial fathers
- Description of the nonresidential children and the target child
- Access patterns prior to enrollment
- Access and other parental conflicts

In this Chapter, and in Chapters 7 through 11, we limit the evaluation to the seven demonstration projects that provided a broad range of services, primarily to low-income, noncustodial fathers. While some of these sites also served noncustodial mothers, as noted in Chapter 3, mothers constituted a minority of clients and are not included in the analysis. The California mediation program is discussed in Chapter 12.

Characteristics of Noncustodial Fathers

Table 6-1 summarizes the general characteristics of male NCPs who enrolled in the programs. The information was collected by case managers at the sites during the intake process and entered on the Responsible Fatherhood Management Information System (RFMIS), a database developed for use by responsible fatherhood programs. The Table provides information on the noncustodial fathers':

- Age;
- Race/ethnicity;
- Education level;
- Current marital status; and
- Residence.

Age of Noncustodial Fathers

- On average, noncustodial fathers were 33 years old. About one-quarter (23%) were 25 years old or less, and nearly one fifth (18%) were over the age of 41.

Noncustodial fathers who participated in the programs were older than some program architects had expected, but were comparable in age to the clients served in Parents' Fair Share Demonstration sites (Doolittle and Lynn,1998). The average age of clients at the OCSE sites ranged from 27.1 in Missouri to34.4 in Washington. The Missouri program originally targeted fathers with young children, so it is not surprising that their participants were also younger. The sites with large numbers of older fathers included Massachusetts, Colorado, and Washington. Among these sites, about one out of five (17% to 22%) of the noncustodial fathers was over 40.

Ethnicity and Race of Noncustodial Fathers

- Exactly half (50%) of the noncustodial fathers were African-American. The second largest ethnic group was white (35%).

In general, the race and ethnicity of participating noncustodial fathers reflected the geographic area targeted by each program. As shown in Table 6-1, the Massachusetts, Maryland, Missouri, and Wisconsin programs served predominately African-American communities. The Colorado, Washington, and New Hampshire programs served predominantly white clients, although Washington also enrolled substantial numbers of African-American fathers and Colorado served a relatively high percentage of Hispanic fathers.

Education of Noncustodial Fathers

- Consistent with other research findings, noncustodial fathers who enrolled in the programs generally had low levels of education.

The Maryland, New Hampshire, and Missouri programs had the highest proportions of noncustodial fathers lacking high school diplomas or GEDs (48%, 71%, and 43%, respectively). Colorado and Washington had far lower proportions of participants reporting no diploma or GED (13% and 17%, respectively). Indeed, the highest percentages of noncustodial fathers with a post-secondary degree (*i.e.*, technical, associate, or college degree) were from Colorado and Washington, as well as

Massachusetts. However, even at these sites, the proportion of clients with post-secondary education was modest, ranging from 12 percent among noncustodial fathers in Colorado to 17 percent in Washington.

Marital Status

- About half (48%) of the noncustodial fathers enrolled by the programs had been married to their children's mother.

Table 6-1 shows that the percentage of ever-married, noncustodial fathers ranged from a high of 60 percent in Washington to a low of 22 percent in Maryland. When they enrolled in the program, a fair percent (24%) of noncustodial fathers at all sites were divorced, with the incidence highest in Colorado and Washington (34% and 32%, respectively). The percentage of never-married noncustodial fathers ranged from a low of 40 percent in Washington to highs of more than 75 percent in Maryland, Missouri, and Wisconsin.

Nearly a quarter of the noncustodial fathers were married at enrollment (23%), with some reporting that they lived with their spouse (11%) and others reporting that they were separated (12%). Since the analysis of noncustodial fathers is restricted to those who had at least one non-resident child, the marriages that clients reported at intake apparently reflected marriages to second spouses or someone other than the mother of their nonresident children.

Residential Patterns

- One-third (32%) of noncustodial fathers reported they were living with their parents or relatives (*i.e.*, brothers, sisters, grandmothers, or other relatives) when they enrolled in the programs. This figure was as high as 56 percent in Missouri.

Where a noncustodial father lives may influence his ability to succeed in the responsible fatherhood program and to achieve the goals of improved employment, child support payment, and access to children. If the father does not have stable living arrangements, it may be more difficult for him to keep in regular contact with his case manager or be contacted about employment opportunities. A stable living arrangement is frequently a prerequisite for regular parent-child contact. Table 6-1 presents living arrangements for noncustodial fathers when they enrolled in fatherhood programs.

The high proportion living with parents or other family members may reflect the fact that many fathers were unemployed or in low-paying jobs when they enrolled in the fatherhood programs and were not entirely self-sufficient.

- Almost one-quarter (23%) of fathers reported living with their spouse or girlfriend at program entry.

Nearly half (47%) of noncustodial fathers in New Hampshire lived with a spouse or girlfriend when they enrolled in Phoenix Project. Only about one-fifth (21%) of noncustodial fathers reported living alone, with Colorado, Massachusetts, and Washington fathers reporting this living arrangement more often than fathers in New Hampshire, Maryland, Missouri, and Wisconsin.

- Ten percent of all noncustodial fathers lived in a halfway house or shelter.

This category includes living quarters for offenders, those in drug and alcohol treatment programs, and the homeless. The site with the highest proportion of noncustodial fathers living in halfway houses or shelters at intake was Colorado (18%), while Missouri had the lowest (2%).

Some noncustodial fathers (10%) reported living with friends and roommates, and a small fraction (4%) reported other living arrangements, such as combinations of relatives and spouses or girlfriends or friends, as well as other atypical situations, such as army barracks.

Finally, at entry to the program, approximately 12 percent of the fathers had a child who lived with them, in addition to being a noncustodial parent. In addition, about 9 percent reported that they lived with the children of their partner.

Table 6-1. Characteristics of Noncustodial Fathers, by Site

		Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial Parent to at Least One Child		163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
Age at Program Entry	*(Number with valid information)*	*157*	*90*	*272*	*44*	*21*	*715*	*110*	*1,409*
	Age 18-20 years	6%	22%	5%	14%	14%	2%	15%	6%
	21-25 years	19%	9%	20%	33%	19%	14%	26%	17%
	26-30 years	18%	19%	16%	26%	33%	20%	24%	20%
	31-35 years	20%	22%	25%	19%	19%	23%	15%	22%
	36-40 years	20%	18%	17%	5%	10%	19%	10%	17%
	41 years and older	17%	10%	17%	2%	5%	22%	11%	18%
	Average age	33.1	30.5	33.1	27.1	29.2	34.4	29.2	33.0
Race / Ethnicity	*(Number with valid information)*	*157*	*90*	*273*	*43*	*20*	*749*	*103*	*1,435*
	White, Non-Hispanic	51%	4%	5%	9%	100%	50%	15%	35%
	African-American, Non-Hispanic	27%	93%	78%	88%	0%	35%	74%	50%
	Hispanic or Latino	20%	0%	13%	0%	0%	3%	8%	7%
	Native American	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	4%	1%	3%
	Asian-American	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%
	Other	0%	1%	3%	2%	0%	6%	2%	4%
Highest Degree Completed	*(Number with valid information)*	*150*	*90*	*262*	*42*	*21*	*724*	*87*	*1,376*
	None	13%	48%	23%	43%	71%	17%	38%	23%
	GED	24%	14%	21%	14%	5%	22%	21%	21%
	High school diploma	51%	32%	43%	40%	24%	44%	37%	43%
	Technical/AA degree	7%	2%	5%	2%	0%	13%	0%	9%
	College degree or higher	5%	3%	8%	0%	0%	4%	2%	4%

Table 6-1. Characteristics of Noncustodial Fathers, by Site

		Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Marital Status at Entry	*(Number with valid information)*	*160*	*93*	*278*	*48*	*18*	*748*	*102*	*1,447*
	Married, living with spouse	8%	5%	10%	2%	17%	14%	6%	11%
	Married, separated from spouse	14%	13%	9%	10%	11%	13%	9%	12%
	Divorced	34%	2%	12%	12%	11%	32%	8%	24%
	Widowed	0%	1%	2%	0%	6%	1%	0%	1%
	Never married	44%	78%	67%	75%	56%	40%	77%	52%
Residence at Entry	*(Number with valid information)*	*157*	*82*	*258*	*48*	*17*	*709*	*96*	*1,367*
	Live alone	23%	12%	20%	13%	6%	23%	13%	21%
	Live with parents or other relatives	24%	52%	44%	56%	35%	24%	43%	32%
	Live with spouse/girlfriend	24%	11%	18%	14%	47%	26%	29%	23%
	Live with friends or roommates	6%	12%	5%	6%	6%	13%	4%	10%
	Live in a halfway house or shelter	18%	6%	9%	2%	0%	10%	6%	10%
	Other living arrangement	5%	6%	4%	8%	6%	4%	5%	4%
Children in Home at Entry	*(Number with valid information)*	*157*	*97*	*282*	*53*	*17*	*760*	*110*	*1476*
	Own biological children in home	7%	4%	8%	4%	24%	15%	15%	12%
	Partner's children in home	6%	6%	7%	2%	29%	11%	5%	9%

Non-residential Children

- Two-thirds of the noncustodial fathers had children with only one partner, slightly more than one quarter reported children by two women, and less than 10 percent by three or more women.

Across the sites, between 56 and 77 percent of fathers reported having only children with one woman. The proportion of fathers with multiple families ranged from 23 percent in Missouri to 44 percent in Wisconsin. Between 17 and 26 percent reported having children with two different women, and 4 to 18 percent reported having children with three or more women.

- Over half (57%) of noncustodial fathers had one non-resident child and 27 percent had two non-resident children when they enrolled in the program.

Table 6-2 shows the number of nonresident children for fathers in each of the sites. Like PFS, most of our analysis focuses on the youngest, non-resident — or "away" — child.

Table 6-2. Number of Non-resident Children of Noncustodial Fathers, by Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
Number of away / non-resident children								
(Number with valid information)	*157*	*82*	*231*	*46*	*20*	*711*	*81*	*1,328*
One	61%	72%	58%	65%	65%	52%	63%	57%
Two	30%	17%	23%	22%	25%	30%	15%	27%
Three	6%	9%	9%	9%	5%	12%	12%	10%
Four or more	3%	2%	10%	4%	5%	6%	10%	6%
Average number	1.5	1.5	1.2	1.6	1.5	1.0	1.3	1.4

Table 6-3 provides summary information about the youngest away child, and the relationship between the mother and father of this child. As this table demonstrates:

- In each of the demonstration sites, between 60 and 70 percent of the fathers had a youngest away child who was age six years or younger.

Children who were ages two years or younger accounted for over a third of the youngest away children at each site. Noncustodial fathers in Missouri were somewhat less likely than fathers at other sites to have a youngest child age 12 or older. This may reflect the fact that the Missouri program initially targeted young fathers. In fact, at its start, the Missouri program targeted unmarried parents with children less than two years of age, a requirement that was subsequently lifted. No other site had a similar recruitment criterion based on children's age.

- Although most (69%) of the noncustodial fathers were never married to the mother of their youngest nonresident child, this varied across the sites, with the never-married rate ranging from 62 to 90 percent.

In Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, and Wisconsin, almost 90 percent of the fathers were never married to the mother of their youngest nonresident child. In cases where the parents were never married, about two-thirds of fathers reported that they had lived with the child's mother in the past.

Only three sites had a substantial proportion of fathers who had been married. In Washington (39%), Colorado (37%), and New Hampshire (31%), at least a third of the noncustodial fathers reported having been married to the mother of the youngest away child.

- At all of the sites, the majority (87%) of away children lived with their mother.

The proportion of away children living with their mother ranged from 72 percent in Maryland to 95 percent in New Hampshire. The next most common places for away children to live were with another relative (chiefly, the grandmother) and foster care.

Across the sites, 7 percent of the away children lived with a relative, 4 percent lived in foster care, and 2 percent lived in other situations. "Other" situations included a child living at an academy and situations where the child's residence changed part of the year. There were a handful of cases where the father and mother lived together, but their child lived in foster care or with another relative.

Table 6-3. Characteristics of the Youngest Away Child of Noncustodial Fathers, by Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial Parent to at Least One Child	*163*	*97*	*284*	*53*	*24*	*760*	*110*	*1,491*
Age of youngest away child								
(Number with valid information)	*157*	*82*	*231*	*46*	*20*	*711*	*81*	*1,328*
Less than 1 year	10%	22%	15%	0%	21%	12%	23%	14%
Ages 1-2	22%	24%	20%	33%	21%	23%	24%	23%
Ages 3-4	18%	15%	17%	22%	16%	20%	18%	19%
Ages 5-6	14%	8%	13%	22%	5%	11%	7%	11%
Ages 7-11	23%	15%	22%	22%	26%	23%	16%	22%
Age 12 and older	13%	16%	13%	0%	11%	11%	12%	12%
Average age of youngest away child	6.4	5.4	5.8	4.7	5.7	6.0	5.0	5.9
Relationship to the youngest away child's mother								
(Number with valid information)	*127*	*73*	*191*	*8* [i]	*16*	*672*	*72*	*1,159*
Currently married to her	10%	4%	7%	13%	0%	13%	6%	11%
Previously married to her	27%	7%	10%	0%	31%	26%	4%	21%
Never married to her, but lived with her in the past	47%	41%	46%	50%	44%	43%	43%	44%
Never married to her, never lived with her	16%	48%	36%	38%	25%	19%	47%	25%
Usual residence of youngest away child								
(Number with valid information)	*130*	*74*	*192*	*9* [i]	*19*	*674*	*74*	*1,172*
With mother	82%	72%	90%	78%	95%	90%	81%	87%
With a relative	11%	20%	7%	22%	5%	5%	7%	7%
In foster care	5%	5%	3%	0%	0%	3%	8%	4%
Other	2%	3%	0%	0%	0%	2%	4%	2%

[i] The small number of cases with valid information means the Missouri patterns should be viewed with caution.

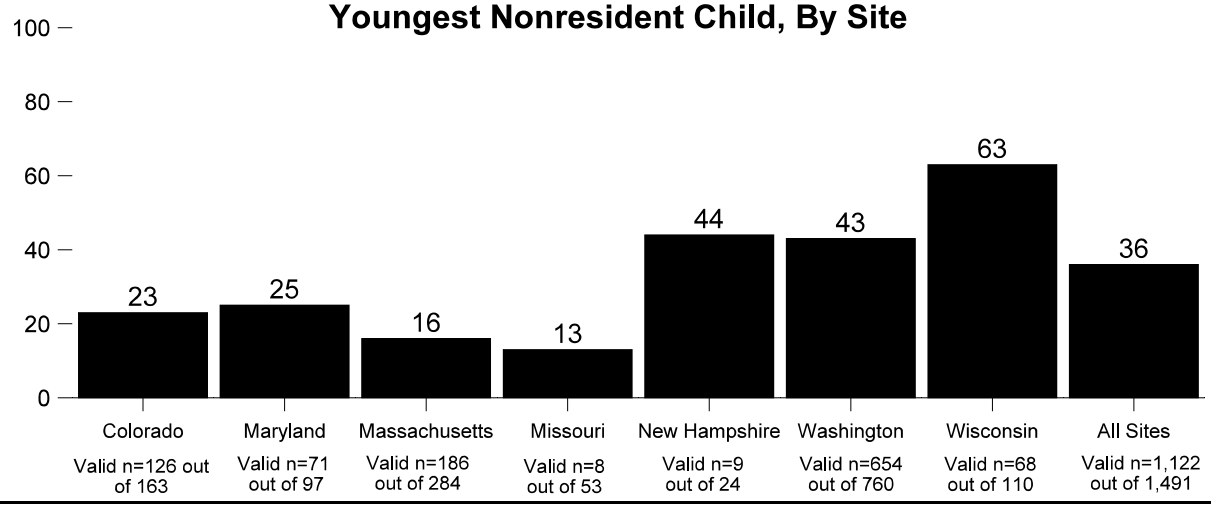
Access Patterns

Court-Ordered Access

- Across the sites, about a third of the noncustodial fathers had court-ordered child access or visitation when they enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs.

Figure 6-1 shows the proportion of noncustodial fathers who reported having a court order stating that they had the right to visit with their youngest non-resident child when they enrolled in the fatherhood programs. Very few cases in New Hampshire and Wisconsin had valid information on this variable; the results at these two sites should be viewed with caution. Across the sites, only one-third (36%) of noncustodial fathers reported having court-ordered visitation rights. Washington and Wisconsin sites had higher proportions (42% and 63%, respectively) than other sites.

Figure 6-1
Percent of Noncustodial Fathers with Court-Ordered Access to Youngest Nonresident Child, By Site



There are several reasons why fathers at some sites might have had higher levels of court-ordered visitation. Court-ordered visitation rights are almost always part of a divorce decree but are rarely accorded to never-married parents unless they pursue a separate legal action. Washington had a

relatively high proportion of fathers who had been previously married. In addition, workshops to assist noncustodial parents with legal filings to obtain court visitation orders were the most popular features of Washington's Devoted Dads program, suggesting that the establishment and modification of visitation rights were priorities for many noncustodial parents at that site. Wisconsin has a *pro se* (*i.e.*, self-represented) process to establish a child access order among unmarried parents, which might explain that site's higher rate of court orders concerning access.

Court-Ordered Restrictions on Access

- A significant number (15%) of noncustodial fathers had court orders restricting child contact.

Figure 6-2 shows that 15 percent of noncustodial fathers faced legal restrictions to contact with their youngest nonresident child when they enrolled in the fatherhood programs. The proportion of noncustodial fathers with court-restricted child contact ranged from a low of 6 percent among Wisconsin fathers to a high of 18 percent in Washington. Washington had a much higher divorce rate than Wisconsin (26% versus 4%) and court-ordered restrictions on visitation typically result from allegations made during divorce proceedings.

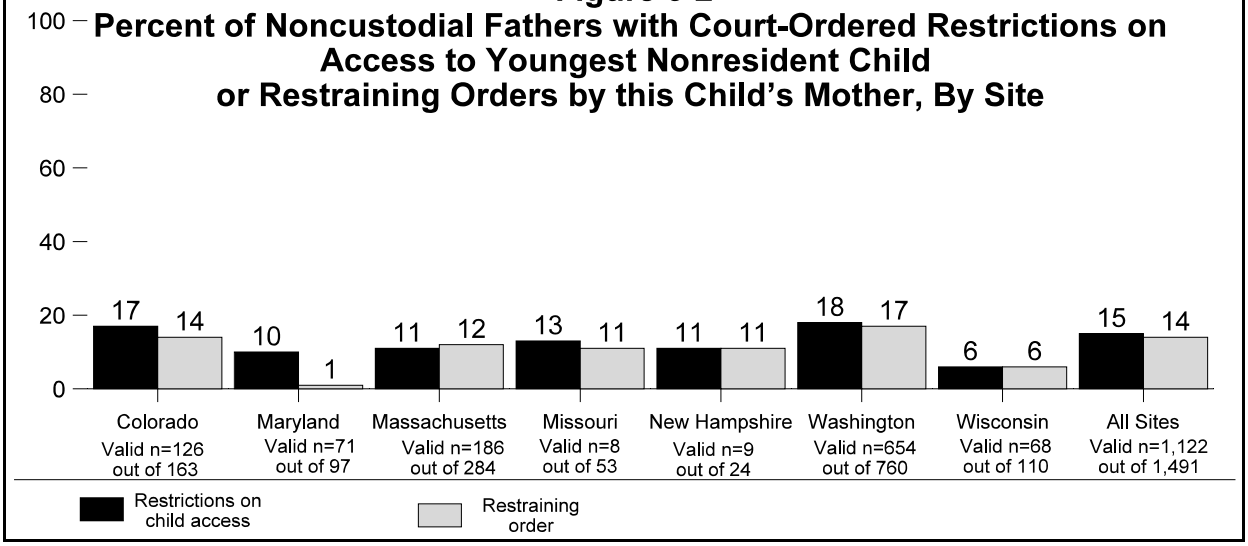
Court orders restricting visitation typically called for supervised visitation (44%), although some specified no contact (12%) and another 30 percent prohibited overnight visitation. In the remaining 14 percent of the cases with restrictions, the nature of the restriction was not specified.

- Fourteen percent of the fathers reported that the mother of their youngest nonresident child had obtained a restraining order prohibiting contact.

A small but notable proportion of noncustodial fathers had a restraining order in effect against them filed by the mother of their youngest child. This proportion ranged from a low of 1 percent of Maryland noncustodial fathers to a high of 17 percent in Washington. Like court restrictions on child access, it is unclear whether these differences reflect different rates of divorce at the sites, differences in court procedures and practices, or differences in the type of noncustodial fathers who enrolled in the programs.

Frequency of Contact

Figure 6-2
Percent of Noncustodial Fathers with Court-Ordered Restrictions on Access to Youngest Nonresident Child or Restraining Orders by this Child's Mother, By Site



- Fathers reported a wide variety of contact patterns when they enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs, with substantial proportions reporting high levels of contact during the year preceding their enrollment.

At enrollment to the program, almost two-thirds (61%) of the noncustodial fathers reported that during the past 12 months, they generally saw their youngest away child more than once a month. The remaining fathers were almost equally split between those who did not see their children at all (20%) and those who saw their children less than once a month in the past year (19%).

Compared to the noncustodial fathers in Colorado and Washington, those in Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin reported seeing their away children more frequently.[1] At these three sites, more than half (58%, 52%, and 52%, respectively) reported seeing their youngest away child at least weekly during the 12 months prior to program enrollment. Compared to Colorado and

[1] As in the earlier analyses, the number of cases in Missouri and New Hampshire with valid information is too small to make the patterns meaningful.

Washington, these three sites (Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin) also had higher proportions of noncustodial fathers who had never married and never lived with the mother of their youngest away child. Table 6-4 summarizes these patterns.

Table 6-4. Contact Reported by Noncustodial Fathers in the 12 Months Prior to Program Enrollment By Distance from the Youngest Away Child, By Site

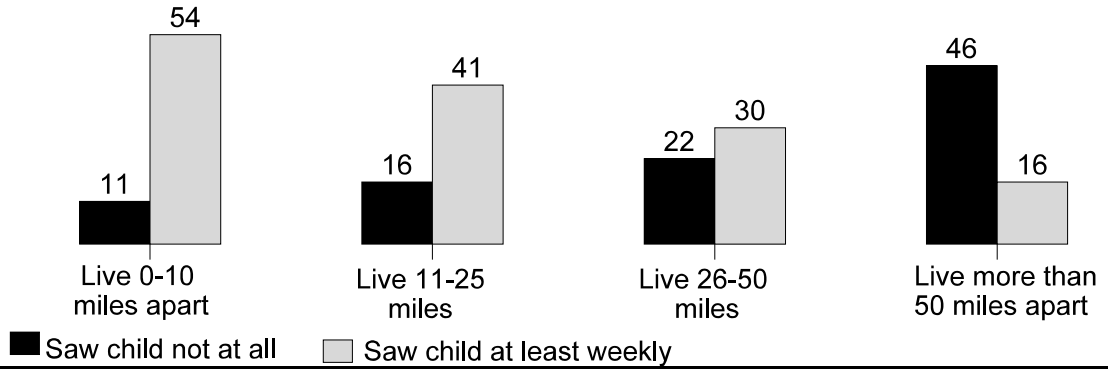
	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
(Number with valid information)	*128*	*71*	*184*	*9*	*12*	*663*	*71*	*1,138*
12 months prior to enrollment, saw youngest away child								
Not at all	23%	4%	20%	22%	17%	23%	9%	20%
About once a year	11%	5%	7%	0%	17%	6%	9%	7%
Several times a year	13%	10%	6%	11%	17%	13%	14%	12%
About 1-3 times a month	13%	23%	15%	22%	0%	21%	17%	19%
About once a week or more	40%	58%	52%	45%	49%	37%	51%	42%

Understanding the Frequency of Contact

- There is clearly a relationship between geographic distance separating the noncustodial father and child, and the frequency of their contact.

As Figure 6-3 indicates, the likelihood of contact decreases as the distance between the noncustodial fathers and the youngest away child increases. Similarly, the frequency of weekly contact increases as distance decreases.

Figure 6-3
Relationship Between Frequency of Contact in the 12 Months Pre-Enrollment and Noncustodial Father's Distance From Youngest Away Child, By Site



- Marital status between the noncustodial father and the mother of the youngest away child is not related to the amount of father-child contact reported at program enrollment.

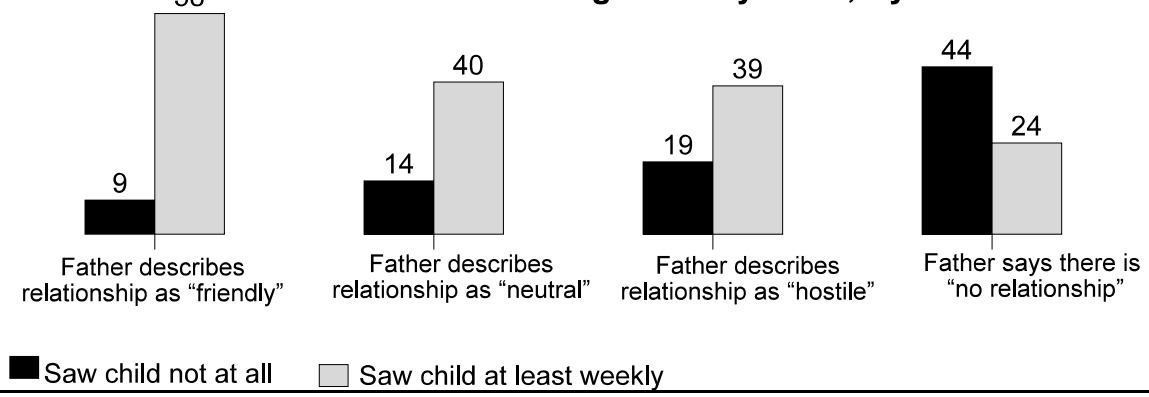
Figure 6-4 compares (1) fathers who were married to the mother of the youngest away child; (2) those who lived with the child's mother without marriage; and (3) those who were never married nor lived with the mother. Across the three groups, the percentage reporting no contact stood at 22, 18, and 22 percent, respectively. Similarly, the percentage reporting contact at least once a week stood at 38, 46, and 41 percent, respectively.

- The quality of the relationship between the noncustodial father and the mother of his youngest away child is related to the frequency of his contact with this child.

Figure 6-4
Frequency of Contact in the 12 Months Pre-Enrollment and Noncustodial Father's Marital Status with the Mother of His Youngest Away Child, By Site

Figure 6-5 shows that 58 percent of the noncustodial fathers who described their relationship with the mother of their youngest away child as "friendly" at program enrollment said they saw their child at least weekly in the prior 12 months. By contrast, only 39 percent of those who reported the relationship was hostile reported weekly contact, and only 24 percent of those who said they had no relationship with the mother reported weekly contact.

Figure 6-5
Frequency of Contact in the 12 Months Pre-Enrollment and Relationship Between the Noncustodial Father and the Mother of His Youngest Away Child, By Site



Satisfaction with Access and Access Conflicts

Satisfaction with Contact

- At enrollment, the majority (68%) of the noncustodial fathers reported being "somewhat dissatisfied" or "dissatisfied" with the amount of time they spend with their children. The remaining 32 percent reported being "somewhat" or fully "satisfied" (see Table 6-5).

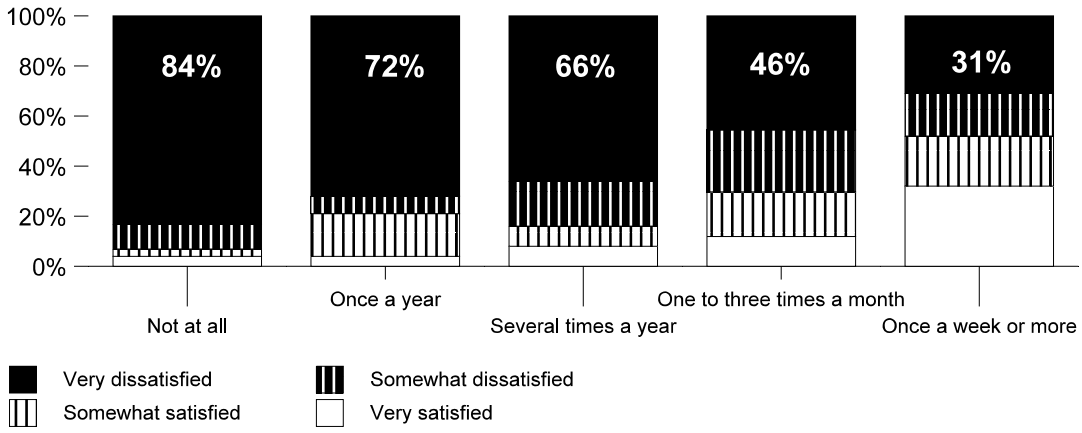
Table 6-5. Satisfaction with Contact with Youngest Away Child in the 12 Months Prior to Program Enrollment, as Reported by Noncustodial Fathers, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
(Number with valid information)	*128*	*68*	*177*	*9*	*10*	*657*	*67*	*1,116*
Satisfaction with frequency of contact with the youngest away child in the 12 months prior to enrollment								
Very satisfied	14%	34%	30%	38%	0%	13%	28%	18%
Somewhat satisfied	20%	27%	13%	12%	30%	12%	15%	14%
Somewhat dissatisfied	17%	19%	15%	0%	30%	15%	22%	16%
Very dissatisfied	48%	21%	42%	50%	40%	60%	34%	52%

- Satisfaction with access to the youngest away child increased with the amount of contact.

Figure 6-6 shows that there was a relationship between the amount of time the noncustodial father spent with the youngest away child in the 12 months prior to program enrollment and his reported satisfaction with access. However, it is also true that dissatisfaction with access was often quite high among fathers with high levels of contact. For example, 31 percent of those who saw their youngest away child at least once a week during the past 12 months still reported being dissatisfied with this situation.

Figure 6-6
Satisfaction with Child Access by Frequency of Access



Perceived Quality of the Parental Relationship

Parental relationships have been shown to be strong predictors of paternal involvement in both non-marital and divorce contexts. Fragile family researchers report that the quality of the parents' relationship is among the most consistent predictors of involvement among young, unmarried fathers (Carlson and McLanahan, 2002). Evaluators of the child access demonstration projects have also found that mother-father relationships are central to father involvement (Pearson, *et al*., 1996).

Table 6-6 looks at the relationship between the father and the mother of the youngest away child using the self-reports of noncustodial fathers when they enrolled in the programs. The table shows:

- There was no consistent pattern in how the noncustodial fathers in this study viewed their relationships with the mother of their youngest away child.

Some noncustodial fathers reported friendly relationships (31%); some reported neutral relationships (21%); some reported hostile relationship (28%); and some reported no relationship at all (21%). Maryland had the highest percentage of noncustodial fathers who reported friendly relationships with the mother of their youngest child, with over half (58%) of enrolling fathers characterizing it

this way. As previously noted, Maryland fathers reported the highest levels of father-child contact at program enrollment and the lowest levels of dissatisfaction with the amount of time they spent with their child.

- Fathers also differed greatly in their perception of whether the mother wanted them to be involved with the child.

Overall, 38 percent of the noncustodial fathers thought the child's mother did want him involved with the child, but 28 percent were certain she did not want him involved, and 17 percent said they were not sure how she felt. There was also considerable variation across, as well as within, the sites. As in earlier analyses, the sample sizes in Missouri and New Hampshire are too small to be reliable. However, fathers in Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin were more likely to report that mothers want them involved than were fathers in Colorado and Washington.

Table 6-6. Noncustodial Fathers Perceptions of His Relationship with the Mother of His Youngest Away Child as Reported at Program Enrollment, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
Relationship between father and mother of youngest away child								
(Number with valid information)	*123*	*72*	*184*	*9*	*7*	*669*	*67*	*1,131*
Friendly	30%	58%	41%	44%	43%	25%	35%	31%
Neutral	25%	19%	21%	11%	0%	19%	37%	21%
Hostile	41%	11%	18%	22%	28%	31%	14%	28%
No relationship	3%	11%	20%	22%	29%	26%	13%	21%

Table 6-6. Noncustodial Fathers Perceptions of His Relationship with the Mother of His Youngest Away Child as Reported at Program Enrollment, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Believes mother wants him to have a positive relationship with this child								
(Number with valid information)	*123*	*67*	*185*	*9*	*7*	*659*	*67*	*1,117*
Definitely	21%	57%	55%	44%	43%	31%	67%	38%
Somewhat	27%	28%	12%	44%	29%	17%	3%	17%
No	29%	5%	16%	0%	29%	36%	15%	28%
Not sure	23%	10%	18%	11%	0%	16%	15%	17%

Perceived Areas of Access Conflict

- In Colorado, Maryland, and Washington, the conflicts between the noncustodial father and the custodial mother appeared to cut across all possible topics. In Massachusetts and Wisconsin, the disputes were somewhat more contained to issues other than custody or residence of the children.

Table 6-7 shows the areas of greatest perceived conflict between parents. As in the earlier tables, there were too few cases in Missouri and New Hampshire to warrant a separate consideration of these sites. Table 6-7 also shows the noncustodial fathers' self-report of their roles in decision making related to their youngest away children. The pattern shows that at most sites, about half or more of the noncustodial fathers believed they had no influence in making decisions related to their youngest away children. The exception to this was in Maryland, where fathers felt more influential. At this site, less than a third of the noncustodial fathers reported having no role in decision making.

Table 6-7. Issues in Conflict Between the Noncustodial Father and the Mother of His Youngest Away Child as Reported at Program Enrollment, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial Parent to at Least One Child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
Percent with Conflicts Over These Topics								
(Number with valid information)	*123*	*72*	*184*	*9*	*7*	*669*	*67*	*1,131*
Custody of children	43%	20%	10%	0%	33%	28%	11%	25%
Where the child will live	40%	20%	10%	0%	25%	28%	8%	25%
How the child will be raised	46%	39%	24%	33%	25%	40%	29%	37%
Decisions related to child	44%	30%	15%	0%	25%	30%	18%	28%
Child support	48%	32%	15%	14%	33%	30%	19%	29%
Visits with the child	48%	37%	22%	43%	33%	44%	22%	40%
Activities during visits	44%	21%	10%	0%	25%	26%	18%	25%
Issues not related to the child	55%	33%	25%	0%	0%	35%	21%	36%
Father's Perceived Influence in Decision Making Related to Child								
(Number with valid information)	*125*	*69*	*184*	*8*	*11*	*657*	*68*	*1,122*
Great deal of influence	8%	25%	19%	25%	0%	16%	28%	17%
Some influence	40%	46%	26%	38%	37%	18%	25%	24%
No influence	52%	29%	55%	38%	63%	66%	47%	59%

Summary

- On average, noncustodial fathers were 33 years old. About one-quarter (23%) were 25 years old or less, and nearly one-fifth (18%) were over the age of 41.

- Exactly half (50%) of the noncustodial fathers were African-American. The second largest ethnic group was white (35%).

- Almost one-quarter (23%) of noncustodial fathers who enrolled in the programs had less than a high school diploma/GED. While (77%) had at least a high school diploma/GED, only 13 percent had education or training above the high school level.

- About half (48%) of the noncustodial fathers enrolled by the programs had been married.

- One-third (32%) of noncustodial fathers reported they were living with their parents or relatives (*i.e.*, brothers, sisters, grandmothers, or other relatives) when they enrolled in the programs.

- Two-thirds of the noncustodial fathers had children with only one partner, and over half (57%) had only one non-resident child.

- Most (64%) noncustodial fathers did not have court-ordered child access or visitation when they enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs. Fifteen percent had court orders restricting child contact.

- Fathers reported a wide variety of contact patterns when they enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs, with substantial proportions reporting high levels of contact during the year preceding their enrollment.

- The majority (68%) of the noncustodial fathers reported being "somewhat dissatisfied" or "dissatisfied" with the amount of time they spent with their children.

- Frequency of contact between noncustodial father and child decreases as geographic distance between them increases. Frequency of contact was not related to the marital relationship between the parents, but frequency increased as the quality of the parental relationship increased.

- There was no consistent pattern in how noncustodial fathers in this study viewed the quality of their relationships with the mother of their youngest away child. Fathers also differed greatly in their perception of whether the mother wanted them to be involved with the child.

Chapter 7: Employment, Earnings, and Child Support at Program Entry

In this chapter

- A brief review of the methodology employed in this Chapter
- Self-report of employment and earnings at entry
- Employment and earnings at entry from the automated database
- Characteristics of child support cases at entry – automated database
- Current monthly support order levels at entry – automated database
- Child support arrears at entry – automated database
- Child support payment prior to enrollment – formal support payment from the automated database
- Child support payment prior to enrollment – self-report of informal support payments

Review of the Methodology

This Chapter presents the employment, earnings, and child support status of noncustodial fathers when they enrolled in the programs.

Chapter 4 presented detailed information about the data sources for this analysis, as well as a discussion of their strengths and weaknesses. As noted in Chapter 4, information on employment and earnings came from two sources:

- Information provided by clients when they enrolled in the program; and

- Reports of employee earnings submitted by employers to the state Department of Labor and Employment as part of the state's unemployment insurance (UI) system.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the UI database is an external source of information on employment and earnings, but it has serious limitations. Not all employers are required to report to the UI system; the self-employed are not included, nor are those employed by the federal government, military, or nonprofit organizations; work done on a cash basis may not be reported; and some employers who are required to file reports simply fail to do so. However, self-reports of income, which are also utilized in the analysis, have equally serious problems. Survey response rates were low, limiting our ability to generalize from the survey data to the full population. In addition, such estimates are especially prone to error among respondents who work varying hours (such as taxicab drivers) or do day labor or occasional/pick-up jobs (Camerer *et al.*, 2000).

Information on the child support status of program clients also came from two sources:

- Data provided by clients when they enrolled in the programs; and

- Automated child support records maintained by child support enforcement agencies in the individual states (CSE records).

We relied on client self-reports of informal payments of support at program entry and on CSE records for information about the payment of formal child support both prior to and following program enrollment.

As described in Chapter 4, we conducted reviews of automated employment and child support records for all fathers served by the programs (if a Social Security number was provided), rather than limiting the review to those who reported themselves to be noncustodial parents. We checked all fathers in the child support system because even fathers who had no away children at program enrollment might have a child support order and owe child support arrears. We checked all fathers in the employment database in order to ensure that we had automated earnings data for all fathers found to owe child support.

Employment and Income at Program Entry

Self-Report

Table 7-1 shows the employment situation reported by noncustodial fathers when they enrolled in the program.

- At entry, the percentage of fathers reporting employment ranged from a high of 63 percent in Washington to a low of 20 percent in Missouri.

- When asked to describe their general employment situation in the 12 months prior to enrollment, 18 percent of the noncustodial fathers (for all sites combined) said they were unemployed all 12 months.

- Another 16 percent said they worked at pick-up or occasional temporary jobs, and 12 percent described their employment as regular, part-time work. Just more than half (54%) said they were employed full-time all 12 months.

To put these exceptionally low employment figures into perspective, it must be remembered that the responsible fatherhood programs deliberately targeted unemployed fathers and those who were underemployed (*i.e.*, working at very low wages or sporadically employed). In other words, the program participants are not a cross-section of all noncustodial fathers.

- There was considerable variation in job stability across the sites.

The sample sizes in Missouri and New Hampshire were too small to allow for any conclusions to be drawn. Among the other sites, job stability appeared to be greatest in Washington and Colorado. At these two sites, only 9 percent of the noncustodial fathers reported at enrollment that their longest tenure with the same employer was for a year or less. In Massachusetts and Wisconsin, 18 and 31 percent, respectively, had never been at the same job for longer than a year.

Table 7-1. Employment Status as Reported by Noncustodial Fathers at Enrollment, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
Employment status at enrollment								
(Number with valid information)	*161*	*97*	*266*	*49*	*17*	*715*	*91*	*1,396*
Employed	54%	39%	52%	20%	35%	63%	37%	55%
Not employed, looking for a job	44%	60%	40%	63%	59%	30%	59%	39%
Not employed, not looking for a job	2%	1%	8%	16%	6%	7%	3%	6%
Employment status in the 12 months pre-enrollment								
(Number with valid information)	*148*	*85*	*251*	*12*	*12*	*716*	*89*	*1,313*
Mostly employed full-time	61%	58%	50%	42%	42%	56%	37%	54%
Mostly employed part-time	10%	9%	10%	25%	0%	14%	14%	12%
Pick-up jobs and temporary work	14%	14%	14%	8%	50%	13%	42%	16%
Did not work in the past 12 months	15%	19%	25%	25%	8%	17%	8%	18%
Longest time on the same job								
(Number with valid information)	*147*	*79*	*254*	*10*	*10*	*706*	*78*	*1,284*
Less than 6 months	3%	4%	7%	20%	20%	3%	18%	5%
Between 6-12 months	6%	19%	11%	20%	0%	6%	13%	9%
Between 1-2 years	14%	24%	18%	0%	20%	13%	28%	16%
Between 2-5 years	54%	35%	40%	40%	40%	40%	27%	41%
More than 5 years	22%	18%	24%	20%	20%	38%	14%	30%
Average (in years)	4.2	3.1	4.1	3.1	4.3	5.5	2.5	4.7

Table 7-2 shows the self-reported earnings of the noncustodial fathers. The key findings from this Table include the following:

- At program enrollment, when participants were asked to describe their monthly earnings from their current job, or (in the case of those unemployed at enrollment) their most recent job, the average figure provided was $1,716 and the median figure was $1,537.

Only in Washington and Massachusetts did at least a quarter of the noncustodial fathers report monthly earnings over $2,000.

- When they enrolled in the responsible fatherhood programs, most clients (58%) reported that their earnings on their current or most recent job did not meet their financial needs.

In addition to extremely low earnings, a majority of the noncustodial fathers in Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin reported not receiving any employer-paid benefits at their current or most recent employment.

Table 7-2. Earnings and Benefits as Reported by Noncustodial Fathers at Enrollment, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
Monthly earnings from current or most recent job								
(Number with valid information)	*161*	*97*	*266*	*49*	*17*	*715*	*91*	*1,396*
Average reported	$1,367	$1,273	$1,726	$1,071	$1,591	$1,903	$1,230	$1,716
Median reported	$1,387	$1,175	$1,560	$1,041	$1,495	$1,699	$1,127	$1,537
$0-$1,000	16%	35%	17%	50%	0%	18%	38%	20%
$1,001-$2,000	78%	54%	56%	40%	89%	46%	46%	51%
$2,001 or more	6%	11%	28%	10%	13%	38%	17%	29%
How well current/most recent job meets his financial needs								
(Number with valid information)	*146*	*31*	*247*	*10*	*6*	*695*	*85*	*1,220*
Very well	7%	6%	7%	10%	17%	7%	6%	6%
Fairly Well	48%	42%	39%	40%	17%	31%	35%	35%
Not very well	36%	43%	36%	40%	33%	45%	34%	41%
Not at all	11%	9%	18%	10%	33%	17%	25%	17%
Benefits at current or most recent job								
(Number with valid information)	*126*	*78*	*243*	*11*	*7*	*698*	*88*	*1,251*
Vacation	42%	42%	37%	45%	14%	48%	25%	43%
Sick leave	41%	37%	35%	18%	14%	34%	22%	34%
Medical Insurance	45%	40%	37%	36%	14%	50%	28%	44%
None of the above	53%	54%	57%	36%	86%	41%	65%	48%

Review of Employment Database

- There was considerable variation across the sites with respect to the number of fathers who appeared in the UI database.

Over 60 percent of the fathers appeared in the UI database in Colorado and Washington, while 15 percent or fewer appeared in Maryland and Missouri.

- The amount of earnings shown in the UI database also varied substantially across the project sites.

Those who did not appear in the UI database were treated as having no earnings. Average quarterly earnings ranged from less than $500 to nearly $3,000. Earnings were highest in Washington, Colorado, and Massachusetts.

Table 7-3. Results of the UI Earnings Reviews for the Quarter Prior to Program Enrollment, By Site i

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin
Total number of fathers served by the program	165	124	330	59	26	819	127
Number who could be checked in the UI system	*165*	*101*	*297*	*44*	*14*	*787*	*84*
Status in UI system one quarter prior to enrollment							
Earnings shown (*i.e.*, employed)	62%	15%	44%	13%	57%	64%	46%
No earnings shown (*i.e.*, presumed unemployed)	38%	85%	56%	87%	43%	36%	54%
Quarterly earnings for noncustodial fathers checked							
Average for the quarter pre-enrollment	$1,718	$532	$1,711	$404	$1,439	$2,873	$738

i Due to variation in the data collection forms used at each site, cross-site totals are not calculated.

- In five of the seven sites, the pre-enrollment employment patterns derived from UI data and from self-reports are fairly similar.

Self-reported income is generally greater than income from UI data; however, both data sources generally show similar employment patterns (especially in light of the fact that the UI measure of employment is earnings in the quarter pre-enrollment, while self-reported employed is measures at the time of enrollment).

Child Support Status at Program Entry

Program staff expected that most fathers who enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs would be known to the child support agency and have open cases. This was generally the case, although the level of involvement in the child support system among program clients differed across the sites.

- At least 80 percent of the fathers who enrolled in the programs in Maryland, Missouri, Wisconsin, and New Hampshire had open child support cases.
- Just over 75 percent of the fathers in Colorado and Washington had an open child support case.
- In Massachusetts, about 60 percent of the FFI fathers had open child support cases.

It is important to note that non-TANF cases would only appear in the child support system if the custodial parent requested services from the agency.

Table 7-4. Results of the Automated Child Support System Review
Child Support Status Prior to Program Enrollment, By Site i

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin
All fathers served by the program (custodial and noncustodial)	165	124	330	59	26	819	127
(Number of fathers with valid identification information who could be checked)	*165*	*101*	*297*	*44*	*14*	*787*	*84*
Not in the child support system	19%	15%	39%	20%	0%	21%	8%
Has an open case in the child support system	78%	85%	59%	80%	100%	78%	91%
Has only a closed case in the child support system	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%

i Due to variation in the data collection forms used at each site, cross-site totals are not calculated.

General Characteristics of the Child Support Case

Table 7-5 shows the number and types of cases that clients had open in the automated child support enforcement system when they enrolled in the programs. Key characteristics shown in this Table include the following:

- At all the sites, most clients had only one open case.
- At each site, most fathers with a child support case had at least one child currently, or previously, on TANF. However, in two sites, over 40 percent of the fathers in the child support system had no children on TANF and in three other sites, 15 to 25 percent had no children on TANF.
- The number of fathers with a child support case in which an order level had not yet been established ranged from a low of 7 percent in New Hampshire to over 50 percent in Maryland.

These site differences reflect the different strategies used by the sites to recruit program participants and do not necessarily reflect the overall proportion of the states' caseloads with orders established. For example, in New Hampshire, where the child support agency routinely flagged and referred noncustodial parents with low monthly orders (as a proxy for low parental income), all of the project cases were open in the child support system, and nearly all had orders established. In other program sites, such as Massachusetts, Maryland, and Colorado, where program referrals came from a variety of sources, including word-of-mouth and community organizations, greater percentages of those enrolled were not in the child support system, or had only pre-obligation cases.

Table 7-5. Characteristics of Cases Open at Child Support at Enrollment, By Site i

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin
Total number of fathers served by the program	*165*	*124*	*330*	*59*	*26*	*819*	*127*
Number who could be checked in the child support system	*165*	*101*	*297*	*44*	*14*	*787*	*84*
Number checked who showed an open case	*129*	*86*	*175*	*35*	*14*	*614*	*76*
Number of open cases for this NCP at enrollment One	62%	58%	74%	54%	71%	49%	55%
Two open cases	27%	18%	18%	26%	29%	25%	26%
Three or more open cases	12%	24%	8%	20%	0%	26%	19%
Average number open	1.6	1.8	1.4	1.7	1.3	2.1	1.7

Table 7-5. Characteristics of Cases Open at Child Support at Enrollment, By Site [i]

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin
TANF Status of the open cases							
No case ever involved a child on TANF	15%	48%	16%	3%	43%	26%	0%
Has a case where the child has received/is receiving TANF	85%	52%	84%	97%	57%	74%	100%
At least one case needing order establishment at enrollment	33%	55%	30%	31%	7%	15%	11%

i Due to variation in the data collection forms used at each site, cross-site totals are not calculated.

Current Monthly Order Levels

Table 7-7 summarizes the monthly obligations for current support faced by program clients. The Table indicates:

- Most fathers entered the programs owing current monthly support on at least one child support case, with the percent ranging from 63 percent in Maryland to 93 percent in New Hampshire.

- There was considerable variation in the size of the monthly support orders across the sites. The highest monthly per order average ($318 in Washington) was more than twice the lowest per order average ($141 in Maryland).

- Minimal support orders ($50 or less) were used relatively infrequently at all sites. In New Hampshire, just under a quarter of fathers had an order of $50 or less; at the other sites the figure was less than 10 percent.

- When all of the father's current monthly support obligations were taken into consideration, at least 20 percent of the fathers in five of the seven sites owed more than $300 per month.

Table 7-7. Characteristics of Cases Open at Child Support at Enrollment, By Site [i]

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin
Total number of fathers served by the program	*165*	*124*	*330*	*59*	*26*	*819*	*127*
Number who could be checked in the child support system	*165*	*101*	*297*	*44*	*14*	*787*	*84*
Number checked who showed an open case	*129*	*86*	*175*	*35*	*14*	*614*	*76*
Current monthly support due							
None, only pre-obligation case(s)	30%	37%	22%	24%	0%	7%	6%
None, only arrears case(s)	6%	[ii]	[ii]	0%	7%	7%	3%
Has a case with monthly support due	64%	63%	78%	76%	93%	86%	91%
Total number of cases with monthly support due							
One case with monthly support due	54%	46%	66%	50%	86%	67%	56%
Two cases with monthly support due	9%	12%	10%	24%	7%	15%	23%
Three or more cases with monthly support due	1%	5%	3%	3%	0%	4%	13%

[i] Due to variation in the data collection forms used at each site, cross-site totals are not calculated.

Child Support Arrears

Many fathers entered the responsible fatherhood program with an arrears balance, which represents past due child support that has not been paid. Table 7-8 shows clients' arrears balances at program entry in the four sites where this information was available: Colorado, Missouri, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin.

- The average arrears owed per order ranged from approximately $5,000 to $9,000.
- When arrears on all orders were combined, arrears balances increased between approximately $8,000 and $15,000.
- In Washington, 34 percent of program participants with arrears owed more than $15,000 in child support arrears, while 27 percent owed amounts that exceeded $15,000 in Wisconsin and Colorado.

Table 7-8. Child Support Arrears at Program Entry (includes only cases with arrears), By Site [i]

	Colorado	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin
Total number of fathers served by the program	165	59	26	819	127
Number who could be checked in the child support system	165	44	14	787	84
Number checked who showed any type of open case	129	35	14	614	76
At least one case with arrears at enrollment	68%	[ii]	[ii]	71%	93%
Amount of arrears per order					
Number of cases with valid information	94	25	13	540	64
Average arrears per order	$9,495	$5,303	$6,165	$8,070	$6,595
Median arrears per order	$6,912	$4,680	$2,331	$4,727	$5,127
$1,000 or less per order	10%	12%	23%	16%	11%
$1,001 to $5,000 per order	27%	40%	39%	36%	38%
$5,001 to $9,000 per order	20%	32%	15%	17%	28%
$9,001 to $15,000 per order	26%	16%	15%	15%	16%
More than $15,000 per order	18%	0%	8%	16%	8%
Range of arrears due per order	$94-$42,768	$256-$12,556	$50-$24,736	$1-$59,428	$246-$27,725
Amount of arrears across all orders					
Average arrears across all orders	$10,908	$7,986	$7,978	$15,341	$11,079
Median arrears across all orders	$8,387	$7,044	$3,600	$8,395	$9,881
$1,000 or less across all orders	9.0%	8.0%	23.0%	13.0%	11.0%
$1,001 to $5,000 across all orders	26%	36%	39%	25%	20%
$5,001 to $9,000 across all orders	18%	16%	8%	14%	16%
$9,001 to $15,000 across all orders	21%	24%	15%	14%	27%
More than $15,000 across all orders	27%	16%	15%	34%	27%
Range of arrears due across all orders	$94-$53,193	$256-$23,059	$50-$29,473	$1-$185,991	$246-$40,257

[i] Due to variation in the data collection forms used at each site, cross-site totals are not calculated. Arrears information was not available in Maryland or Massachusetts.

Table 7-9 shows the effects of adding monthly support due and the monthly amount due toward the arrears balance across all orders. This was the total monthly child support responsibility owed by fathers when they entered the programs, excluding any charges for interest or penalties.

- In the four sites where arrears and current monthly support information was available — Colorado, Missouri, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin — the total amount due per month across all orders ranged from an average of $243 to $376, with medians ranging from $168 to $339.
- At three sites — Colorado, Massachusetts, and Washington — at least 20 percent of participants with orders had total monthly obligations that exceeded $500.

Table 7-9. Estimated Total Amount Due Per Month at Enrollment
Current Monthly Support Due Across All Orders, Plus Arrears Across All Orders, By Site i

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin
Total number of fathers served by the program	*165*	*124*	*330*	*59*	*26*	*819*	*127*
Number who could be checked in the child support system	*165*	*101*	*297*	*44*	*14*	*787*	*84*
Number checked who showed any type of open case	*129*	*86*	*175*	*35*	*14*	*614*	*76*
Number with open cases with monthly support due and/or monthly arrears payments	*90*	*54*	*137*	*27*	*14*	*571*	*72*
Number of cases with valid information	*90*	*47*	*130*	*26*	*13*	*526*	*64*
Amount of monthly child support and monthly payments towards arrears due across all order							
Average across all orders	$376	$187	$415	$269	$245	$380	$243
Median across all orders	$339	$152	$331	$249	$200	$342	$188
Less than $100 across all orders	4%	23%	9%	19%	18%	11%	16%
$101 - $250 across all orders	26%	55%	19%	31%	55%	27%	45%
$251-$350 across all orders	23%	8%	24%	31%	0%	13%	16%
$351-$500 across all orders	27%	10%	25%	8%	18%	21%	13%
More than $500 across all orders	20%	2%	24%	12%	9%	27%	10%

i Due to variation in the data collection forms used at each site, cross-site totals are not calculated. In Maryland and Washington, only current monthly support is available; monthly payments towards arrears are not included in these two sites.

Child Support Payment Patterns Prior to Enrollment

Formal Support Payment

The automated child support system at each site was used to assess patterns of formal child support payment during the six months prior to program enrollment. Those parents without a formal support order were not included in the analysis. The results of the child support system review are shown in Table 7-10.

Table 7-10. Payment Pattern in the Six Months Prior to Enrollment
Current Monthly Support, Plus Arrears, Across All Orders, By Site i

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin
Total number of fathers served by the program	*165*	*124*	*330*	*59*	*26*	*819*	*127*
Number who could be checked in the child support system	*165*	*101*	*297*	*44*	*14*	*787*	*84*
Number checked who showed any type of open case	*129*	*86*	*175*	*35*	*14*	*614*	*76*
Number with open cases with monthly support due and/or monthly arrears payments	*90*	*47*	*130*	*26*	*13*	*526*	*64*
Number with valid payment information	*90*	*46*	*130*	*26*	*11*	*526*	*64*
Percent paying 0%	51%	61%	40%	62%	18%	38%	25%
Percent paying 1-25%	16%	22%	19%	23%	27%	11%	30%
Percent paying 26-50%	12%	2%	9%	4%	9%	12%	14%
Percent paying 51-75%	8%	0%	9%	4%	18%	11%	12%
Percent paying 76-96%	9%	2%	9%	0%	9%	7%	4%
Percent paying 96% or more	5%	13%	15%	8%	18%	21%	14%
Average percent of amount due that was paid	25%	18%	33%	14%	46%	40%	34%
Percent paying something in 6 months pre-enrollment	49%	39%	60%	38%	82%	62%	75%

i Due to variation in the data collection forms used at each site, cross-site totals are not calculated.

Table 7-10 demonstrates:

- At three of the seven sites, over half of the fathers made no payments during this six-month pre-enrollment period, with the percent paying nothing ranging from 18 to 62 percent.

- The percent making at least some payment ranged from a low of 38 and 39 percent in Missouri and Maryland, respectively, to highs of 75 percent and 82 percent in Wisconsin and New Hampshire, respectively.

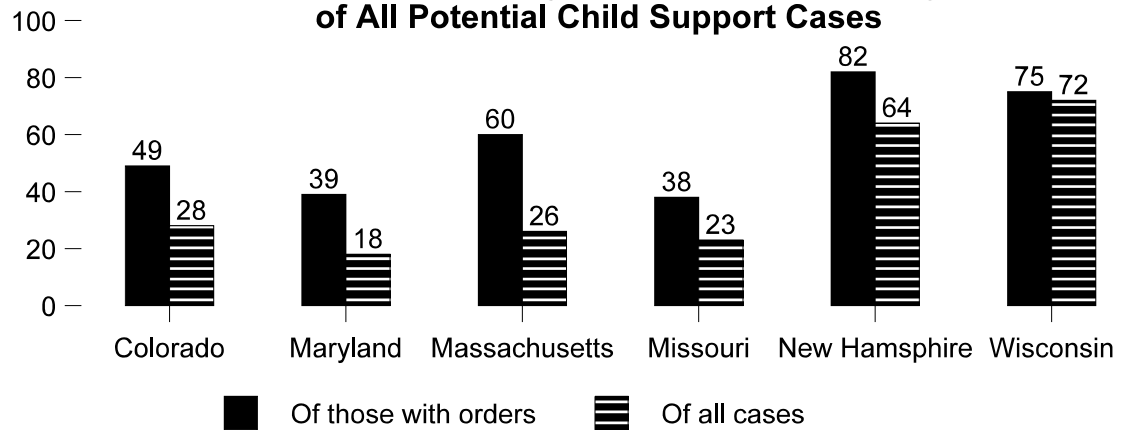
- Including those making no payments, the average amount paid ranged from 14 to 46 percent of the total amount due.

Figure 7-1 also presents the percentage of cases showing any payment of support. It considers the incidence of payment for two groups of NCPs: those with a current support order (as in Table 7-10) and all NCPs, including those with pre-obligation cases that lacked a child support order and those not in the child support system. The solid black bar shows how well the child support agency is collecting support for the parents in the child support system. The striped bar shows the percentage of all noncustodial mothers (those with and without orders, and those in and not in the child support system) who receive any child support through the child support agency. It is important to keep in mind that in non-TANF cases, noncustodial parents who do not request services will not receive payments through the agency.

Informal Support Provided

In addition to paying formal child support through the child support system, noncustodial fathers may support their children financially by making direct payments to the custodial parent and/or paying certain household and child-related expenses. Some studies have suggested that in-kind contributions and informal support play a significant role among households where fathers can provide little cash. For example, in the Public/Private Ventures pilot project for young unwed fathers, about half of the 155 fathers reported giving cash support to the custodial parent, while 93 percent reported making some type of in-kind contributions (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994).

Figure 7-1
Percentages of Cases with Support Orders Receiving Any Monthly Support and Cases Receiving Support as a Percentage of All Potential Child Support Cases



When they enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs, fathers were asked whether they had provided any informal support for children who did not live with them during the preceding six months. The types of support they were asked about included giving money directly to the child or the other parent; making car payments; paying medical bills; paying rent or mortgage; purchasing clothes, furniture, bikes, or other major items; or buying diapers or "anything else." One response category, "none of the above," indicated that the father had provided no informal support.

Table 7-11 shows the responses of NCPs to a question about informal support when they enrolled in the responsible fatherhood programs. There was great variation in the proportion of NCPs reporting that they had provided informal support:

- The percentage of fathers reporting any type of informal support ranged from a high of 75 percent in Washington to a low of 22 percent in Colorado.

- The percentage of fathers reporting that they made a cash contribution ranged from a high of 58 percent in Massachusetts to a low of 7 percent in New Hampshire.

Parent's Fair Share used reports from custodial parents to gauge the incidence and level of informal support. Based on this data, researchers reported an informal support rate of 41 percent across the sites (Knox and Redcross, 2000). Table 7-11 shows that in the present study, slightly more than 60 percent of the fathers reported some informal support. However, in four sites, the percentage of informal support was less than or comparable to the 41 percent reported by custodial parents in PFS.

Table 7-11. Informal Child Support Reported by Noncustodial Fathers at Enrollment, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
(Number with valid information)	*163*	*97*	*284*	*44*	*14*	*706*	*72*	*1,380*
Gave money directly to custodial parent	14%	31%	58%	15%	7%	48%	58%	44%
Made car payment for custodial parent	2%	2%	6%	0%	0%	9%	7%	6%
Paid child's medical bills	1%	6%	10%	0%	14%	21%	8%	4%
Paid mortgage or rent for custodial parent	2%	9%	12%	2%	0%	8%	8%	8%
Purchased clothes or other items for child	11%	35%	63%	15%	14%	53%	67%	49%
Purchased diapers for child	5%	13%	25%	7%	7%	20%	39%	20%
Other	3%	8%	3%	0%	14%	9%	28%	8%
Any of the above	22%	41%	68%	14%	29%	75%	64%	62%

Finally, Table 7-12 compares the average amount of child support paid by fathers who reported making informal contributions with those who said they did not contribute informally. The results show that, in two of the three sites with information available, fathers who provided support informally did a better job of paying formally compared to those who provided no informal assistance. The differences between the percent of the monthly obligation paid by those making no informal payments and those making informal payments were significantly different in both Colorado and Massachusetts.

Table 7-11. Formal Payments Shown in the Automated Child Support System, by Whether the Father Self-Reports Making Informal Contributions, By Site [i]

	Colorado		Maryland		Massachusetts		Wisconsin	
Total number of fathers served by the program	165		124		330		127	
Number with valid payment information	*90*		*46*		*130*		*64*	
	Self-reports no informal support	Self-reports paying informal support	Self-reports no informal support	Self-reports paying informal support	Self-reports no informal support	Self-reports paying informal support	Self-reports no informal support	Self-reports paying informal support
Percent of monthly obligation paid in the 6 months prior to enrollment, based on automated data	8%	20%	13%	21%	13%	41%	37%	32%
Percent paying nothing in the 6 months prior to enrollment, based on automated data	79%	62%	54%	72%	62%	31%	25%	24%

[i] Washington is excluded because payment data could not be linked to self-report data. Wisconsin and New Hampshire are excluded due to very small cell sizes.

Summary

Employment and Earnings

- When asked to describe their employment situation in the 12 months prior to enrollment, 18 percent of the noncustodial fathers (for all sites combined) said they generally were unemployed all 12 months. Just more than half (54%) said they were generally employed fulltime all 12 months.

- When asked at enrollment for their monthly earnings from their current or most recent job, the average was $1,716 and the median was $1,537.

- When they enrolled in the responsible fatherhood programs, most clients (58%) reported that their earnings at their current or most recent job did not meet their financial needs.

Child Support Obligations

- The percentage of fathers with an open child support case at enrollment ranged from 60 to over 80 percent.

- Overall, the majority of fathers had only one open case. However, across the sites, between one-half and one-quarter of all fathers had more than a single case in the child support system.

- Most of the fathers who had an open child support case also had at least one order established. In New Hampshire, 93 percent of the fathers had at least one child support order, while in Maryland, 55 percent had an order.

- Most fathers had at least one child support case with arrears or past due support. Among those with information, the range was from two-thirds to over 90 percent.

- There was considerable variation in the size of monthly support orders across the sites. The highest monthly per order average ($318 in Washington) was more than twice the lowest per order average ($141 in Maryland).

- The average arrears owed per order ranged from just over $5,000 to over $9,000.

- When arrears on all orders were combined, arrears balances for participants at the sites ranged from approximately $8,000 to $15,000.

Child Support Payments

- The percentage of noncustodial fathers making at least some child support payment in the six-months prior to program enrollment ranged from a low to 38 percent to a high of 82 percent.

- Almost two-thirds of the fathers reported making some kind of informal child support contribution during the six months pre-enrollment. These informal contributions included cash and in-kind support, such as diapers. The percentage of fathers reporting that they provided any type of informal support ranged from a high of 75 percent in Washington to a low of 22 percent in Colorado.

Chapter 8: Client Needs and Program Services

In this chapter

- A brief review of how service needs were measured
- Fathers' reports of their service needs, with a focus on employment, education, child support, access, parenting, and health needs
- Staff perspectives on the service needs of clients
- An assessment of barriers to employment, access, and child support payment
- Services actually provided to clients

Measuring Service Needs

Service needs of clients were gathered and recorded in several different ways in the Responsible Fatherhood Management Information System (RFMIS).

- The first location in the RFMIS where service needs are recorded is in the client's self-assessment portion of the database.

During the initial meeting with program staff, the noncustodial father was presented with a list of very general areas in which he might need assistance. The major service options listed dealt with employment, getting to see children, child support issues, parenting and relationships with the mother(s) of their children, and health problems. These corresponded to the major services provided by the programs. Fathers were also given the option of specifying a need for "other services." The listing did not represent a pure "needs assessment" of noncustodial fathers, as these participants were a self-selected group of NCPs who were attracted to programs offering the above-noted array of services.

- The next location in the RFMIS where service needs are noted is in the staff assessment portion of the database.

Based on information obtained during the enrollment process and subsequent meetings and conversations with the client, the staff indicated fairly specific areas in which client needed assistance. For example, while clients might have indicated a need for assistance with child support, the staff assessment section noted whether clients needed help with paternity establishment, modifying an order, or establishing a payment schedule. In completing this section of the RFMIS, the staff member used information from the client, but also his or her own insights. For example, the client might not mention the need for substance abuse treatment, but the staff member could indicate this as a need.

Service Needs: Clients' Perspectives

Table 8-1 shows the needs that the client identified at program enrollment based on a list of service options that was presented to him. When all of the sites were combined, the percentages of noncustodial fathers who reported needing help with various services were:

- Help with the child support system or help making child support payments: 57%
- Help with parenting, improving the relationship with the other parent, or anger management: 53%
- Employment-related services (*i.e.*, finding a job or finding a better job): 52%
- Help seeing their children more often: 51%
- Additional education or training: 47%
- Help with health-related issues (*i.e.*, substance abuse and health services): 23%

In addition, 39 percent of all noncustodial fathers reported that they needed help with other issues, including a desire to talk with others in similar situations and an interest in help to "get on the right track." These patterns, which often varied by site, are summarized in Table 8-1 and discussed below.

Table 8-1. Service Needs Reported by Noncustodial Fathers at Enrollment, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
(Number with valid information)	*163*	*92*	*282*	*53*	*22*	*760*	*110*	*1,482*
Employment services	66%	79%	57%	76%	82%	40%	72%	52%
Help finding a job	56%	63%	40%	64%	64%	24%	65%	38%
Help finding a better job	23%	29%	28%	49%	46%	23%	63%	28%
Education	20%	48%	61%	55%	68%	45%	64%	47%
Access: Help getting to see children	61%	19%	37%	45%	23%	63%	36%	51%
Help with child support	53%	25%	44%	62%	36%	68%	56%	57%
Parenting/relationship assistance	41%	73%	66%	57%	15%	46%	73%	53%
Parenting skills	23%	70%	53%	45%	18%	31%	60%	39%
Improved relationship with child's mother	25%	17%	34%	30%	18%	31%	44%	30%
Anger management	4%	16%	32%	28%	14%	9%	25%	15%
Health services	4%	22%	47%	30%	8%	18%	24%	23%
Substance abuse treatment	4%	13%	33%	15%	5%	6%	13%	12%
Health care	1%	10%	28%	30%	32%	15%	15%	16%
Other	56%	20%	47%	55%	35%	34%	41%	39%
A chance to talk with others in the same situation	4%	10%	36%	34%	5%	16%	22%	19%
Help generally getting your life back "on track"	44%	7%	29%	49%	18%	13%	34%	22%
Other	13%	7%	11%	24%	41%	13%	14%	13%

Employment Services: Client Perspective

- The proportion of noncustodial fathers who reported needing employment assistance varied across the sites.

In general, slightly more than half (52%) of all noncustodial fathers indicated they needed some type of help related to employment. Those reporting a need for help finding a job slightly outnumbered

the employed fathers who wanted help finding a "better" job, meaning one with a higher salary or more benefits (38% versus 28%).

Interest in some type of employment assistance was highest among fathers in New Hampshire (82%) and lowest among fathers in Washington (40%). Based on client reports at enrollment and UI-wage reports, noncustodial fathers in Washington entered the Devoted Dads program with higher rates of employment than fathers served at the other sites. Thus, it is not surprising that Washington fathers were the least interested in receiving assistance with employment.

The high rate of interest in employment services among fathers in New Hampshire correlates with the high rate of client-reported unemployment at enrollment (almost 60%) for that site. This is further supported by UI-wage reports for New Hampshire that show only half (57%) of New Hampshire fathers with UI earnings one quarter prior to enrollment.

Education and Training: Client Perspective

- Overall, the level of interest in additional education or training was nearly as high as interest in strict employment services. Across the sites, 47 percent of the noncustodial fathers reported that they were interested in education or training.

Colorado fathers were the least interested (20%) in receiving additional education or training services, while New Hampshire fathers reported the most interest (68%). In Colorado, only 13 percent of noncustodial fathers reported not having a GED or high school diploma at enrollment, which may be a factor in explaining their lower level of interest in educational services. Similarly, the high level of interest in educational services expressed by fathers in New Hampshire may be a reflection of the fact that just over 70 percent of noncustodial fathers did not have a GED or high school diploma at enrollment.

Child Support Services: Client Perspective

- There was substantial variation by site in the proportions of noncustodial fathers who wanted help with child support. Across the sites, 57 percent of noncustodial fathers wanted help with child support.

In four of the seven sites — Colorado, Missouri, Washington, and Wisconsin — more than half of the fathers indicated they needed some help related to child support. Interest was highest among

NCPs in Washington, where 68 percent expressed a need. Interest in child support assistance was slightly lower in Massachusetts (where 44% reported needing this type of assistance) and considerably lower in Maryland (25%) and New Hampshire (23%).

Services Dealing with Child Access: Client Perspective

- Across the sites, 51 percent of fathers said they would like help "getting to see their children more often."

In Colorado and Washington, 61 and 63 percent of fathers, respectively, expressed a desire for help with child access. As discussed in the previous chapter, Colorado and Washington fathers had lower levels of father-child contact relative to most other sites. For example, 34 percent of noncustodial fathers in Colorado reported seeing their children not at all or only one time in the year before they enrolled in the Parent Opportunity Program. In contrast, only 9 percent of fathers in Maryland reported this low level of contact.

Parenting Assistance: Client Perspective

- Fathers who reported that they wanted help with their parenting skills tended to come from sites with structured programs to teach parenting skills.

A majority of noncustodial fathers in Maryland (73%), Massachusetts (66%), and Wisconsin (73%) reported needing assistance with parenting. The programs at each of those sites required clients to attend parenting classes or peer support sessions that used a parenting curriculum. In contrast, at the New Hampshire program, which did not offer parenting classes or peer support groups, only 15 percent of noncustodial fathers requested assistance with parenting.

Health Assistance Needs: Client Perspective

- Fathers in Massachusetts and Missouri were most apt to report that they needed help with health issues.

Forty-seven percent of noncustodial fathers in Massachusetts and 30 percent in Missouri wanted health assistance. The Father Friendly Initiative (FFI) in Massachusetts was based at the Boston Healthy Start Program, a community health center that provided many health-related services, such

as substance abuse treatment, free physicals, and referrals to health insurance programs for low-income Boston citizens. As a result, FFI participants with health issues could be served in the same agency and FFI staff screened for the incidence of various health problems among fatherhood clients.

The Missouri Proud Parent Program shared a common staff member with the local community health agency. Although it is unclear what types of services noncustodial fathers may have received from this community health agency, clients may have known about the connection when they enrolled and requested health services. None of the other programs was directly linked to health care agencies and staff were probably more reticent about offering enrolling clients the opportunity to obtain health services.

Client Perspective: Social Support

- There was considerable variation across the sites with respect to the level of interest clients expressed in meeting and talking with others who shared the same types of employment, child support, and child access problems.

Very few clients in Colorado, Maryland, New Hampshire, and Washington listed peer support as an area of interest when they enrolled. Interest in meeting with others in the same situation was cited by over a third of the clients in Massachusetts and Missouri, and was mentioned by just less than a quarter of the noncustodial fathers in Wisconsin.

Service Needs: Perspectives of Program Staff

Table 8-2 shows the percentages of noncustodial fathers at each site who were perceived by program staff to need various types of services. When noncustodial fathers from all sites were combined, the percentages were as follows:

- Needed assistance with child access: 54%
- Needed assistance with child support issues: 53%
- Needed employment assistance: 44%
- Needed assistance with parenting: 29%
- Needed education assistance: 17%
- Needed assistance with healthcare: 14%
- Needed other types of assistance (*e.g.*, peer support and case management): 47%.

However, as with reports from clients, staff perceptions often looked quite different across the sites. Some of the key differences are discussed below.

Employment: Perspectives of Program Staff

- The number of clients rated as needing employment assistance ranged from 20 to 86 percent across the sites.

Program staff in Washington agreed with clients that relatively few needed help with employment. While their counterparts at other programs determined that 51 to 86 percent of all enrolled clients needed employment services, staff at Washington's Devoted Dads program made this determination for only 20 percent of fathers who enrolled.

Smaller, but substantial, proportions of fathers at each site were judged to need "soft" job skills training, including help with job readiness and job retention issues. In Maryland, staff felt that 67 percent of clients needed this type of training.

Education: Perspectives of Program Staff

- Overall, program staff did not cite education as a primary need of clients.

Overall, about 17 percent of the clients were reported by program staff to need education services. Whether the need was for basic education services (literacy, pre-GED classes, and GED classes) or post-secondary education (trade school, college courses, and college preparatory courses) varied by site.

Child Support: Perspective of Program Staff

- Staff identified a need for child support services in over half the client population. Two main types of assistance were identified: assistance with arrears (33%) and modifications of support orders (27%).

Relatively few were judged to need assistance with the establishment of paternity (9%) and/or child support orders (8%). One reason why program staff may not have identified paternity and order

establishment as client needs was because, at some sites, they did not have access to the client's child support information. Without access to child support records, they relied on what noncustodial fathers reported and some fathers were unsure about whether they had a child support order or whether there were orders for all of their children.

Child Access: Perspective of Program Staff

- Overall, half of all clients were reported by program staff to need access services.

The most common forms of assistance that staff recommended were "help with visiting the child" (22%), "developing a parenting plan," (25%), and "establishing a visitation order" (21%). Less frequently, staff recommended that fathers explore custody issues (12%). Only 5 percent of clients were judged to need mediation services, a procedure that is frequently used to generate parenting plans but requires the participation of the custodial parent. There was far more interest in using the court system to address access issues. A parent can petition the court for custody or visitation without the consent or participation of the other parent.

Program staff was least likely to mention access as a client problem in Maryland (11%) and most likely to mention it is an issue needing attention in Colorado (66%). As discussed earlier, Maryland fathers reported high levels of visitation and satisfaction with child access when they enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs. In contrast, fathers in Colorado and Washington, another site where staff referred a high proportion of participants for child access services, reported much lower levels of visitation and satisfaction.

Parenting Assistance: Perspective of Program Staff

- Overall, just less than a third of all clients were reported by staff as needing parent education.

Staff in Maryland recorded parenting education as a need for 91 percent of program participants. In Missouri, the site with the next highest proportion, only 40 percent of noncustodial fathers were judged to need parenting education. In Colorado and Washington, staff identified this as a need for only about 10 percent of program participants.

Maryland's high percentage of referrals for parenting education may reflect the program's priorities. Maryland was the only site that required participants to attend a six-month program that included

the use of a structured parenting curriculum. Proud Parents staff in Missouri also required that participants attend one workshop on parenting. While parenting issues were covered in classes and/or peer support group sessions offered at other sites, participation was encouraged but not required.

Significant numbers of fathers in Maryland (18%), Massachusetts (24%), and Wisconsin (16%) were determined to need anger management classes. As previously noted, 14 percent of all participating fathers reported that the mother of their children had obtained a restraining order against them that prohibited contact.

Healthcare Services: Perspectives of Program Staff

- Program staff identified only 14 percent of noncustodial fathers as needing healthcare assistance, including medical and dental services, substance abuse treatment, and mental health services.

There was considerable variation by site in client need for healthcare services, with the percentages ranging from a high of 34 percent in Missouri to a low of 6 percent in Colorado. These cross-site differences may be due to heightened sensitivity to health problems at sites that were able to provide such services. It is also possible that the availability of health services at some sites led referral makers to send clients who needed such services. For example, the highest proportion of fathers (26%) assessed by staff as needing substance abuse treatment was in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts program was run through Boston Healthy Start, which also provides substance abuse treatment. Program staff at this site might be more aware of substance abuse issues compared to the other sites, and other community agencies and family/friends may have urged fathers in need of such services to enroll in the program.

Social Support: Perspectives of Program Staff

- Staff at the programs reported that half their clients needed some type of additional social support. The two types mentioned with some frequency overall were peer support (26%) and case management (17%).

At some sites, the perceived need for such support services was quite high. Staff in Maryland and Massachusetts reported that over half (65% and 53%, respectively) of their noncustodial fathers needed peer support. These two sites offered the most extensive peer support services, with case

management tending to occur as part of (or immediately following) the peer support group. Staff in Colorado and New Hampshire were most apt to assess fathers as needing case management, with 71 percent and 77 percent, respectively, receiving this determination. The Colorado and New Hampshire programs tried offering peer support but reported little enthusiasm among clients. These programs relied on case manager interactions with clients to monitor client progress and service delivery and create a "climate of concern."

Other Services: Perspectives of Program Staff

- At most sites, a small percentage of clients needed assistance in obtaining documents and other forms of help.

Staff at every site noted that a small percentage of clients needed help obtaining various documents, such as a birth certificate, Social Security card, or photo ID; these items are needed for employment. Relatively few clients needed assistance with child care. Vocational rehabilitation was mentioned for a number of clients in New Hampshire, and large percentages of the Missouri clients were rated as needing money management classes and clothes/work equipment.

Table 8-2. Service Needs of Noncustodial Fathers at Enrollment Based on Program Staff Reports, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
(Number with valid information)	*163*	*89*	*242*	*35*	*22*	*719*	*106*	*1,376*
Employment services	74%	84%	62%	63%	86%	20%	51%	44%
Job search assistance or job referrals	69%	43%	38%	51%	50%	14%	38%	32%
On-the-job training	2%	17%	8%	26%	9%	9%	34%	11%
Soft job skills (*e.g.,* job readiness, job retention)	16%	67%	28%	51%	36%	11%	25%	21%
Education	10%	28%	34%	40%	45%	8%	21%	17%
Primary education	6%	23%	11%	26%	36%	4%	9%	8%
Post-secondary education	4%	9%	24%	17%	14%	4%	15%	9%
English as a Second Language	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%
Child access issues	66%	11%	52%	28%	22%	62%	42%	54%
Help client in getting to see children	45%	0%	13%	9%	14%	26%	14%	22%
Developing a parenting plan	14%	9%	25%	26%	14%	29%	30%	25%
Establishing a visitation order	13%	1%	30%	6%	4%	24%	20%	21%

Table 8-2. Service Needs of Noncustodial Fathers at Enrollment Based on Program Staff Reports, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Establishing a custody order	7%	2%	17%	3%	9%	13%	9%	12%
Help with child support	70%	22%	53%	37%	14%	59%	35%	53%
Paternity establishment	7%	0%	18%	14%	0%	9%	5%	9%
Establish child support order	13%	2%	8%	17%	0%	7%	7%	8%
Modify child support order	23%	6%	26%	11%	0%	35%	15%	27%
Help with arrears	47%	21%	32%	17%	14%	34%	28%	33%
Parenting/relationship assistance	26%	91%	53%	49%	32%	12%	38%	29%
Mediation	12%	3%	10%	3%	14%	1%	17%	5%
Parent education	14%	91%	36%	40%	18%	9%	28%	22%
Help with a child abuse/neglect case	3%	0%	2%	3%	0%	1%	4%	1%
Anger management	2%	18%	24%	11%	17%	2%	16%	8%
Health services	6%	16%	32%	34%	26%	23%	15%	14%
Medical/dental services	1%	1%	10%	49%	18%	5%	8%	4%
Substance abuse treatment	3%	14%	26%	11%	18%	2%	7%	7%
Mental health care	3%	2%	7%	6%	36%	1%	6%	3%
Social support and other miscellaneous services	95%	97%	64%	77%	95%	20%	51%	47%
Peer support	34%	65%	53%	31%	9%	11%	26%	26%
Case management	71%	1%	29%	0%	77%	1%	34%	17%
Money management	0%	28%	8%	60%	9%	1%	10%	6%
Clothing or work equipment	4%	11%	2%	60%	0%	1%	7%	4%
Vocational rehabilitation	0%	0%	4%	17%	32%	1%	2%	2%
Legal assistance	3%	1%	4%	17%	9%	4%	9%	4%
Assistance with intimate partner abuse	1%	1%	3%	9%	14%	1%	2%	2%
Needs photo ID	1%	17%	9%	9%	0%	4%	14%	6%
Needs Social Security number	1%	0%	2%	0%	7%	1%	0%	1%
Needs copy of birth certificate	3%	21%	12%	0%	0%	14%	18%	12%
Needs child care assistance	0%	7%	4%	0%	0%	4%	2%	3%
Other	3%	3%	1%	17%	9%	1%	6%	2%

Combined Perspectives of Clients and Staff

Ultimately, deciding what types of services clients needed was a joint undertaking, based on discussions between the client and staff, as well as staff observations and information from secondary sources, such as child support records. Table 8-3 shows the percentage of noncustodial

fathers at each site with various needs identified either by the father and/or the program staff. The Table shows a greater level of service needs than either client self-reports or staff assessments indicate separately.

It is important to note that staff and clients were not always in agreement about the types of services needed. The differences of opinion are most obvious in the area of educational services. Nearly half (47% across all sites) of all clients said they needed educational services, compared with 17 percent of the program staff. It is unlikely that program staff was truly unaware of their clients' limited educational levels. It is more likely that staff and clients interpreted questions related to educational need quite differently. Interviews with program staff suggest that clients reported needing educational services as a way of recognizing that their lack of education will hinder their employment and earning opportunities. However, when confronted with the prospect of pre-GED classes and GED preparation, fewer clients are willing to take on these services. As a result, program staff say the service is "not needed."

Table 8-3. Service Needs of Noncustodial Fathers at Enrollment Combined Perspective of Parents and Program Staff, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
(Number with valid information)	*163*	*97*	*284*	*53*	*22*	*760*	*110*	*1,489*
Employment-related services	74%	92%	71%	83%	96%	45%	79%	61%
Education services	23%	53%	64%	66%	82%	47%	68%	51%
Access services	74%	28%	58%	53%	32%	75%	56%	66%
Child support services	77%	33%	58%	68%	46%	78%	62%	69%

**Table 8-3. Service Needs of Noncustodial Fathers at Enrollment
Combined Perspective of Parents and Program Staff, By Site**

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
Services related to parenting and relationship to custodial parent	47%	94%	74%	70%	46%	48%	76%	59%
Health services	8%	69%	55%	42%	50%	11%	25%	26%

Barriers to Employment, Child Support, and Child Access

In this section, we discuss a few obstacles to employment, child support payment, and regular child access that have not already been discussed elsewhere.

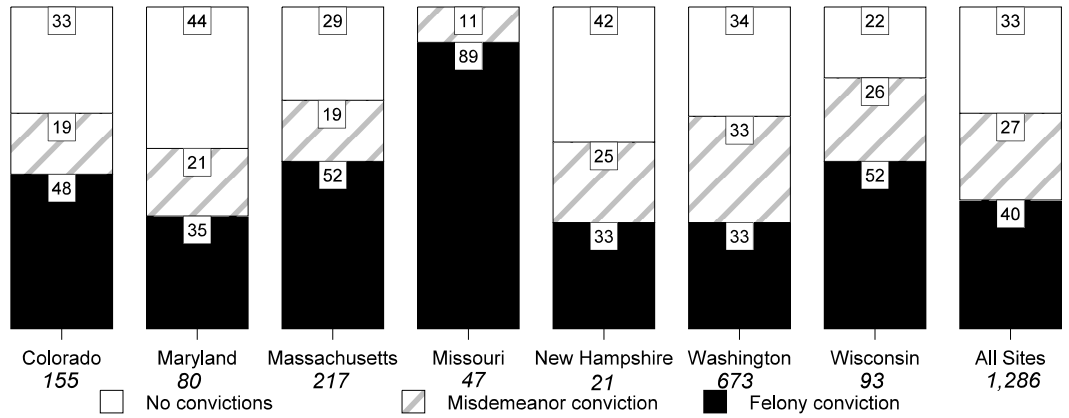
Criminal History

- Forty percent of all noncustodial fathers had been convicted of a felony, and 27 percent had been convicted of a misdemeanor. Only 33 percent reported no criminal history.

A criminal history often presents significant barriers to individuals trying to find work and see their children. Criminal records result in legal prohibitions against employment in certain occupations. Even when there are no legal restrictions, employers often refuse to hire or retain individuals with criminal records. Incarceration frequently affects child custody and visitation determinations, and may well translate into restrictions such as court orders requiring supervised visitation.

Figure 8-1 shows that criminal convictions were most common among fathers in Missouri, where 89 percent reported a felony conviction, and the remaining 11 percent reported a misdemeanor conviction. New Hampshire fathers had the lowest criminal history rates, with 42 percent reporting no prior convictions.

Figure 8-1
Criminal History of Noncustodial Fathers, by Site



Lack of Permanent Address

- The lack of a stable, permanent living situation was a problem for more than a quarter of the noncustodial fathers at four of the seven sites.

The lack of a permanent address creates serious problems for individuals as they look for employment; it also poses obstacles to obtaining regular access to children. Across the sites, an average of 20 percent of the noncustodial fathers reported having no permanent address when they enrolled in the programs. However, in some sites, the problem was even more pronounced. For example, 40 percent of Massachusetts participants lacked a permanent address. (See Table 8-4.)

Transportation Problems

- At all of the sites, noncustodial fathers faced basic transportation problems.

At all of the sites, more than a third of the noncustodial fathers reported at enrollment that they did not have a valid driver's license. At some sites (*e.g.*, Wisconsin and Massachusetts), this figure was over 70 percent. In addition, the lack of reliable transportation was a problem mentioned by

noncustodial fathers in all but one site (Washington). The lack of a driver's license and the lack of reliable transportation create difficulties in locating and keeping steady employment. Both factors also pose challenges to maintaining regular contact with children. Table 8-4 summarizes these patterns.

Substance Abuse History

- At four of the seven sites, approximately a quarter of the noncustodial fathers said that their drug and/or alcohol use created problems in finding and keeping employment.

Overall, 12 percent of the noncustodial fathers reported a problem with substance abuse; the percentages ranged from a low of 4 percent in Colorado to a high of 33 percent in Massachusetts. Program staff cited substance abuse treatment as a need for seven percent of all clients, ranging from a low of 2 percent in Washington to a high of 26 percent in Massachusetts.

Table 8-4 shows the percentages of clients and/or staff who reported that substance abuse would create problems for the client in finding or maintaining employment (and presumably, in maintaining regular access to children).

Table 8-4. Selected Barriers to Meeting Employment, Child Support, and Child Access Goals Noted by Noncustodial Fathers and/or Program Staff

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	*163*	*97*	*284*	*53*	*24*	*760*	*110*	*1491*
(Number with valid information)	*163*	*97*	*284*	*53*	*22*	*760*	*110*	*1489*
Lacks permanent housing	29%	26%	40%	31%	12%	16%	14 %	20%
Lacks a valid driver's license	63%	51%	82%	39%	45%	42%	71 %	47%

Table 8-4. Selected Barriers to Meeting Employment, Child Support, and Child Access Goals Noted by Noncustodial Fathers and/or Program Staff

Lacks reliable transportation	44%	28%	20%	33%	47%	8%	22 %	19%
Drugs/alcohol make finding/keeping a job difficult	24%	22%	24%	0%	27%	8%	9%	14%

Services Provided

Once the enrollment and assessment process ended and program staff determined the range of problems that fathers faced and their objectives, participants were referred for various types of remedial services. In the ensuing months, program staff attempted to monitor whether clients followed through with the service referrals they had made and/or whether adjustments were needed.

Table 8-5 presents a portrait of the services that noncustodial fathers received at the various program sites. The incidence of service provision is based on monthly records maintained by program staff for participants. An individual is classified as having received a certain service if staff noted that he had participated in an activity or had met with a service provider at least once. The Table does not reflect the intensity of service activity or the completion of service regimen; it merely denotes that staff believed that a noncustodial father had received at least one episode of assistance in proscribed subject areas. Naturally, program staff were better able to monitor services that were provided in-house. When they referred fathers to services provided by other agencies, staff records may only reflect the fact that staff made a referral to an external service provider and not that the client followed through and was actually served. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 4, there was considerable variation in the quality of monthly record-keeping at the sites.

Education and Employment Services

- While 47 percent of the clients (across all sites combined) reported needing educational services, only 17 percent of the program staff indicated educational services were needed, and only 12 percent of fathers across the sites showed any education activity.

We cannot be certain why there are such discrepencies in the number of clients and program staff reporting a need for educational services, or why only 12 percent of the noncustodial fathers received educational services. However, as noted above, it may be that many fathers who recognize that they need more education are not ready to enroll in the pre-GED and GED preparation courses.

Program staff reported that most fathers had not had positive educational experiences in the past that would make them welcome a return to a classroom, and most were too concerned about immediate financial needs to focus on the long-range benefits of additional education.

There were also some differences by site in the percentage of clients participating in educational services. For example, in Maryland and Missouri, 19 and 21 percent of fathers, respectively, appeared to have participated in some secondary education episode.

- Across the sites, 52 percent of the clients and 44 percent of the program staff said that the noncustodial father needed employment services.

- At six of the seven sites, at least half of the enrolled fathers showed involvement in some employment services.

As a result of extremely low rates of employment services provided in Washington (15%), the largest program site, the percentage of fathers who received employment assistance across the sites was only 36 percent, but excluding Washington, the range is 50 to 97 percent. Job club/search and job referrals were the key employment activities in which fathers participated. With the exception of Maryland, where high proportions of fathers engaged in job skills training (48%) and job readiness training (75%), most fathers used the programs to get job referrals and support in their job search activities. Many fathers entered the programs employed or with substantial work histories and did not need to review the fundamentals of getting and keeping a job. Only a tiny fraction of fathers participated in on-the-job training, which reflects the fact that these opportunities were rarely available to program participants.

Child Support

- Overall, about 57 percent of the noncustodial fathers and 53 percent of program staff (combined across the sites) indicated a need for child support services.

- In practice, half of the enrolled fathers reportedly received some type of child support service.

Most enrolled fathers appeared to have met with program staff and/or a child support technician to review the possibility of modifying their child support order and/or to discuss their child support

arrears. Far fewer met with child support technicians to establish paternity and/or a child support order. The exception was in Missouri, where staff indicated that a high proportion of clients met with technicians to establish paternity and/or a child support order.

Unfortunately, it was easier to help clients who needed paternity or an order established than it was to help clients who had large arrears or orders that they were having trouble paying. Even after meeting with a child support technician, it typically proved to be impossible to reduce either the order level or arrears. Indeed, in some instances the technician warned the client that requesting a modification would probably result in an increase in the order level. None of the child support agencies at the program sites offered participants an arrears forgiveness option or other incentives to promote payment.

Child Access Services

- Just over half of all the noncustodial fathers (51%) and program staff (54%) noted the need for child access services.

- Half of the enrolled noncustodial fathers received some assistance with child access.

The type of access assistance provided varied by site. For example, Washington fathers met with a program attorney for legal information and help filing a *pro se* request for visitation or visitation modification. At other sites, program staff met with both parents or contacted the custodial parent and tried to informally establish or modify a parenting plan.

Parenting and Relationship Services

- Approximately half of the noncustodial fathers (53% combined across sites) and 29 percent of program staff indicated a need for parenting services and services to improve the relationship between the parents.

- Across the sites, approximately a quarter of all noncustodial fathers reportedly received such services.

As with educational services, there are considerable discrepencies between the fathers' and the staff's perceptions regarding the need for parenting and relationship services. We cannot be sure why this is the case. During the intake process, many fathers may endorse the rather vague goal of

being "a better parent," without meaning to endorse an interest in classes on parenting and relationships.

Participation in parent education classes was a program requirement at the three sites with the highest levels of participation: Maryland, Missouri, and Wisconsin (although clearly, not all clients did take part). When parent education was not a program requirement, participation rates were far lower, with only 7 to 17 percent of fathers at non-mandatory sites attending some parent education intervention.

Attendance at anger management classes was highest in Maryland, which offered a court-approved treatment program for batterers at no charge to the participants. A fifth of the Massachusetts clients were referred to and/or received anger management classes, which were offered through public health agencies with which the fatherhood program was housed.

Other Services Received

- Peer support was the most common type of "other" service received, especially in Maryland and Massachusetts, where 99 and 62 percent, respectively, of program participants attended at least one peer support session.

Peer support groups were offered routinely in Maryland and Massachusetts; 99 and 62 percent, respectively, took part in peer support groups. At the other sites, only 23 percent of all fathers participated in peer support. Sites that did not use peer support groups tended to rely on case management to keep track of clients, monitor their participation, and provide a sense of concern and community. Across the sites, 29 percent of program participants received case management services, with the incidence exceeding 50 percent in Colorado, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin.

- Help with transportation was the third most common type of "other" assistance that fathers received.

Transportation assistance usually involved the provision of bus tokens, but at rural sites, it sometimes involved assistance with car repairs. Across the sites, 13 percent of fathers received transportation assistance.

- None of the cross-site averages for other services exceeded 10 percent, but some sites appeared to "specialize" in certain services.

Maryland offered participants help with money management (24%), housing (18%), partner abuse (17%), mental health services (18%), and substance abuse treatment (17%). Massachusetts provided fathers with substance abuse treatment (30%) and housing referrals (16%). Missouri reported that high proportions of fathers received clothing/equipment (48%) and assistance with money management (21%) and housing (21%). High proportions (but small absolute numbers) in the New Hampshire program received medical/dental services (23%), mental health services (18%), and vocational rehabilitation (14%). Eleven percent of Wisconsin fathers received legal assistance. Indeed, Washington was the only site that did not provide "other" types of services with any frequency.

Table 8-5. Services Received by Noncustodial Fathers Based on Program Staff Reports, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Noncustodial parent to at least one child	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,491
(Number with valid information)	*139*	*79*	*247*	*29*	*22*	*693*	*88*	*1,297*
Education	4%	24%	26%	24%	32%	6%	14%	12%
Primary education	1%	5%	10%	3%	27%	2%	6%	4%
Secondary	1%	19%	7%	21%	23%	3%	5%	5%
Post-secondary education	1%	0%	13%	0%	5%	2%	6%	4%
English as a Second Language	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	2%	1%
Employment services	59%	97%	49%	72%	64%	15%	50%	36%
Job search assistance	48%	43%	24%	38%	36%	11%	41%	23%
Job referrals	45%	14%	28%	62%	46%	10%	36%	21%
Job skills training	12%	48%	17%	14%	0%	7%	21%	13%
On-the-job training	1%	6%	1%	10%	5%	5%	19%	5%
Job readiness program	4%	75%	7%	17%	23%	2%	17%	9%
Job retention program	0%	4%	7%	38%	0%	1%	13%	4%

Table 8-5. Services Received by Noncustodial Fathers Based on Program Staff Reports, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Child access issues	38%	42%	37%	24%	18%	59%	34%	48%
Help client in getting to see children	30%	1%	15%	17%	0%	26%	21%	22%
Developing a parenting plan	12%	35%	13%	14%	14%	27%	19%	22%
Establishing a visitation order	4%	3%	23%	14%	5%	22%	19%	19%
Establishing a custody order	5%	3%	8%	0%	0%	14%	14%	11%
Help with child support	37%	35%	43%	41%	27%	61%	28%	50%
Paternity establishment	4%	1%	13%	28%	9%	9%	8%	9%
Establish child support order	13%	5%	10%	24%	9%	8%	6%	9%
Modify child support order	13%	14%	24%	21%	0%	35%	19%	27%
Help with arrears	22%	19%	28%	14%	18%	37%	14%	30%
Parenting/relationship assistance	19%	94%	37%	52%	5%	9%	45%	24%
Mediation	12%	13%	7%	3%	5%	1%	27%	6%
Parent education	7%	94%	17%	38%	0%	7%	36%	17%
Help with a child abuse/neglect case	3%	0%	2%	7%	0%	0%	2%	1%
Anger management	0%	43%	22%	10%	0%	1%	5%	8%
Social support, health, and other services	72%	100%	94%	66%	91%	17%	84%	58%
Medical/dental services	1%	3%	5%	17%	23%	3%	2%	4%
Substance abuse treatment	3%	17%	30%	10%	9%	1%	5%	8%
Mental health care	2%	18%	2%	7%	18%	1%	5%	3%
Peer support	4%	99%	62%	3%	0%	8%	9%	23%
Case management	63%	4%	79%	7%	86%	0%	83%	29%
Housing	5%	18%	16%	21%	0%	2%	8%	7%
Transportation	21%	87%	2%	52%	32%	4%	17%	13%
Money management	0%	24%	3%	21%	5%	0%	7%	3%
Clothing or work equipment	1%	6%	1%	48%	5%	0%	5%	2%
Vocational rehabilitation	1%	3%	2%	0%	14%	0%	3%	1%

Table 8-5. Services Received by Noncustodial Fathers Based on Program Staff Reports, By Site

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	All Sites
Legal assistance	4%	13%	5%	10%	0%	4%	11%	5%
Assistance with intimate partner abuse	1%	17%	4%	3%	0%	0%	2%	2%
Obtaining ID	0%	1%	2%	10%	0%	0%	3%	1%
Child care assistance	1%	3%	1%	10%	0%	0%	3%	1%
Other	12%	3%	2%	14%	36%	1%	3%	3%

Summary

- More than half (52%) of all noncustodial fathers indicated they needed assistance with employment. The number of clients rated by program staff as needing employment assistance ranged from 20 to 86 percent across the sites. At all but one site, Program records show at least half of the noncustodial fathers were involved with some type of employment service.

- At four of the seven sites, more than half of the fathers indicated they needed some help related to child support. Based on their discussions with clients and, at some sites, an independent review of the client's child support records, staff concluded that clients needed assistance with arrears (33%) and modification of child support orders (27%). Across the sites, Program records indicate that approximately half of the enrolled fathers received some child support services.

- Across the sites, 51 percent of fathers said that they would like help getting to see their children more often. Program staff identified access as an issue in just over 10 percent of the cases in Maryland, but saw it as an issue in two-thirds of the cases in Colorado. Across the sites, about half of the fathers appear to have received access services.

- Client barriers to employment, child support payment, and child access included high rates of felony convictions (40% cross-site) and the lack of a stable, permanent living situation (20% cross-site). Lack of reliable transportation was also a problem at all but one site; at four of the seven sites, approximately a quarter of the fathers said that their drug and/or alcohol use created problems in finding and keeping employment.

Chapter 9: Employment and Earnings Post-Enrollment

In this chapter

- Brief review of the data sources and methodology
- Employment and earnings changes after enrollment based on UI data
- Employment and earnings changes after enrollment for subgroups of noncustodial fathers based on UI data
- Client assessment of program effects on earnings and employment

Review of Data Sources

Chapter 4 described the data provided by clients and extracted from the automated employment databases that were used in this analysis of post-enrollment changes in earnings and employment. Chapter 4 also includes a description of the limitations of both types of data. Readers are briefly reminded that:

- Clients were asked about their employment status and earnings at program entry and at the follow-up interview, but the lack of follow-up data for many clients made it difficult to rely on client self-reports for the analysis of program impacts on employment and earnings.

- With funding from the Ford Foundation, wage records maintained by the states' Departments of Labor and Employment as part of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system were reviewed and information was extracted to assess changes in employment and earnings. All fathers — not simply noncustodial fathers — were included in the UI review.

- While UI data provide the best estimates of the number of clients who were employed and their earnings, it is generally agreed that this data source underestimates actual earnings. Among the limitations of this data are that: (1) only employers subject to the state Unemployment Insurance

Tax are required to report earnings to the state; (2) the database excludes those who work in another state, the self-employed, independent contractors, those working for cash (*i.e.*, "under the table" or "off the books"), the military, nonprofit institutions, and the federal government; and (3) some employers who are required to report employee earnings fail to do so.

- In Washington, the Human Research Review Section of the Department of Social and Health Service in Washington would not permit UI wage information to be released in a manner that would allow it to be linked with other client-supplied information dealing with employment, earnings, or background characteristics.

Changes in Employment and Earnings Post-Enrollment

Table 9-1 shows the employment and earning status of men in the responsible fatherhood programs prior to and following their enrollment. It is based on information that was extracted from the UI wage databases. Table 9-1 shows that:

- There were dramatic differences across sites in client rates of employment prior to their enrollment in the programs.

Based on UI data, pre-enrollment rates of employment ranged from a low of 13 percent in Missouri to a high of 64 percent in Washington.

- The percentage of noncustodial fathers employed following enrollment increased significantly over pre-enrollment percentages in Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, and Wisconsin. There were increases at the remaining three sites as well, but they were not statistically significant.

Significant increases in employment occurred at the four sites with the lowest levels of pre-program employment activity. For example, the rate of employment increased by 33 percentage points in Maryland, where only 18 percent of the clients had UI wages in the quarter prior to their enrollment in the RFP. For men in Missouri, the rate of employment rose from 13 percent to 42 percent. Clients in Massachusetts and Wisconsin also registered significant gains in employment following program participation, with UI rates going from about 45 percent to 53 to 62 percent.

In contrast, there was no significant increase in employment activity in Colorado, New Hampshire, and Washington, where, compared to other sites, substantially higher percentages of clients had UI-reported employment when they enrolled in the fatherhood programs. Thus, the percentage showing earnings in the UI database pre- and post-enrollment was virtually unchanged in Washington,

moving from 63 to 64 percent. In Colorado, while 62 percent of male clients had UI earnings the quarter before they enrolled in POP, 68 percent showed earnings two quarters after enrollment. It is clearly easier for programs to achieve bigger impacts in employment if they enroll mostly unemployed clients.

- Clients at four sites — Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin — showed significant increases in earnings following program enrollment.

Largely due to earnings among those who were unemployed at enrollment, quarterly earnings rose from an average of $532 to $1,866 in Maryland (250%), $738 to $1,177 in Wisconsin (58%), $1,718 to $2,439 in Colorado (41%), and from $1,711 to $2,149 in Massachusetts (25%). Although the gains were substantial, the post-enrollment average quarterly earnings were, of course, still low.

- When the analysis was restricted to fathers with UI earnings at both pre- and post-enrollment time points, only three sites — Colorado, Washington, and Wisconsin — showed evidence of significant wage growth.

Among the 82 POP clients in Colorado with both pre- and post-program UI-reported earnings, average quarterly earnings rose significantly by 38 percent, from $2,870 to $3,960. The same was true for 29 Wisconsin clients who entered Children UpFront with UI-reported earnings. Their average quarterly earnings rose from $1,694 to $2,736. Gains were statistically significant, but more modest, in Washington, where average quarterly earnings increased from $3,547 to $3,914. While average earnings at the other program sites increased for those who had UI earnings at both points of time, the increases were not statistically significant.

- Even at sites with statistically significant increases in UI reported earnings, post-program salaries remained at low levels.

Two quarters after enrolling in the program, clients at no site had average quarterly earnings in excess of $3,100. At four sites — Maryland, Missouri, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin — average quarterly earnings fell below $2,000. As measures of earnings over a three-month span of time, these are extremely low figures.

Table 9-1. Comparing Earnings of Fathers in the Quarter Pre-Enrollment and Two Quarters Post-Enrollment By Site i

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin
Total number of fathers served by the program	165	124	330	59	26	819	127
Number who could be checked in the UI system	*165*	*101*	*297*	*44*	*14*	*787*	*84*
Percent showing any earnings							
Number with valid information	*165*	*101*	*297*	*44*	*14*	*787*	*84*
One quarter prior to enrollment	62%	18%	45%	13%	57%	64%	46%
Two quarters post-enrollment	68%	51% W	53% W	42% W	79%	63%	62% W
Average quarterly earnings							
One quarter prior to enrollment	$1,718	$532	$1,711	$404	$1,439	$2,873	$738
Two quarters post-enrollment	$2,439 W	$1,866 W	$2,149 W	$704	$1,956	$3,095	$1,177 W
Average quarterly earnings for those with earnings pre- and post-enrollment							
Number with valid information	*82*	*13*	*100*	*5*	*7*	*304*	*29*
One quarter prior to enrollment	$2,870	$3,393	$4,239	$2,684	$2,842	$3,547	$1,694
Two quarters post-enrollment	$3,960 W	$3,912	$4,359	$3,020	$3,355	$3,914 W	$2,736 W

i Due to variation in the data collection forms used at each site, cross-site totals are not calculated.
W Indicates pre- and post-enrollment differences significant at .05.

Factors Associated with Employment

The analysis presented in Table 9-2 explores whether certain types of fathers — minorities, young fathers, and those without a high school diploma — were less likely to be employed than were white, older, and better-educated fathers after program participation. Employment was measured by the presence of UI-reported earnings in the two quarters following enrollment in the responsible fatherhood programs. Earning level was based on UI records for the second quarter following program enrollment. Given the small number of clients in the analysis and the absence of a non-treatment control group, both the tests of statistical significance and the general pattern of effects must be viewed as tentative and suggestive rather than conclusive.

Race/Ethnicity

- Post-enrollment employment and earning levels did not vary significantly by race or ethnicity.

Neither rates of employment nor earnings differed significantly for clients who classified themselves as white versus African-American, Hispanic, or a member of some other racial/ethnic group. At three of the four sites (Colorado, Maryland, Wisconsin), whites were more apt to show UI earnings than minorities, but the differences were not statistically significant. Nor were there significant differences between white and minority noncustodial fathers with respect to earning levels. These patterns are consistent with PFS, which also found no differences by race/ethnicity.

Age

- None of the sites showed significant differences in employment rates for those below age 25 and those over age 25.

Only one site, Wisconsin, showed differences in earning levels for younger and older clients. At this site, earnings among those employed were somewhat higher for older clients.

Education

- At four of the five sites (Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Wisconsin), the percent employed was higher for clients with high school diplomas than for those without, but at none of the sites were the differences between the two groups statistically significant.

- At two sites (Massachusetts and Missouri), clients with a high school diploma earned more than their counterparts without a diploma; the differences were statistically significant.

In Colorado, Maryland, and Wisconsin, the differences in client earnings for those with and without a high school diploma were not statistically significant.

Table 9-2. Department of Labor Evidence of Employment Two Quarters Post-Enrollment, by Site and Characteristics of the Fathers By Site i

	Colorado		Maryland		Massachusetts		Missouri		Wisconsin	
All Fathers Served by Program	165		124		330		59		127	
(Number checked in UI system)	*165*		*101*		*297*		*44*		*84*	
Race/Ethnicity	**White**	**Minority**	**White**	**Minority**	**White**	**Minority**	**White**	**Minority**	**White**	**Minority**
Number with valid information	*83*	*83*	*7*	*94*	*14*	*285*			*12*	*72*
No earnings	29%	35%	43%	50%	50%	47%	i i		17%	42%
Earnings	71%	65%	57%	50%	50%	53%	i i		83%	58%
If earnings, quarterly average	$3,323	$3,860	i i		i i		i i		$1,922	$1,895
Age	**# 25**	**> 25**	**# 25**	**> 25**	**# 25**	**> 25**	**# 25**	**> 25**	**# 25**	**> 25**
Number with valid information	*34*	*126*	*28*	*71*	*72*	*222*	*20*	*17*	*29*	*50*
No earnings	32%	31%	57%	45%	56%	44%	40%	59%	41%	38%
Earnings	68%	69%	43%	55%	44%	56%	60%	41%	59%	62%
If earnings, quarterly average	$3,645	$3,566	$3,573	$3,733	$3,198	$4,261	$788	$936	$1,055	$2,181
High school diploma	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**
Number with valid information	*28*	*131*	*49*	*44*	*67*	*180*	*17*	*24*	*25*	*37*
No earnings	21%	35%	53%	43%	51%	46%	65%	46%	48%	35%
Earnings	79%	65%	47%	57%	49%	54%	35%	54%	52%	65%
If earnings, quarterly average	$4,703	$3,443	$1,459	$2,182	$2,799 w	$4,226	$238 w	$1,151	$1,475	$2,091

i Due to variation in the data collection forms used at each site, cross-site totals are not calculated. New Hampshire is not included because there were only two minority fathers, four under age 25, and four with a high-school diploma. Washington data were not provided in a format that would allow an analysis of earnings by race/ethnicity, age, or education.

i i Too few cases to be included in this portion of the analysis.

W Indicates differences between those with and without a high school diploma are significant at .05.

Self-Reported Changes in Employment

Table 9-3 provides clients' assessments of the role that the fatherhood program played in their employment situation at the time of the follow-up interview. Clients who were employed full- or part-time at the interview were asked whether this was the same job they had when they enrolled in the programs. Responses varied considerably across the sites.

- Most NCPs in Colorado and Wisconsin who were interviewed six months after enrollment did not have the same job that they had at enrollment, while NCPs in Maryland, Massachusetts, and Washington were more evenly divided between those who did and did not have the same job.

- Across all of the sites, most clients reported being confident that they could have found the job they now held without the help of the program. Few gave the program credit for providing assistance or training that led to their current employment.

Table 9-3. Assessment of the Impact of the Program on Employment and Earnings by Clients Employed at the Follow-up Interview By Site i

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Washington	Wisconsin
All fathers served by program	165	124	330	819	127
Number of noncustodial fathers	163	97	284	760	110
Number of completed telephone follow-up interviews	63	45	110	232	28
Number of cases with valid information	*45*	*27*	*70*	*137*	*16*
Client had the same job at follow-up that he had at enrollment	27%	54%	42%	61%	31%
Client had a different job at follow-up than at enrollment	73%	46%	58%	39%	69%
If he had a different job, percent who say:					
I would have found the job I have now without the program	68%	50%	77%	96%	64%
I received services through the program that helped with this job	4%	22%	10%	2%	6%

i The following were not included in the analysis:
New Hampshire: Only seven NCPs with information.
Missouri: Only five NCPs with information.

Summary

- Following program enrollment, there were statistically significant increases in UI-reported employment at four sites.

- The sites showing increased employment at follow-up were those with the highest initial unemployment rates.

- Clients at four sites — Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin — showed significant increases in earnings following program enrollment.

- It was much harder for programs to help employed clients get better jobs than it was to help unemployed clients get any job at all. Colorado and Wisconsin were the only sites that appear to have produced increased earnings among those who entered the programs with jobs.

- There was little evidence that client age, race/ethnicity, or high school education affected post-enrollment patterns dealing with employment and earnings.

Chapter 10: Child Support Post-Enrollment

In this chapter

- Brief review of data sources
- Percentages of fathers in the child support system prior to and following enrollment
- Percentages of fathers needing order establishment prior to and following enrollment
- Changes in obligation levels prior to and following enrollment
- Changes in child support payment prior to and following enrollment
- Understanding payment patterns: the influence of income level and order amount

Review of Data Sources

Chapter 4 described the various types of data utilized in this chapter and their limitations. Readers are briefly reminded that:

- Information on child support obligations and payments came from the automated databases maintained by child support agencies at each site.

- Information on obligations and payments was collected for the six months immediately preceding enrollment and for two post-enrollment periods: six months and 12 months post-enrollment.

- The collection of child support information, as well as the extraction of data from wage records maintained by the states' Departments of Labor and Employment as part of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system, was conducted under a grant from the Ford Foundation. All fathers — not simply those who self-identified as noncustodial fathers — were included in the child support review.

- In Washington, the Human Research Review Section of the Department of Social and Health Service would not permit child support information to be released in a manner that would allow it to be linked with other client-supplied information dealing with employment, earnings, or background characteristics.

- Automated child support data was not merged across the sites. Each site collected comparable information, but in somewhat different formats. Although it would have been possible to create a single standardized data file, creation of such a data file was not included in the scope of this evaluation due to resource constraints. As a result, no cross-site totals are presented.

Status in the Child Support System Pre- and Post-Enrollment

Entry into the System

Chapter 7 showed that most fathers were involved with the child support system in their state at the time they enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs. Table 10-1 shows that:

- There was relatively little change in the proportion of fathers in the child support system pre- and post-enrollment.

Only in Colorado, where many POP referrals were made by child support workers, was there a noticeable increase in the percentage of clients in the child support system following enrollment. It appears that as Colorado fathers were brought into the child support system for order establishment, they were often referred to the fatherhood program. In a few other program sites (*e.g.*, Massachusetts, Missouri, Washington, Wisconsin), the percentage of fathers with cases in the child support system actually declined at the 12-month follow-up, presumably due to some case

closures. The decline in the average number of cases open for fathers at every site provides further evidence of case closure activity following program enrollment.

Order Establishment

Table 10-1 shows the percentage of clients in the child support system who had an order established and the percentage who needed order establishment on at least one case. The Table shows that:

- Even though order establishment was at relatively high levels prior to enrollment, most sites did increase the percentage of cases with orders post-enrollment.

In Colorado, Missouri, Washington, and Wisconsin, the percentage of fathers in the child support system who had an order established increased over time. At every site, the percentage of fathers still needing at least one order established declined. Of course, in the absence of a control group, we cannot be certain that these changes would not have occurred without the fatherhood program.

Table 10-1. Child Support Cases at Enrollment (Pre-) and 12 Months After Enrollment (Post-), By Site

	Colorado		Maryland		Massachusetts		Missouri		New Hampshire		Washington		Wisconsin	
Total men served by the program	165		124		330		59		26		819		127	
Number checked in child support system	*165*		*101*		*297*		*44*		*14*		*787*		*84*	
Open cases with valid information	*129*		*86*		*175*		*35*		*14*		*614*		*76*	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Open child support case in the system	82%	96%	74%	77%	54%	52%	78%	73%	100%	100%	78%	76%	86%	84%
Of those in the system:														
Average number of cases per father	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.7	1.6	1.3	1.2	2.1	2.0	1.7	1.6
Percent with an order established	68%	87%	64%	51%	77%	79%	74%	86%	100%	100%	85%	97%	89%	95%
At least one case needs order established	33%	20%	55%	53%	30%	25%	31%	14%	7%	0%	15%	3%	11%	3%

Child Support Order Levels

As a result of participating in responsible fatherhood programs, noncustodial fathers might have experienced changes in their support obligations. If they qualified for a review and adjustment and the child support worker determined that their order was too high, their monthly obligations might have gone down. They might also have experienced declines in their monthly financial obligations if the child support worker decided that one or more cases should be closed or adjusted due to an agency error or change in circumstance.

There might also have been changes in the total amount clients were required to pay towards arrears, since child support workers in states that permit orders to be established administratively have some discretion in the amount of arrears that they order NCPs to pay on a monthly basis. Overall arrears levels could also have been modified as a result of ledger corrections or agency decisions to forgive a portion of arrears owed to the state as an incentive for program participation and payment of current support. And, of course, if clients were unable or unwilling to pay child support during the 12 months following their enrollment, their arrears balances would have increased.

Table 10-2 compares the child support obligations that fathers faced when they enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs and their status 12 months later. The most striking pattern is the similarity in obligations at the two time points.

- There were no significant differences in monthly child support order levels at enrollment and 12 months later at any of the program sites.
- There were no significant differences between baseline and follow-up with respect to the total monthly amount due (*i.e.*, combining monthly support with the monthly arrears payment).
- Arrears levels showed no consistent increases or decreases across the sites.

Interviews with case managers at the program sites confirmed that child support technicians took relatively few remedial actions on behalf of clients enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs. Few qualified for order modifications under state child support guidelines; as a result, there were no substantial changes in monthly obligations. The lack of consistent decreases in arrears levels confirms that the child support agencies did not extend any special incentives to promote the

payment of child support among responsible fatherhood program clients, such as forgiveness of arrears owed to the state.

Many states charge interest and penalties for unpaid child support balances that were not reflected in the arrears balances shown in Table 10-2. This information was available for Massachusetts' FFI clients. Massachusetts charges annual interest of 12 percent on unpaid child support balances. It also imposes a 6 percent penalty. By adding interest and penalty charges to arrears balances for NCPs, we can document the true level of unpaid balances that clients faced 12 months after they enrolled in FFI.

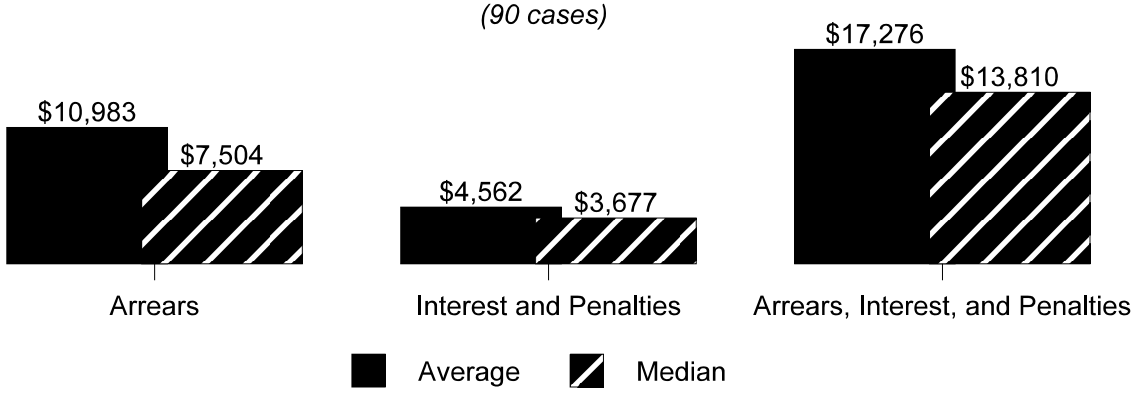
Table 10-2. Child Support Order Levels (Across All Orders) at Enrollment (Pre-) and 12 Months After Enrollment (Post-), By Site

	Colorado		Maryland		Massachusetts		Missouri		New Hampshire		Washington		Wisconsin	
Total men enrolled	165		124		330		59		26		819		127	
Checked in CSE system	*165*		*101*		*297*		*44*		*14*		*787*		*84*	
Open cases with valid information	*82*	*158*	*47*	*78*	*128*	*154*	*26*	*32*	*13*	*14*	*526*	*622*	*64*	*107*
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Amount due in monthly current support														
Average	$319	$283	$187	$191	$340	$331	$206	$186	$242	$289	$381	$372	$223	$244
Median	$300	$248	$152	$162	$300	$296	$210	$175	$216	$228	$342	$328	$185	$200
Total arrears balance														
Average	$10,908	$11,060	i	$13,569	i	$10,983	$7,986	$9,170	$7,978	$7,629	$15,341	$14,809	$11,079	$11,263
Median	$8,387	$8,918	i	$10,606	i	$7,504	$7,044	$5,445	$3,600	$2,140	$8,395	$7,405	$9,881	$8,711
Monthly amount due in current and arrears														
Average	$376	$331	i	i	i	i	$269	$240	$245	$260	$381	$372	$224	$285
Median	$339	$302	i	i	i	i	$249	$219	$200	$209	$342	$328	$186	$219

i At these sites, the monthly amount paid towards arrears is not available.

As Figure 10-1 shows, the addition of interest and penalties increases child support balances dramatically. While FFI clients with arrears owed an average of $10,983 for unpaid child support 12 months after they enrolled in the programs, the average amount they owed was $17,276 when interest and penalty charges were taken into account.

Figure 10-1
Massachusetts
Interest and Penalties Owed On Arrears
12 Months Post-Enrollment
(90 cases)



Child Support Payment Behavior

Table 10-3 shows child support payment patterns in the six months prior to enrollment and the 12 months following enrollment. The table demonstrates that:

- The percentage of clients making *any* payments towards their monthly support obligations and/or arrears increased after enrollment.

This pattern was true for all sites, with the exception of New Hampshire, where most clients made at least some payment even prior to enrollment.

- As a result of the decline in the percentage of fathers making no payments following enrollment, the average percentage paid increased at most sites.

This pattern was true for all sites except Wisconsin. Table 10-3 also shows the results of significance tests conducted using paired cases, *i.e.*, comparing only those clients who had orders both pre- and post-enrollment. In three sites — Colorado, Maryland, and Massachusetts — those fathers who owed child support at both time periods paid significantly more in the post-enrollment period. The increases in all three sites appeared to be due to a decline in the percentage of clients who paid nothing. Clients making no payments declined from 51 to 20 percent in Colorado, from 61 to 44 percent in Maryland, and from 40 to 21 percent in Massachusetts.

- There was little change in payment patterns among clients who were making some payment at program entry.

Table 10-3 also shows that the percentage of child support paid by clients who had paid *any* support in the six months prior to their enrollment was roughly equivalent to the percentage they paid in the ensuing 12 months. For example in Washington, fathers who made payments in the six months prior to enrollment paid, on average, 64 percent of what they owed. In the six months following their enrollment, these same fathers paid 63 percent of what they owed. Missouri fathers paid an identical 36 percent at both time points, and payment levels among Massachusetts fathers went from 55 percent to 53 percent.

- The reduced number of clients who made no payments was probably due in part to the increased use of wage withholding.

At most sites, the percentage of cases with some payments from wage withholding increased between the two time points. For example in Maryland, the percentage of fathers with a child support order who paid through wage withholding in the six months prior to and the 12 months following enrollment went from 26 to 39 percent. In Colorado, where program staff worked closely with the child support agency to ensure that wage assignments went into effect as soon as the program placed the father in a job, the percentage of fathers with some wage withholding went from from 17 to 60 percent.

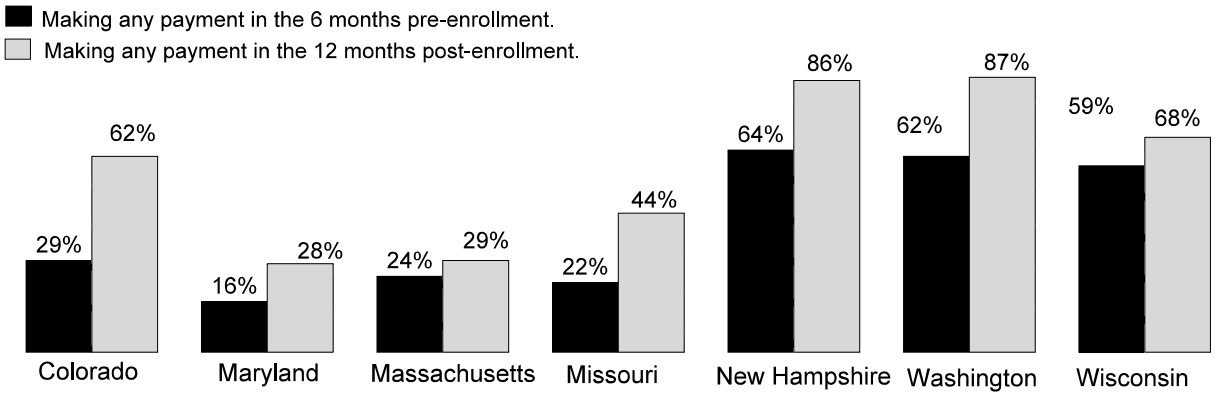
Table 10-3. Child Support Payments (Across All Orders) by Fathers Who Have a Child Support Obligation (Current Monthly and/or Arrears) in the 6 Months Pre-Enrollment (Pre-) and the 12 Months After Enrollment (Post-), By Site

	Colorado		Maryland		Massachusetts		Missouri		New Hampshire		Washington		Wisconsin	
Total men enrolled	165		124		330		59		26		819		127	
Checked in CSE system	*165*		*101*		*297*		*44*		*14*		*787*		*84*	
Open cases with valid information	*82*	*158*	*47*	*78*	*128*	*154*	*26*	*32*	*13*	*14*	*526*	*622*	*64*	*107*
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Percent making some payment	49%	80%	39%	56%	60%	79%	38%	67%	82%	86%	62%	88%	75%	86%
Percent increase from pre- to post-	*31%*		*17%*		*19%*		*29%*		*4%*		*26%*		*11%*	
Average amount of what was due that was paid	24%	36%	18%	27%	33%	42%	14%	23%	46%	62%	40%	55%	34%	35%
Percent increase from pre- to post-	*12%* [i]		*9%* [i]		*9%* [i]		*9%*		*16%*		*15%*		*1%*	
Of those making some payment, average amount of what was due that was paid	49%	45%	46%	48%	55%	53%	36%	36%	56%	72%	64%	63%	45%	41%
Percent increase or decrease pre- to post-	*-4%*		*2%*		*-2%*		*0%*		*16%*		*-1%*		*-4%*	
Percent with a payment through wage withholding	17%	60%	26%	39%	58%	67%	35%	43%	36%	86%	43%	39%	71%	84%
Percent increase or decrease pre- to post-	*43%*		*13%*		*9%*		*8%*		*50%*		*-4%*		*13%*	

[i] Tests of significance were not conducted on all cases reflected in the percentages at each site. Paired T-tests were conducted using only those individuals who had orders at both the pre- and post- time points. The percentages for these matched cases are not shown, but would differ from the overall site percentages.

Figure 10-2 looks at payment patterns from the custodial parent's point of view. It examines how many of the fathers known to the child support system (those with an order established and those without an order) were making payments. Thus, it combines the fathers with orders with the fathers who should have had child support orders. The figure shows that although higher proportions of custodial mothers received some child support after the fathers of their children enrolled in the programs, many continued to receive nothing.

Figure 10-2
Percent Making Any Formal Payment 6 Months Pre-Enrollment and 12 Months Post-Enrollment, By Site
(Those who do not have an order are included as $0 payments).



- In four of the seven sites (Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri), less than half of all fathers known to the child support system made any payment in the six months prior to their enrollment in the responsible fatherhood program.

- At all sites, more of the fathers known to the child support system made a payment in the 12 months post-enrollment than pre-enrollment.

- In three of the seven sites (Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri), less than half of the fathers known to the child support system made a payment in the post-enrollment time period.

Without a control group, it is impossible to determine whether these changes in payment behavior for fathers reflected the impact of the programs or were the result of normal enforcement activity. PFS, which had a control group, led researchers to conclude that:

- Most of the project's increases in child support payments were due to the intake process, which involved extra outreach, case review, and enforcement activity that uncovered unreported employment among fathers who were thus ineligible for PFS.

- Among fathers who participated in PFS, the child support outcomes were more modest. The number of fathers paying child support increased, but among those who paid, there was little change in the average amount paid.

PFS researchers attributed the higher payment rate to the strong involvement of the child support agency in PFS, including monitoring cases closely and following up with noncompliant cases. They attributed the program's minimal impact on payment amounts to the likelihood that the men's original order levels were too high and as a result, many experienced downward modifications during program participation. Based on these findings, the authors concluded that one of the reasons why a program offering services like PFS is valuable is because it leads child support agencies to review and work low-income cases (Miller and Knox, 2001).

We get additional evidence of the value of traditional child support enforcement activity from an experimental program in Washington State, which aimed to improve collections among low-income, delinquent cases by exposing a randomly generated treatment group to high-quality, aggressive enforcement work. The intervention produced significant increases in both the proportion making payment and amount of payment, with the treatment group contributing 54.6 percent of what they owed, compared to the control group's 45.4 percent. As a result, the authors of that evaluation concluded that the program "demonstrated the value of aggressive collection work — the traditional work of support enforcement officers or other bill collectors, but done better than by the average worker" (Peters, 1999).

Understanding Payment: The Role of Income and Order Levels

Table 10-4 combines UI wage data with payment data obtained from CSE records. The table shows that:

- Child support payment activity increased with earnings.

For example, Massachusetts clients who earned less than $500 per month paid an average of 30 percent of what they owed in child support. Those who earned more than $2,000 per month paid 74 percent of what they owed. Like PFS and many other studies, the responsible fatherhood programs

show that fathers who earn more pay more child support and that improving the economic status of low-income fathers is critical to improving child support payments.

- Ordered levels of child support may be unrealistically high for many clients in responsible fatherhood programs.

Although UI wage data clearly understate earnings and, as a result may overestimate the burden of child support, child support definitely consumes a huge proportion of NCP income at the lowest earning levels. Those earning between $501 and $1,000 per month had child support obligations equal to 21 to 61 percent of monthly earnings. Only at the higher monthly income levels, exceeding $2,000 per month, did monthly child support obligations comprise more realistic percentages of incomes (ranging from 8 to 21 percent).

We repeated this analysis of client earnings, child support obligations, and payment patterns using the generally higher earnings reported by clients rather than those contained in the UI system. (See Table 10-5.) Due to the low response rate in the follow-up survey, we used the client's self-reported earnings for the most recent job held prior to enrollment. The patterns remained essentially the same as those reported above: the burden of child support remained extremely high for those at the lowest income levels.

In addition to showing that guidelines and/or default orders tend to produce excessively high order levels for extremely low-income individuals, the data in Tables 10-4 and 10-5 also reveal the limited ability of responsible fatherhood programs to address the basic mismatch between earnings and child support obligations among low-income NCPs. Ultimately, the programs were neither able to reduce child support order levels nor dramatically increase client earnings. Thus, although overall payment patterns at many of the sites improved, they did so chiefly by reducing the incidence of complete non-payment.

Table 10-4. Child Support Obligations and Payments Among Men with a Child Support Obligation Six Months After Enrollment, by UI Earnings and Site [i]

Monthly earnings shown in the UI system		Average amount of child support + arrears to be paid per month	Monthly obligation expressed as a percent of monthly earnings (excludes cases with no earnings)	Percent of obligation actually paid in the 6 months post enrollment (excludes cases with no earnings)
Colorado	*Number with valid information*	*82*	*73*	*73*
	Less than or equal to $500	$350	222% [W]	24%
	Between $501 - $1,000	$278	42%	33%
	Between $1,001 - $2,000	$342	24%	53%
	Over $2,000	$407	16%	57%
Maryland	*Number with valid information*	*47*	*24*	*24*
	Less than or equal to $500	$207	551%	1%
	Between $501 - $1,000	$178	21%	22%
	Between $1,001 - $2,000	$163	12%	57%
	Over $2,000	$204	8%	67%
Massachusetts	*Number with valid information*	*128*	*81*	*81*
	Less than or equal to $500	$396	640% [U]	30%
	Between $501 - $1,000	$382	61%	37%
	Between $1,001 - $2,000	$405	30%	50%
	Over $2,000	$536	21%	74%
Washington	*Number with valid information*	*526*	*330*	*330*
	Less than or equal to $500	$341	433%	43%
	Between $501 - $1,000	$357	50%	46%
	Between $1,001 - $2,000	$354	24%	70% [±]
	Over $2,000	$462 [–]	16%	82% [±]
Wisconsin	*Number with valid information*	*64*	*40*	*40*
	Less than or equal to $500	$284	526%	38%
	Between $501 - $1,000	$251	33%	77%
	Between $1,001 - $2,000	$301	22%	56%
	Over $2,000	$434	17%	96%

[i] New Hampshire and Missouri were not included in the analysis due to sample size.
[W] 222% is significantly higher than other figures in Colorado.
[U] 640% is significantly higher than other figures in Massachusetts.
[–] 462% is significantly higher than other figures in Washington.
[±] 70% and 82% are significantly higher than other figures in Washington.

Table 10-5. Child Support Obligations and Payments Six Months After Enrollment Among Men with a Child Support Obligation, by Self-Reported Earnings and Site [i]

Self-reported monthly earnings (interview data):	Average amount of child support + arrears to be paid per month	Average monthly obligation as a percentage of monthly earnings	Percent of the obligation actually paid in the six months post-enrollment	*Number with valid information*
Colorado				
Less than or equal to $500	$378	125% [W]	27%	*5*
Between $501 - $1,000	$291	37%	32%	*17*
Between $1,001 - $2,000	$362	27%	37%	*78*
Over $2,000	$582	23%	47%	*4*
Maryland				
Less than or equal to $500	$138	57% [U]	38%	*2*
Between $501 - $1,000	$178	21%	26%	*10*
Between $1,001 - $2,000	$199	14%	28%	*22*
Over $2,000	$249	10%	28%	*4*
Massachusetts				
Less than or equal to $500	$233	62% [–]	91%	*4*
Between $501 - $1,000	$400	52% [–]	42%	*19*
Between $1,001 - $2,000	$413	29%	51%	*68*
Over $2,000	$528	19%	67%	*34*
Wisconsin				
Less than or equal to $500	$184	81%	11%	*5*
Between $501 - $1,000	$277	40%	26%	*13*
Between $1,001 - $2,000	$298	23%	42%	*31*
Over $2,000	$305	13%	91% [±]	*6*

[i] New Hampshire and Missouri were not included in the analysis due to sample size. Washington was excluded because data were not available.

[W] 125% is significantly higher than all other figures in Colorado.

[U] 57% is significantly higher than all other figures in Maryland.

[–] 62% and 52% are significantly higher than 29% and 19% in Massachusetts.

[±] 91% is significantly higher than 11% and 26% in Wisconsin.

Summary

- Overall, most fathers were formally involved with the child support system in their state at the time they enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs, and there was little change after enrollment in the percentage involved with the child support sytem.

- At four of the seven sites, the number of fathers in the child support system who had orders established increased after enrollment.

- There were no significant differences in the monthly child support order levels at enrollment and 12 months later at any of the program sites.

- There were no significant differences between baseline and follow-up with respect to the total monthly amount due (*i.e.*, combining monthly support with the monthly arrears payment).

- Arrears levels showed no consistent increases or decreases across the sites. While the fact that arrears balances did not consistently grow is encouraging — suggesting that payments were being made — the lack of consistent decreases in arrears levels suggests that the child support agencies did not extend any special incentives to promote the payment of child support among responsible fatherhood program clients, such as forgiveness of arrears owed to the state.

- The percentage of clients with payment due who made *any* payments towards their monthly support obligations and/or arrears generally increased after enrollment. However, post-enrollment, in three of the seven sites, less than half of the fathers with support orders made a payment.

- Child support payment activity increases with earnings, but ordered levels of child support may be unrealistically high for many clients in responsible fatherhood programs.

Chapter 11: Child Access at Follow-Up

In this chapter

- Review of the data sources and limitations
- Quick profile of the away children of fathers who were interviewed
- Changes in the amount of father-child contact pre- and post-enrollment
- Reasons for changes in contact levels
- Satisfaction with child access

Review of the Data Sources and Limitations

Chapter 4 discussed the generation of the follow-up interview data and its limitations. The primary points regarding the data include the following:

- Attempts were made to conduct telephone interviews with all noncustodial fathers six months after they enrolled in the responsible fatherhood programs.

- In order to generate comparable information at each site, the Ford Foundation provided a grant to allow for the development of a single interview schedule and covered the costs of interviewing clients and paying incentives at each site.

- Of the 1,674 noncustodial fathers served by the sites, just under a third (31%) were interviewed. The refusal rate was only 4 percent, but most fathers could not be located.

- The probability of an interview being completed was greater if the noncustodial father was:
  - Over age 40 (compared to under 25);
  - Ever married (versus never married);
  - Better educated (some post high-school training versus less than a high school graduate or GED);

- Employed at program entry (rather than unemployed); or
- In a more contentious relationship with the mother of the youngest away child.

The site specific analyses yield some very small sample sizes that should be viewed with caution. In selected tables, sites are excluded when they had five or fewer valid responses. Given the low response rates, all of the findings presented in this chapter are best viewed as exploratory and suggestive, rather than conclusive.

Profile of the Away Children

For an overview of child access patterns for all noncustodial fathers prior to their enrollment in the responsible fatherhood programs, readers are referred to Chapter 6. It presents an analysis of the data collected at program entry and recorded in the Responsible Fatherhood Management Information System. Table 11-1 presents a picture of noncustodial fathers' access situation at program enrollment for *only* those fathers who completed the follow-up interview.

The Table shows that:

- A majority of the fathers interviewed at follow up (56%) had only one child not living with them at the time of enrollment. Of the remaining fathers, 27 percent had two children, 10 percent had three children, and 7 percent had four or more children not living with them.

- The number of "away" children ranged from one to seven, and the average number of "away" children was 1.7. The average number of children was fairly consistent across all project sites except for New Hampshire, where information was only available for three noncustodial fathers.

- A majority of noncustodial fathers (66%) had children with only one woman. About a quarter of fathers (23%) had children with two different women, 8 percent had children with three different women, and 3 percent had children with four or more different women.

- The number of different mothers for each father ranged from one to six, with the overall average being 1.5. There was more diversity across sites on this variable than on the number of children. The average number of women with whom the fathers had children ranged from a low of 1.2 in Colorado to a high of 1.8 in Wisconsin.

Table 11-1. Profile of Children at Enrollment for Noncustodial Men Interviewed at Follow-Up By Site [i]

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Washington	Wisconsin	Total
Number of Noncustodial Fathers	163	97	284	760	110	1,491
Number of completed telephone follow-up interviews	*63*	*45*	*110*	*232*	*28*	*495*
Number of children not living with the father at program enrollment						
Number with valid information	*61*	25	68	169	22	353
One	64%	56%	52%	54%	54%	56%
Two	23%	24%	31%	27%	32%	27%
Three	7%	12%	7%	12%	5%	10%
Four or more	7%	8%	10%	7%	9%	7%
Average number of children	1.6	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.7
Number of different women with whom father has had children	61	22	59	163	22	335
Number with valid information	*61*	*22*	*59*	*163*	*22*	*335*
One	83%	59%	59%	63%	64%	66%
Two	13%	27%	25%	28%	14%	23%
Three	2%	5%	12%	8%	14%	8%
Four or more	2%	9%	3%	2%	9%	3%
Average	1.2	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.8	1.5

[i] The Table does not present site specific data for New Hampshire and Missouri due to small cell sizes. The total column does include New Hampshire and Missouri fathers.

Amount of Contact with Children and Decision-Making, Pre- and Post-Enrollment

To gauge what impact, if any, the programs might have had on the fathers' involvement with their children, fathers were asked in the follow-up interview to report the amount of contact they had with their children in the 12 months prior to enrollment and the six months after they enrolled in the programs. In addition, fathers were asked to compare the amount of contact during these two time

periods and note whether they were seeing their children "more often," "less often," or "about the same." Table 11-2 shows the noncustodial fathers' report on the amount of contact they had with their children prior to and following program enrollment. The Table shows:

- The overall changes in reported frequency of contact were negligible.
- In the 12 months prior to enrollment, 17 percent of the noncustodial fathers reported they had not seen their children at all; in the six months post-enrollment, the figure was 26 percent.
- In the 12 months pre-enrollment, 64 percent said they saw their away children at least once a month, while 62 percent said they saw their children at least once a month post-enrollment.

Table 11-2. Noncustodial Fathers' Reported Contact With Children at Enrollment and Follow-Up Interview By Site

	Colorado		Maryland		Massachusetts		Washington		Wisconsin		Total	
Number of Noncustodial Fathers	163		97		284		760		110		1,491	
Number of completed telephone follow-up interviews	*63*		*45*		*110*		*232*		*28*		*495*	
Number with valid information	*61*		25		68		169		22		353	
Frequency of contact with away children, pre- and post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
No contact	21%	39%	5%	13%	10%	18%	20%	29%	11%	17%	17%	26%
Had contact, but less than monthly	26%	20%	18%	3%	17%	9%	18%	11%	22%	11%	20%	12%
One to three times a month	16%	17%	18%	13%	10%	18%	25%	19%	22%	11%	20%	17%
At least weekly	36%	24%	59%	70%	62%	55%	37%	41%	44%	61%	44%	45%

i The Table does not present site specific data for New Hampshire and Missouri due to small cell sizes. The total column does include New Hampshire and Missouri fathers.

Figure 11-1 shows how noncustodial fathers compared their pre- and post-enrollment contact with their children. Individual site data for New Hampshire and Missouri were not presented due to extremely small sample sizes.

Figure 11-1 shows that:

- More than half of the fathers (58%) reported that access post-enrollment was no different from their level of access pre-enrollment.
- Of those fathers noting a change, almost twice as many said they saw their children more often than said they saw them less often (27% versus 14%).

Figure 11-1
Noncustodial Fathers' Perceptions of How Frequently They See Their Children Post-Enrollment Compared to Pre-Enrollment

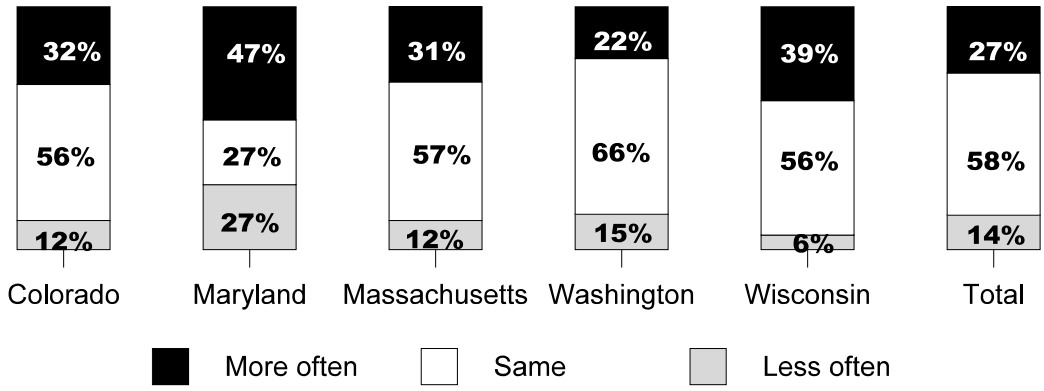
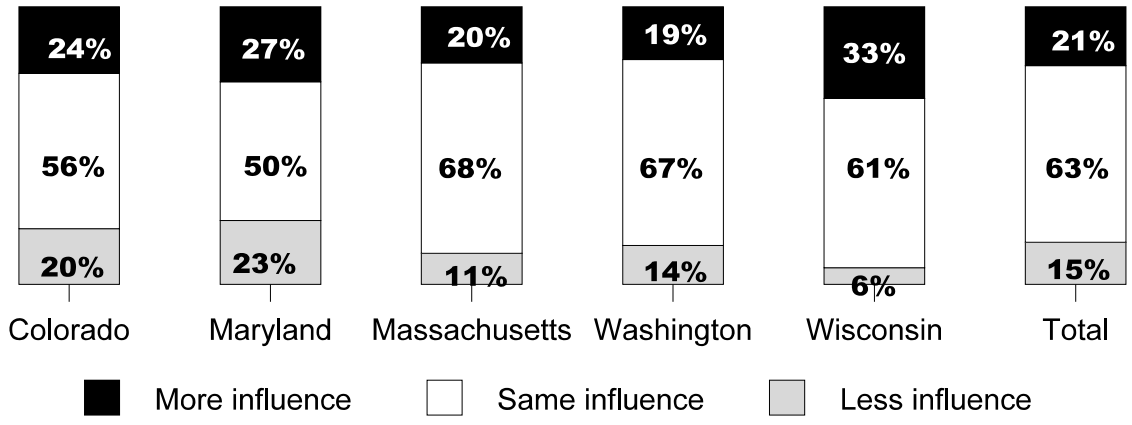


Figure 11-2 presents the fathers' assessment of their decision-making powers at pre- and post-enrollment time periods. It shows that:

- A majority (63%) of fathers reported no change in their level of influence at follow-up compared to six months earlier.
- Twenty-one percent of fathers said they had more influence, while 15 percent of fathers said they had less influence.

- At all sites, higher proportions of fathers said they had more influence at follow-up than said they had less influence.

Figure 11-2
Noncustodial Fathers' Perceptions of Changes in Their Decision Making Power Over Child Issues Post-Enrollment Compared to Pre-Enrollment



Reasons for Changes in Contact

Parents who reported a change in their level of contact with their children following enrollment were asked to explain why they thought they were seeing their children more or less often.

- Fathers who report seeing their children more often identified an improved relationship with the child's mother as the primary reason.

For those fathers who reported seeing their children *more often* after than before enrollment, the most frequently mentioned reason was that their relationship with the other parent had improved. More than twice as many fathers with more access post-enrollment mentioned this reason than any other reason.

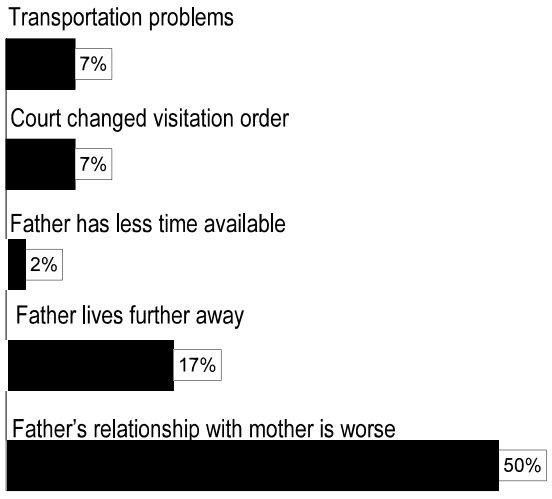
The other reasons cited by parents, in descending order of importance, were:

- The visitation order had changed;
- The father made more of an effort to see his children; and
- The father has more time available.

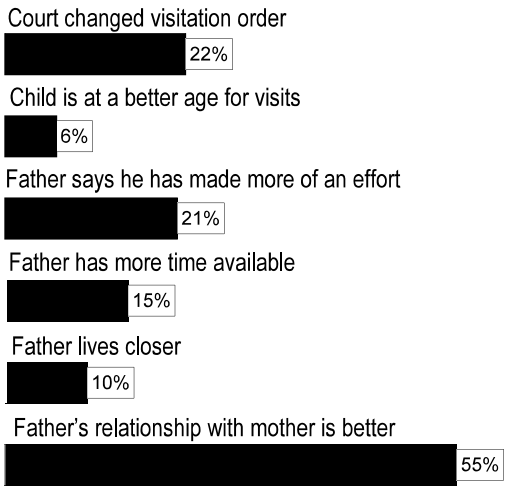
The most common reasons reported by fathers for why they saw their children *less often* after enrollment included:

- The relationship with the custodial mother worsened; and
- The father lived further away from the children.

Figure 11-3.
Reasons Given for Changes in Contact with Away Children



Reasons Father Sees Children Less Often at Follow-Up



Reasons Father Sees Children More Often at Follow-Up

There are, of course, many other possible reasons why the fathers who were interviewed did not report bigger gains in parent-child contact. Table 11-3 looks at changes in access patterns for some selected subgroups of fathers. The Table indicates that:

- Changes in contact with children were more pronounced among those fathers who entered the program with very limited access.

At several sites, a majority of fathers entered the programs with more than weekly contact. For these fathers, there was perhaps little room for improvement. Among those who saw their children weekly or more at enrollment, only 15 percent reported seeing them more often at the six-month follow-up. However, increased contact was reported by 34 percent of the fathers who had no contact with their children in the months preceding enrollment.

- Changes in contact with children were more pronounced among those fathers who entered the program with no court-ordered restrictions on access.

Increased contact was noted by 19 percent of those noncustodial fathers reporting some type of access restrictions, compared to 29 percent of those without restrictions.

On the other hand, increases or decreases in access between enrollment and the follow-up interview did not show any consistent differences according to whether the father:

- Reported problems such as unstable housing or substance abuse at enrollment;
- Reported an arrest or time in jail in the six months between enrollment and the follow-up interview; or
- Had a court-ordered visitation arrangement in place at enrollment.

Table 11-3. Perceived Changes in Contact with Children from Enrollment to Follow-Up for Selected Subgroups of Fathers

Frequency of contact with children in the months prior to enrollment	Weekly or more	Monthly	Less than monthly	Never
Number with valid information	*46*	*55*	*62*	*128*
See children more often than at enrollment	15%	22%	26%	34%
See children less often than at enrollment	11%	18%	15%	12%
See children about the same as at enrollment	74%	60%	60%	55%
At enrollment, reports there were court ordered restrictions on access		Yes	No	
Number with valid information		*36*	*241*	
See children more often than at enrollment		19%	29%	
See children less often than at enrollment		14%	13%	
See children about the same as at enrollment		67%	59%	
At enrollment, reported drugs/alcohol would create employment difficulties		Yes	No	
Number with valid information		*36*	*260*	
See children more often than at enrollment		28%	27%	
See children less often than at enrollment		17%	12%	
See children about the same as at enrollment		56%	61%	
At enrollment, reported he had no permanent address		Yes	No	
Number with valid information		*44*	*252*	
See children more often than at enrollment		23%	27%	
See children less often than at enrollment		16%	12%	
See children about the same as at enrollment		61%	60%	
At follow-up interview, reports having spent some of past 6 months in jail		Yes	No	
Number with valid information		*31*	*265*	
See children more often than at enrollment		26%	27%	
See children less often than at enrollment		13%	13%	
See children about the same as at enrollment		61%	60%	
At enrollment, reports there was a court order providing access		Yes	No	
Number with valid information		*97*	*189*	
See children more often than at enrollment		24%	29%	
See children less often than at enrollment		14%	13%	
See children about the same as at enrollment		62%	59%	

Satisfaction with Access

Past research on child access issues has underscored the complexity of the access problem and its inextricable relationship to other factors. Furthermore, what is satisfactory access for one parent may be an unacceptable amount of access to another parent. Findings from the Child Access Demonstration Projects, for example, showed that some fathers with substantial access (*e.g.*, one or more times a week) wanted even more contact with their children, while some fathers with little access (*e.g.*, once a month or less) were satisfied with their level of contact (Pearson, *et al.*, 1996). There is no single level of access with which everyone is satisfied.

At the follow-up survey, fathers were asked to report:

- Their level of satisfaction with their current level of contact;
- How their current level of satisfaction compared to their pre-enrollment level of satisfaction;
- Their level of involvement in making major decisions about their child's life.

These results are displayed in Table 11-4. The Table indicates:

- At the follow-up interview, higher proportions of fathers were somewhat or very dissatisfied (55%) than were somewhat or very satisfied (45%) with the amount of contact they had experienced in the months since project enrollment.

The negative pattern reflects high levels of dissatisfaction among participants in the Colorado and Washington programs, which together accounted for 63 percent of all noncustodial fathers. A majority of fathers in the Maryland (64%), Massachusetts (51%), and Wisconsin (58%) sites were satisfied with their amount of access.

- When asked to compare how they felt at the interview and how they felt at enrollment, the combined site figures show that noncustodial fathers were fairly evenly divided between those who were more satisfied (33%), less satisfied (32%), and equally satisfied (36%).

Table 11-4. Noncustodial Fathers' Satisfaction With Child Access Six Months Post-Enrollment By Site [i]

	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Washington	Wisconsin	Total
Number of Noncustodial Fathers	163	97	284	760	110	1,491
Number of completed telephone follow-up interviews	*63*	*45*	*110*	*232*	*28*	*495*
How satisfied are you with the amount of time you spend with the children who do not live with you?						
Number with valid information	*54*	*29*	*76*	*185*	*19*	*379*
Very or somewhat satisfied	41%	64%	51%	37%	58%	45%
Very or somewhat dissatisfied	59%	36%	49%	63%	42%	55%
How has your satisfaction with the amount of access you have changed in the 6 months since you enrolled in the program?						
Number with valid information	*57*	*25*	*66*	*180*	*18*	*361*
More satisfied	39%	48%	32%	27%	39%	33%
Satisfaction has not changed	25%	28%	48%	34%	44%	36%
Less satisfied	37%	24%	20%	38%	17%	32%

[i] The Table does not present site specific data for New Hampshire and Missouri due to small cell sizes. The total column does include New Hampshire and Missouri fathers.

Continuing Problems with Access

To understand some of the factors that affect access, fathers were asked about the continuing obstacles they faced in their efforts to spend more time with their children. Table 11-5 shows (1) the responses from all noncustodial fathers, and (2) responses from those fathers who reported at follow-up that they were somewhat or very dissatisfied with the amount of contact they had with their child. Regardless of which group we examined, the relative importance of the factors remained about the same.

- The major barrier to contact appeared to be problems with the custodial parent.

Some 37 percent of the noncustodial fathers and 52 percent of those dissatisfied with their access to children at the follow-up interview reported "the other parent does not want me to see the children" as a reason for lack of access.

- The next most frequently mentioned barrier to greater access was transportation difficulties.

Fourteen percent of all noncustodial fathers and 19 percent of those dissatisfied with access said lack of transportation was a problem, while 28 percent of noncustodial fathers and 32 percent of those dissatisfied with their access mentioned the distance and/or travel time as a barrier to greater access.

Table 11-5. Access Problems Men Report Having Six-Months Post-Intake By Site

		Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Washington	Wisconsin	Total
Problems men say interfere with access to their children							
All Men	*Number with valid information*	*51*	*28*	*75*	*182*	*19*	*372*
	Lack of transportation	33%	11%	20%	13%	26%	14%
	The distance or travel time involved	39%	14%	29%	24%	32%	28%
	The other parent does not want you to see the children	33%	25%	27%	47%	37%	37%
	Work schedule	17%	10%	16%	12%	0%	13%
	Not wanting to see your children until you are more "together"	9%	0%	9%	2%	6%	4%
Men dissatisfied at follow-up with amount of time spent with children							
	Number with valid information	*29*	*10*	*37*	*113*	*9*	*202*
	Lack of transportation	35%	10%	30%	12%	22%	19%
	The distance or travel time involved	45%	20%	43%	25%	44%	32%
	The other parent does not want you to see the children	43%	40%	38%	61%	67%	52%
	Work schedule	14%	10%	19%	9%	0%	11%
	Not wanting to see your children until you are more "together"	11%	0%	12%	4%	0%	6%

i The Table does not present site specific data for New Hampshire and Missouri due to small cell sizes. The total column does include New Hampshire and Missouri fathers.

Summary

- Of the 1,674 noncustodial fathers served by the sites, just under a third (31%) were interviewed. The refusal rate was only 4 percent, but most fathers could not be located.

- A majority of the fathers interviewed at follow up (56%) had only one child not living with them at the time of enrollment.

- The number of away children ranged from one to seven; the average number of away children was 1.7.

- A majority of noncustodial fathers (66%) had children with only one woman. About a quarter of fathers (23%) had children with two different women, 8 percent had children with three different women, and 3 percent had children with four or more different women.

- There was little change in the overall amount of contact reported by noncustodial fathers prior to and following program enrollment. In the 12 months pre-enrollment, 64 percent said they saw their children at least once a month, while 62 percent said they saw their children at least once a month post-enrollment.

- Fathers who reported seeing their children more often identified an improved relationship with the child's mother as the primary reason for their higher levels of contact.

- Contact with children increased most among those fathers who entered the program with very limited access.

- Noncustodial fathers were fairly evenly divided between those who were more satisfied (33%), less satisfied (32%), and equally satisfied (36%) with the amount of time they spent with their children in the months since enrolling in the programs.

Chapter 12: California and Access Mediation

In this chapter

- Review of program services and data
- Description of the parents referred for mediation.
- Child support characteristics of the parents referred for mediation
- Outcome of the mediation referral
- Description of the families who participated in mediation
- Description of the mediation process
- Child access at follow-up
- Child support payment patterns pre- and post-mediation

Review of Program Services and Data

The Intervention

The responsible fatherhood program of San Mateo County, California — Supportive Services for Noncustodial Parents — is treated in a separate chapter because the services provided at this site were substantially different from the other sites.

- The California program focused exclusively on resolving the access and visitation issues of noncustodial parents in order to promote the payment of child support.

Literature showing that increasing child access may be a way of encouraging voluntary payment of child support among obligors at all income levels formed the premise of this project. According to recent data compiled by the Census Bureau, full or partial child-support payments were received by

73 percent of custodial parents who were owed child support and who had joint custody or visitation arrangements with the noncustodial parent. By contrast, only 25.5 percent of custodial parents without joint custody or visitation arrangements received some support (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

On the other hand, it is important to note that researchers have not been able to identify a causal connection between access and child support payment patterns, and the evaluation of the child access demonstration projects found that child support payment patterns were more likely to track with the financial resources of the noncustodial parent rather than his access situation (Zill and Nord, 1996; Price, *et al.*, 1994; Pearson, *et al.*, 1996).

The responsible fatherhood grant enabled the San Mateo County CSE agency to:

- Arrange for any noncustodial parent who mentioned having access problems to receive free mediation services at the San Mateo Superior Court.

The court had a well-established mediation program, but like most court-based programs, it traditionally had not served many of the parents routinely seen by the CSE agency, such as never-married parents without a visitation order. As part of the Supportive Services for Noncustodial Parents project, all types of child support personnel could refer parents to the mediator, including customer service representatives, attorneys, and establishment and enforcement staff. Particular attention was paid to those cases where the NCP was not complying with the child support order and the issue of visitation denial and/or non-contact with the children was raised as a reason for non-payment.

- Hire a bilingual mediator, based at the court, to serve parents identified by the child support agency.

Many Spanish-language parents have traditionally been poorly served by court-based mediation programs, which lack Spanish-language mediators. Although a few courts have bilingual mediators and some make use of translators, the addition of a Spanish-speaking mediator was seen as an important addition to the San Mateo Superior Court mediation program.

- Contract with a community-based organization to provide additional access services on an as-needed basis, including supervised visitation, counseling, and repeat mediation interventions.

Recognizing that some families might need additional services to resolve their access problems, the San Mateo County CSE agency contracted with San Mateo County Family Service Agency, a community-based organization, to provide a variety of follow-up services. Upon the recommendation of the mediator, families were referred to Family Service Agency for case management, parent education, and/or supervised visitation. In addition, some families could avail themselves of these services directly as a result of public outreach campaigns conducted by both the child support agency and the Family Service Agency.

The Data

The evaluation drew on a number of data sources, including:

- A review of existing child support records on noncustodial fathers referred to court mediation by the child support agency;
- Intake forms completed by parents who appeared at the court for a mediation session;
- A form completed by the mediator following each session;
- Follow-up interviews with parents who mediated; and
- A review of a variety of employment and assets databases, including the Employment Development Department, Franchise Tax Board, Social Security, and Department of Social Services wage records for clients who mediated.

Each data collection method is briefly described below. For a more detailed discussion of the data sources and their limitations, see Chapter 4.

Child Support Records

Programmers at the San Mateo County Family Support Division extracted information on all NCPs referred to mediation services during the life of the three-year project. The extract included:

- Demographic information about noncustodial fathers referred to mediation;
- The relationship between the parents;
- The nature of the child support case;
- Payment behavior for several discrete time periods: three months prior to the mediation referral and the 12-month period following the referral, recorded in increments of three months; and
- The outcome of the mediation referral. If mediation occurred, the outcome was recorded as an agreement or no agreement. If mediation did not occur, the outcome was recorded as one of the following: the father failed to appear; the mother failed to appear; both failed to appear; one or both parties could not be located and an appointment could not be set; or the parties withdrew the request for mediation either prior to or following the setting of an appointment.

This Chapter presents the data extracted for 915 noncustodial fathers who were referred by child support technicians for mediation between August 1998 and December 2000. Most of the cases were flagged by child support staff and referred to mediation once during the three-year project. However, more than one-fifth (22%) received two or more referrals for mediation. This may be an indicator of the entrenched nature of many access disputes, or it may reflect the fact that non-appearance at mediation was a significant problem that resulted in the need to make multiple referrals.

Table 12-1. Number of Referrals for Mediation

Number of noncustodial fathers referred for mediation	915
Number with valid information	*915*
One mediation referral	78%
More than one referral	22%

Baseline Data on a Subgroup of Parents Who Mediated

During January through December 2000, custodial and noncustodial parents who came to the San Mateo Superior Court to mediate as a result of a referral by the child support agency completed an

intake form. Available in Spanish and English, the form elicited information about the demographic and family characteristics of mediation clients, relationships with the other parent, the amount of parent-child contact, the amount of travel time involved in the NCP seeing the children, satisfaction with existing access arrangements, the nature of the access dispute, and employment and earnings. Following the mediation, the mediator completed a brief information form recording whether mediation was attempted and the nature of the outcome. If mediation did not occur, the mediator indicated whether the NCP or the CP had failed to appear. If mediation did occur, the mediator noted the issues that were discussed and the nature of the agreements that were reached. This included decisions about where the children would reside and the frequency with which they would visit each parent.

During January through December 2000, 189 mediations were conducted. For these cases, we have data for:

- A total of 183 noncustodial fathers and 187 custodial mothers.
- A Session Summary completed by the mediator for all 189 cases.

Follow-Up Telephone Surveys

- Approximately six months after they appeared at the court to mediate, independent researchers attempted to contact each parent to conduct a telephone interview.

The interview elicited information about the client's mediation experiences. It also collected information about the client's contact with children six months after mediation and the nature of the relationship with the other parent. Clients were also asked about employment and earnings.

- Of the 183 noncustodial fathers who could potentially have been interviewed, only 32 interviews were conducted, or 17 percent. Of the 187 custodial mothers who could potentially have been interviewed, 60 were successfully interviewed, or 32 percent.

The refusal rate for California parents stood at only 4 percent. The low completion rate reflects the fact that most parents could not be reached for the six-month interview.

Review of Employment Databases

- Researchers reviewed employer-reported wage records maintained by the California Employment Development Department for noncustodial fathers who appeared at the court for a mediation appointment during calendar year 2000.

The goal of the review was to determine whether these fathers displayed earnings, and the amount of earnings, in the two quarters prior to referral to mediation and up to four quarters following.

General Characteristics of Parents Referred for Mediation

Most of the noncustodial parents identified at the child support agency as having a visitation problem were male. Of the 955 cases referred to mediation, 915 involved noncustodial fathers. Our analysis was limited to these 915 cases.

Table 12-2 presents basic demographic information about male NCPs referred for mediation by child support workers. The Table indicates that:

- There was significant racial/ethnic variation among referred noncustodial fathers.

While Hispanics were the single largest (45%) group of fathers flagged for a mediation referral, a quarter were white, 15 percent were African-American, and 8 percent were Asian-American. Although these demographic patterns differ from the county as a whole, with white non-Hispanics and Asians being under represented and Hispanics and African-Americans being over-represented, the patterns are quite similar to the NCP population served by the San Mateo County Department of Child Support Services.

- On average, referred noncustodial fathers were 35 years of age.

The median age was also 35 years. Only 3 percent of the fathers were age 21 or younger. Nearly a quarter were over the age of 40.

- More than half (62%) of the cases referred to mediation involved never-married parents. A fifth of the cases involved divorced parents. And nearly a fifth of the cases (17%) involved newly separated parents who were still technically married to one another.

While the noncustodial fathers who were divorced or pursuing a divorce might have been able to obtain mediation services from the court in the absence of the Services for Noncustodial Parents project, assuming they had a motion before the court, mediation would have been unavailable for the majority of the fathers who were never married to the child's mother.

Table 12-2. Characteristics of the Noncustodial Fathers Referred for Mediation

Noncustodial parent to at least one child		915
Race/Ethnicity	*Number with valid information*	890
	African-American	15%
	White	25%
	Latino/Hispanic	45%
	Asian-American	8%
	Other	7%
Age	*Number with valid information*	*901*
	Average age	35
	Median age	35
	Age 21 or younger	3%
	Age 22-25	8%
	Age 26-30	20%
	Age 31-40	45%
	Age 41 or older	24%
Relationship between the noncustodial father and custodial mother		
	Number with valid information	*881*
	Never-married	62%
	Ex-spouse	20%
	Spouse	17%
	Other	1%

Child Support Cases of Parents Referred for Mediation

Case Status

Fathers with access problems who were referred to mediation by child support technicians had cases that reflected the full range of cases handled by the child support agency. Table 12-3 shows key characteristics of the child support cases of the referred NCPs.

- In less than 10 percent of the referrals, the children were current recipients of public assistance. In about half the cases, the children were previous recipients of public assistance, and in 37 percent of the cases, the children had never received public assistance.

- A total of 16 percent of the noncustodial fathers referred for mediation had their child support case closed between the time of the referral and the time of the data extract.

Cases were closed for a variety of reasons, such as the emancipation of the child, the custodial parent requesting case closure when no public assistance was owed to the state, or when the custodial parent moved out of the county with less than $500 in public assistance arrears.

- Among noncustodial fathers with an open child support case, most (81%) had an order requiring him to pay monthly current child support.

- In 17 percent of the open cases, there was no current support obligation and only past-due support was owed.

- In a small number of cases (2%), a support obligation had not been established.

Table 12-3. Child Support Status of Cases Referred for Mediation

Number of noncustodial fathers		915
TANF Status of Children in Child Support Cases	*Number with valid information*	*915*
	Currently on TANF	8%
	Formerly on TANF	55%
	Never on TANF	37%

Table 12-3. Child Support Status of Cases Referred for Mediation

Number of noncustodial fathers		915
Child support case status	*Number with valid information*	*915*
	Number closed between referral and data extract	*150*
Among fathers with an open child support case		
	Number of cases	*765*
	Support obligation not yet established	2%
	Owes only arrears	17%
	Owes current support	81

Order Levels

Table 12-4 summarizes key information about the child support obligations of the noncustodial fathers referred to mediation. The Table shows that:

- Most (98%) noncustodial fathers with a child support obligation had a monetary order entered in the system.

In a small fraction of non-monetary cases, the father received a reserved, or zero-dollar, order. California can issue a reserved order when a noncustodial parent is incarcerated, disabled, or has no capacity to earn income.

- On average, noncustodial fathers owed $421.54 per month, with order amounts ranging from $29 to $4,319.

About a quarter of the fathers had monthly support orders that exceeded $500. Child support order amounts are based on NCP earnings; however, in the absence of an income history, San Mateo County imputes the minimum wage. This results in orders of approximately $240 per month for one child.

Table 12-4. Monthly Amount Due by Noncustodial Fathers with Current Child Support	
Number of noncustodial fathers	915
Number of fathers with an open child support case	*765*
Number of fathers with an obligation established (including reserved)	*750*
Average	$421.54
Median	$363
Range	$29 - $4,319
Order reserved ($0 due monthly)	2%
$1 - $200	15%
$201 - $300	20%
$301 - $500	37%
$501 - $1,000	23%
More than $1,001	3%

Arrears Levels

Table 12-5 provides information about the arrears owed by NCPs referred to mediation. It shows that:

- On average, noncustodial fathers owed $8,590 in past due child support.

However, there is considerable variation in the arrears levels for San Mateo County fathers requesting mediation. For example, 28 percent had no child support balance, 72 percent had an arrears balance, and 27 percent owed more than $10,000.

A recent study of child support arrears showed that 60 percent of the noncustodial parents in the California IV-D caseload owe child support arrears (Sorensen and Zibman, 2002). Thus, the proportion with arrears in this study (72%) appears to be somewhat higher than among the general IV-D population (60%).

Table 12-5. Arrears Owed by Noncustodial Fathers with Open Child Support Cases

Number of noncustodial fathers		915
Number with a current monthly child support order established (excluding reserved)		*750*
Percent of those with an obligation who have an arrearage		72%
Percent of those with an obligation who do not have an arrearage		28%
Arrears amounts		
	Average arrears due	$8,590
	Median	$3,039
	$0	28%
	$1 - $1,000	8%
	$1,001 - $5,000	24%
	$5,001 - $10,000	13%
	$10,001 or more	27%

Outcome of Mediation Referrals

Failure to Appear for Mediation

Many individuals who were referred to mediation by child support staff did not appear for their mediation appointment. In some instances, a party could not be located and an appointment could not even be set. In other cases, the parents were scheduled for a mediation, but one party failed to appear. The San Mateo County CSE reported that several efforts were made to address the high failure to appear rate, including:

- Reducing the waiting period between the request for mediation and the appointment from eight weeks during the initial stages of the project to less than four; and
- Having a representative of the Family Support Division telephone both parents in every case referred for mediation.

The phone call was used to explain the purpose of the mediation program, answer client questions, screen the request for appropriateness, and set an appointment. The calls also helped to screen out

domestic violence cases and parents who were no longer interested in mediation. Despite these efforts, non-appearance continued to be a substantial problem.

- Overall, 58 percent of all cases referred to mediation did not result in a mediation session being held, while 42 percent were held.

In 19 percent of the cases, a party could not be located after the mediation request was made and no appointment could be set. In 24 percent, the mother did not appear, and in 15 percent, the father did not appear for mediation.

Mediation Settlement Rates

Figure 12-1 shows the percentage of parents who reached an agreement in mediation in two different ways:

- If we include those who did not appear for mediation, 30 percent of all referrals resulted in a mediated agreement being reached.
- If we restrict the analysis of mediation outcomes to those who appeared and attempted to mediate, the rate of agreement for cases referred by the IV-D agency was 72 percent. The 72 percent is consistent with agreement rates reported in most public and private sector divorce mediation programs.

Appearance and Settlement Rates for Subgroups of Parents

An analysis of mediation appearance rates and outcomes for different sub-groups showed that:

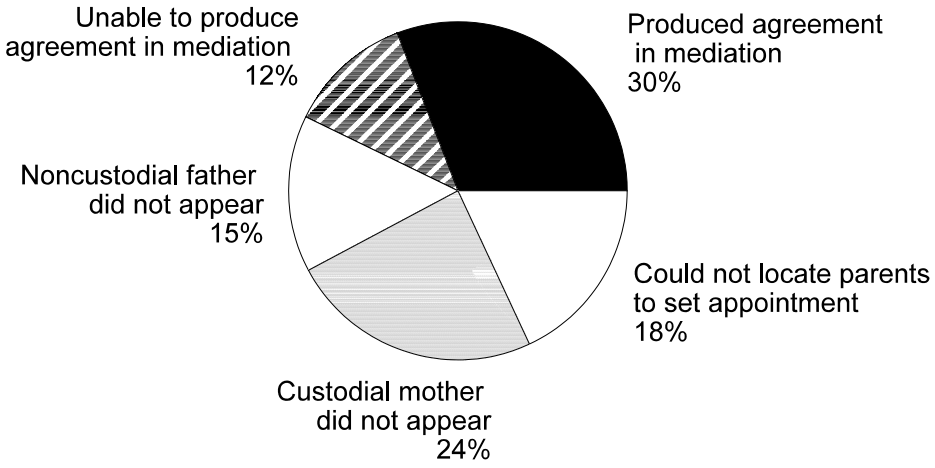
- Appearance and outcomes did not vary by the age of the noncustodial father: younger and older parents were equally likely to appear and equally likely to settle in mediation.

- Appearance rates and outcomes did not vary by the relationship between the noncustodial father and the custodial mother. Never-married parents had similar appearance and agreement rates to those produced by their married and divorced counterparts.

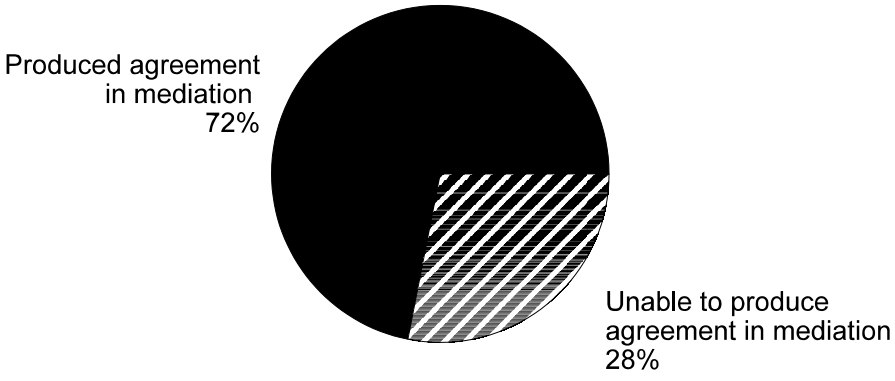
- Appearance rates and outcomes did not vary by the race/ethnicity of the parents.

Figure 12-1
Mediation Outcomes

All cases referred to mediation



Only cases that actually mediated



Description of the Parents Who Mediate

Program staff generated additional information for parents who actually appeared for their mediation appointment between January 1 and December 30, 2000. As previously noted, parents in these cases completed intake forms when they appeared at the court and the mediator provided information on the mediation process.

Demographic Characteristics

Table 12-6 presents selected demographic characteristics of parents who appeared at the court to mediate an access problem after being referred by the child support agency. In many respects, the parents who appeared for mediation resembled the larger group of parents, described above, who received a referral.

- The noncustodial fathers who mediated were generally Hispanic (57%) and over the age of 30 (62%).

- While 19 percent of the noncustodial fathers reported no educational degree, 25 percent had an AA degree or higher.

Table 12-6. Demographic Characteristics of Parents Who Mediated

		Custodial mothers	Noncustodial fathers
Number		187	183
Age	Average age of participant	31.9	33.5
	18-20 years	5%	3%
	21-25 years	19%	13%
	26-30 years	23%	22%
	31-35 years	23%	26%
	36-40 years	17%	20%
	41 years and over	13%	16%
Race/Ethnicity	White	28%	19%
	African-American	9%	12%
	Hispanic	52%	57%
	Asian-American	10%	8%
	Other	2%	4%

Table 12-6. Demographic Characteristics of Parents Who Mediated			
		Custodial mothers	Noncustodial fathers
Highest degree completed	None	14%	19%
	GED	13%	13%
	High School diploma	41%	42%
	Technical/AA degree	14%	15%
	College degree or higher	18%	10%

Financial Characteristics

- Most noncustodial fathers (75%) said they were employed full time, with more than half (55.2%) working in labor/service type jobs. An additional 16 percent were unemployed or engaged in day labor or temporary jobs, with the remainder working part time.

- While 25 percent reported monthly earnings of $2,000 or more, 4 percent reported no earnings, 4 percent reported monthly earnings under $500, and 11 percent reported monthly earnings of $500 to $800.

Table 12-7. Economic Characteristics of Parents Who Mediated			
		Custodial mothers	Noncustodial fathers
Number		187	183
Type of employment	Professional/technical	26%	20%
	Sales	8%	0%
	Clerical	33%	10%
	Labor	20%	55%
	Crafts	0%	10%
	Service	12%	5%
Employment status at intake	Employed full-time	68%	76%
	Employed part-time	11%	8%
	Day labor, temporary jobs	1%	3%
	Not employed	21%	13%

Table 12-7. Economic Characteristics of Parents Who Mediated

		Custodial mothers	Noncustodial fathers
Monthly income	None	10%	4%
	Less than $500	5%	4%
	$500-$799	9%	11%
	$800-$1,199	13%	19%
	$1,200-$1,499	17%	14%
	$1,500-$1,999	19%	22%
	$2,000 or more	27%	26%

Family Characteristics and Relationships

Both the custodial and noncustodial parent who appeared for mediation provided information on their children, their relationships with those children, and their relationship with the other parent. The responses given by custodial mothers and noncustodial fathers differ considerably, reflecting the conflicting perspectives that disputing custodial and noncustodial parents frequently have about matters pertaining to custody and access. In our discussion, we focus on the responses of noncustodial fathers, except when the custodial parent might be particularly enlightening.

The information presented in Table 12-8 shows that:

- Most parents who appeared for mediation were never married (59%). Fewer were newly separated (24%) or divorced (18%). Never-married parents were equally divided between those who once had lived together and those who had never lived together.

- Typically, the parents had a single child in common, averaging five years of age.

- Legal custody had not been established in about half the cases, as would be expected given the fact that half were never-married parents.

- Of those with legal custody established, half involved a joint legal arrangement (54%) and 29 percent called for maternal legal custody.

- Mothers and fathers differed somewhat in their view of the typical residential arrangement for the child. Ninety percent of custodial mothers and 76 percent of noncustodial fathers reported that the child lived primarily with the mother, while 5 and 10 percent, respectively, reported that the children lived with both parents.

With respect to the relationship between the mother and father, the Table shows that:

- Custodial and noncustodial parents gave different reports about the incidence of domestic violence, with 29 percent of custodial mothers and 7 percent of noncustodial fathers reporting past violence. Asked whether they had ever been accused of hitting the other parent and/or the children, 11 percent of custodial mothers and 17 percent of noncustodial fathers answered "yes."

- More than half of noncustodial fathers characterized their relationship with the other parent as "poor," and 27 percent described it as "fair."

- Almost half of the noncustodial fathers (46%) agreed with the statement, "I feel the other parent does not want me in my child's life." A third of the custodial mothers and a quarter of the noncustodial fathers agreed with the statement, "I feel the other parent is a bad influence on the children."

- Noncustodial fathers rated their parenting skills and their relationship with their children more favorably, with nearly half classifying each as "excellent" and most of the rest rating them as "good." At the same time, it is relevant that 25 percent of the noncustodial fathers characterized their relationship with their children as only "fair" or "poor."

Table 12-8. Parent and Child Relationships Reported by Parents Who Mediate

		Custodial mothers	Noncustodial father
Number with valid information		*187*	*183*
Number of children under 18	Average age of children	5.4 years	5.4 years
	One child	64%	67%
	Two children	28%	25%
	Three children	7%	7%
	Four or more children	2%	1%

Table 12-8. Parent and Child Relationships Reported by Parents Who Mediate

		Custodial mothers	Noncustodial father
Residence of children	Child lives with father	3%	6%
	Child lives with mother	90%	76%
	Child lives with both parents	5%	10%
	Child lives with neither parent	2%	8%
Legal custody of the children	No legal custody decided	50%	48%
Among those with legal custody:			
	Sole legal custody to the mother	54%	29%
	Sole legal custody to the father	1%	9%
	Joint legal custody	42%	54%
	Split custody	3%	3%
	Custody to a third party	0%	5%
Marital history with other parent	Still married (new dissolution)	19%	24%
	Divorced	23%	18%
	Never married, lived with in past	32%	31%
	Never married, never lived with in past	26%	27%
Domestic violence history	Reports there is a history of domestic violence	29%	7%
	Reports being accused of hitting by other parent	11%	17%
Quality of the relationship with other parent	Excellent	4%	6%
	Good	17%	14%
	Fair	25%	27%
	Poor	55%	53%
Quality of your relationship with the child	Excellent	87%	45%
	Good	12%	29%
	Fair	1%	9%
	Poor	1%	16%
Quality of your parenting skills	Excellent	63%	40%
	Good	35%	48%
	Fair	1%	9%
	Poor	1%	3%

Table 12-8. Parent and Child Relationships Reported by Parents Who Mediate

		Custodial mothers	Noncustodial father
Percent who say "The other parent...."	Thinks I'm a good parent	80%	53%
	Supports my relationship with the children	70%	52%
	Does not want me in my child's life	16%	46%
	Is a bad influence on the children	34%	26%

Pre-Mediation Child Access Patterns

Although noncustodial fathers who requested mediation all had access problems, they clearly did not all have the same access situation. Table 12-9 shows that they had a wide variety of contact patterns when they came to mediation.

- Just over 20 percent of the noncustodial fathers reported no contact at the time of mediation, and a similar percent said they saw their children several times a week.

- Twenty percent reported sporadic contact, such as once or a few times a year. An equal proportion reported seeing the children one to three times a month, and 16 percent saw the children about once a week.

- Somewhat more than half of noncustodial fathers were very dissatisfied with the amount of contact they had with their children, and an identical proportion reported no influence in making decisions about the children.

- Most noncustodial fathers lived close to their youngest, nonresidential child, with 60 percent reporting that the trip to see their child took 30 minutes or less.

- Ten percent reported that the trip to the custodial mother's home took more than two hours, with some requiring plane travel.

As expected, there was a relationship between distance to the other parent's house and frequency of visitation. Noncustodial fathers who lived less than 15 minutes away from their children reported the most contact, with a third seeing their children several times each week.

Table 12-9. Visitation Patterns and Problems Identified by Noncustodial Fathers Who Mediate

		Noncustodial fathers
Number with valid information		*183*
There is a court restriction limiting access to the child		6%
Frequency of contact with children in 12 months prior to mediation	Not at all	21%
	Once a year	7%
	Several times a year	14%
	1-3 times a month	21%
	About once a week	16%
	Several times a week	21%
Degree of satisfaction with contact	Very satisfied	10%
	Somewhat satisfied	15%
	Somewhat dissatisfied	20%
	Very dissatisfied	56%
Amount of influence in decision making about children during past 12 months	A great deal	18%
	Some	24%
	None	58%
Amount of time to required to travel to the custodial mother's house	Less than 15 minutes	36%
	15-30 minutes	24%
	31-60 minutes	21%
	1-2 hours	8%
	More than 2 hours	10%

Mediation Issues

A comparison of the issues that custodial mothers and noncustodial fathers said they hoped to address in mediation provides insight into the nature of their access problems. The top five issues for noncustodial fathers were:

- How often each parent will see the children;
- Where and how to do pick-up and drop-off;
- Problems sticking to the visitation schedule;

- How the children will be raised; and
- Determining legal custody.

The top five issues for custodial mothers were:

- The children's safety during visits;
- How often each parent will see the children;
- What goes on during visits;
- Determining legal custody; and
- Problems sticking to the visitation schedule.

Table 12-10. Issues that Parents Want to Discuss in Mediation

	Custodial mother	Noncustodial father
Number with valid information	*187*	*183*
Where the children will live	16%	25%
How often each parent will see the children	41%	67%
Problems sticking to the visitation schedule	33%	34%
Fighting between the parents at drop-off and pick-up	24%	24%
Getting a parent back into the child's life after a long absence	28%	30%
Getting the children ready/back on time from visits	25%	20%
Visits for grandparents or other relatives	12%	21%
Where/how to do pick-up and drop-off	30%	42%
What goes on during visits	37%	15%
How the children will be raised	21%	33%
The children's safety during visits	45%	12%
Determining legal custody	34%	32%
Determining physical custody	25%	28%
Other	16%	18%

The Mediation Process

The mediator provided information on 189 mediations conducted with parents referred by the child support agency. The basic information about the session is summarized in Table 12-11. On average, the mediation process took two hours.

According to the mediator, the top five issues that were discussed were:

- When each parent will see the children;
- What goes on during the visits;
- Where the children will live;
- How the children will be raised; and
- Legal custody of children.

The children's safety during visits was reportedly discussed in 34 percent of the mediation sessions, and this was noted as a priority issue by 45 percent of the custodial mothers. The mediator thought that supervised visitation was "definitely appropriate" in 27 percent of the cases, "possibly appropriate" in 12 percent, and thought many cases needed counseling and/or case management.

Table 12-11. Mediation Process

Number with valid information		*189*
Length of mediation	Mean	2 hours
	Median	2 hours
	Range	1-5 hours
Issues discussed in mediation	Legal custody of children	40%
	Where children will live	45%
	When each parent will see the children	93%
	Fighting at pick-up and drop-off	21%
	Getting children ready for visits on time	14%
	Getting children back from visits on time	18%
	What goes on during visits	52%
	How the children will be raised	43%
	Getting a parent back into children's lives	38%
	The children's safety during visits	34%
	Child support issues or problems	16%
	Grandparent contact or concerns	14%
	Other	18%

Mediation Agreements

Table 12-12 provides a summary of mediation outcomes. The Table shows that:

- Full agreements were reached in 63 percent of the cases and partial agreements in 12 percent. In 25 percent of the cases, there was no agreement.
- Following mediation, the children's primary residence typically did not change ; 91 percent lived with the mother and 5 percent with the father.
- Prior to mediation, 21 percent of the noncustodial fathers reported almost no contact, but only 12 percent of the mediated agreements called for such limited contact. Similarly, while 37 percent of the noncustodial fathers reported at least weekly contact prior to mediation, 46 percent of the mediated agreements specified weekly contact.
- Nearly all parents (88%) planned to file their agreements in court, with only 12 percent treating them strictly as an informal agreement between the parents.

Table 12-12. Mediation Outcomes

Number with valid information		*189*
Outcome	Full agreement	63%
	Partial agreement	12%
	No agreement	25%
Children's primary residence following mediation	With the mother	91%
	With the father	5%
	Equal time with each parent	2%
	Other	3%
Frequency of visitation for the parent not living with the children	No visits	12%
	1-6 times per year	5%
	About once or twice per month	29%
	About once per week	30%
	Several times per week	16%
	Other	8%
Status of mediation agreement	Entered with the court	88%

Table 12-12. Mediation Outcomes		
	Agreement between parents only	12%
Needing various follow-up interventions	Second mediation	52%
	Case management	25%
	Supervised visitation	27%
	Co-parent counseling	39%

Follow-Up Patterns

Child Access

The small number of interviews (n=32) conducted with noncustodial fathers approximately six months following their mediation session affords only a limited picture on how they viewed the mediation process and whether they believed their access situation had improved. An analysis of their questionnaire responses shows that:

- Most noncustodial fathers said they were either seeing their children about the same amount as prior to mediation (38%) or more often (41%). Only 21 percent said they were seeing their children less.

- The major barriers that noncustodial fathers cited for not seeing their children more was the "distance or travel time involved" (47%) and "the other parent not wanting [the father] to see them" (33%).

- Although only 21 percent reported seeing their children less often, 45 percent of the noncustodial fathers said they were less satisfied with their access situation than they were at the time of mediation, and most (66%) said their role in decision making about their children had not changed.

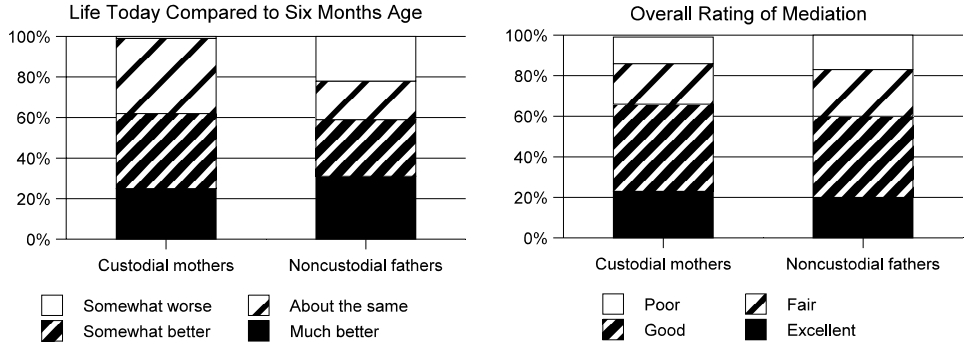
- While 24 percent of the noncustodial fathers said their relationship with the child's mother had improved in the previous six months, 35 percent said it was the same and 41 percent said it was worse.

- Overall, 59 percent of the noncustodial fathers and 62 percent of the custodial mothers said that their life was "somewhat" or "much" better than it had been six months ago. And about 60 percent of each gave mediation an overall rating of "excellent" or "good" (see Figure 12-2).

Table 12-13. Reactions to Mediation, Changes in Life Situation, and Contact with Children

		Noncustodial fathers
Number with valid information		*32*
Compared to six months ago, sees children	More often	41%
	Less often	21%
	About the same	38%
Compared to six months ago, NCP says level of satisfaction with visitation is	Greater	35%
	Less	45%
	About the same	20%
Compared to six months ago, NCP's role in making major decisions about the children is	More	10%
	Less	24%
	About the same	66%
Compared to six months ago, NCP's relationship with CP is	Much/somewhat better	24%
	Much/somewhat worse	41%
	About the same	35%
Percent of NCPs reporting various barriers to seeing children	Lack of transportation	17%
	Distance or travel time	47%
	Other parent not wanting NCP to see them	33%
	NCP work schedule	3%

Figure 12-2.
Ratings of Life at the Follow-Up Interview and Mediation



Payment of Child Support Pre- and Post-Mediation

The impact of referral and actual mediation on child support payment was assessed using all noncustodial fathers with monthly support orders who were referred to mediation by the child support agency. The data came from computerized child support payment records generated by the Family Support Division. The analysis involved comparing pre-referral payment patterns to payment patterns afterwards. It reveals the following patterns:

- There was a significant increase in child support payments from the time before the mediation referral to the time after.

During the three months prior to the mediation referral, fathers paid an average of 41 percent of the monthly amount they owed. In the three months following their referral, the percentage that they paid rose to an average of 66 percent and remained at approximately this level for the next three calendar quarters for which data was available. Average amounts paid during the three-month segments prior to and following referral to mediation rose from about $650 to $1,000. And the percent paying nothing dropped in half, from about 40 percent to 20 percent.

Table 12-14. Payment Patterns Among Men with Monthly Support Due

	Paid in the 3 months prior to mediation referral	Paid in months 1-3 post-mediation referral	Paid in months 4-6 post-mediation referral	Paid in months 7-9 post-mediation referral	Paid in months 10-12 post-mediation referral
Number with valid information	*623*	*623*	*623*	*623*	*623*
Average paid in three months	$651 [i]	$970 [i]	$1,036	$1,125	$1,026
Median paid in three months	$300	$758	$900	$882	$831
Percent paying $0	41%	24%	18%	18%	24%
Percent paying $90% the amount due	27%	45%	52%	53%	49%
Percent of amount due that was paid:					
Average	41%	66%	69%	68%	63%
Median	27%	77%	92%	95%	89%

i T-test of average paid three months prior to and three months following mediation referral is significant at .00.

To explore the reasons behind the increased payments, patterns were compared for the following groups:

- ù Those who reached an agreement in mediation;
- ú Those who mediated, but did not reach an agreement;
- û Those who were referred, but never mediated because the father failed to appear;
- ü Those who were referred, but never mediated because the mother failed to appear; and
- ý Those who expressed an interest in mediation, but one or both parents could not subsequently be contacted and no appointment for mediation was scheduled.

If increased payments were the result of better performance by noncustodial fathers who resolved their access disputes in mediation, payments should increase only in group one. If the catalyst for payment was exposure to mediation and the opportunity to air grievances, even in the absence of a settlement both groups one and two should have improved. If groups three through five also showed increases in payment, there must be an explanation for improvement that lies outside of participation in mediation.

Before conducting the analysis, we looked for evidence that the groups differed in their post-referral earnings, since earnings might be expected to influence payment patterns regardless of mediation status. Unfortunately, UI wage data was only available for groups one and two. However, these groups showed comparable post-mediation earnings.

The analysis of groups one through five shows that:

- In all five groups, payments increased an equivalent amount in the period between the referral and the follow-up.

The patterns were virtually identical for those who reached agreements in mediation and those who did not set an appointment. In the three months after the referral, each group paid a higher percentage of the amount due relative to the three months prior to referral. Similarly, in each group, there was an increase in the percentage of NCPs making some payment (though not necessarily full payment) in the post period relative to pre-referral.

Table 12-15. Payment Patterns Three Months Prior to and Three Months Following the Referral to Mediation, by Mediation Status

	Percent making no payments in the 3 months prior to mediation referral	Percent making no payments in the 3 months following mediation referral	Average amount paid in the 3 months prior to mediation referral	Average amount paid in the 3 months following the mediation referral	Percent increase	*Number of cases*
Reached agreement in mediation	40%	19% •	42% of amount due was paid	64% of amount due was paid	+22%	*186*
No agreement, but mediation was held	38%	23% •	41%	61%	+20%	*61*
Appointment set, noncustodial father failed to appear	44%	26% •	37%	59%	+22%	*125*
Appointment set, custodial mother failed to appear	46%	26% •	36%	58%	+22%	*81*
Could not locate to set appointment	41%	28% •	41%	58%	+17%	*102*

• The difference between 3 months prior to referral and 3 months following referral are significant at .05 for this group.

The uniform increases in payment following the referral means that the changes cannot be attributed to *participation* in mediation. Program staff believe that the improvements were due, in part or in full, to the explicit recognition of the noncustodial fathers' access problems. In their view, the mediation referral eliminated an excuse for non-payment of child support and also reduced the fathers' anger and frustration with the system. The mediation referral may also have improved worker-client relationships, which might have had an effect on payment.

Increased collection activity is an alternative explanation for the observed improvements in child support payments following the mediation referral. All of the cases entered the San Mateo County project as a result of a meeting with child support staff. It is plausible that these meetings, in addition to giving workers the opportunity to make mediation referrals to parents who expressed problems with child access, also produced information that led to wage assignments or other enforcement actions. Unfortunately, the computerized system could not provide information on the percentage of payments that resulted from wage withholding prior to and following the mediation referral.

Child Support Payments and Income

In this final set of analyses, we looked at the relationship between child support payments and the noncustodial father's income. Income information was only available for the subset of noncustodial fathers who participated in mediation. The most basic analysis shows that:

- NCPs with UI earnings showed increased payments of child support in the post-mediation period. The same was not true for NCPs with no earnings.

Among NCPs showing wages six months prior to the mediation referral, 42 percent made no payments toward child support. This figure steadily declined over time. It dropped to 22 percent by three months post-entry to the project and 11 percent by six months post-entry. The drops were possibly due to NCPs having their access problems addressed. Alternatively, they reflected the growing impact of wage assignments that resulted from meeting with the child support worker. Among noncustodial fathers who did not show earnings, the percent paying nothing toward child support remained relatively constant over time. The fact that the percentage of NCPs making at least some payment toward child support did not increase among those who appeared to be consistently unemployed or marginally employed (as evidenced by various employment databases) confirms that ability to pay is a relevant factor in understanding payment behavior, even when access problems are addressed.

Table 12-16. Noncustodial Fathers with Open Child Support Cases and Monthly Support Due

	UI shows earnings in the corresponding time period			UI shows no earnings in the corresponding period		
	Six months prior to mediation referral	In months 1-3 post-mediation	In months 4-6 post-mediation	Six months prior to mediation referral	In months 1-3 post-mediation	In months 4-6 post-mediation
Number with valid information	*124*	*109*	*75*	*43*	*59*	*27*
Percent making no child support payments	42%	22%	11% c	37%	29%	37% c

c Difference between these two groups is statistically significant at .05.

Table 12-17 looks at child support orders as a percentage of total earnings. The Table shows:

- Child support presented a significantly greater burden on noncustodial fathers at lower income levels, and these fathers also exhibited significantly poorer payment patterns.

Thus, among those with monthly earnings of $1,500 or less, the child support burden consumed 65 percent of earnings, and only about half of the monthly child support obligation was actually paid. In contrast, child support comprised only about 14 percent of income for those who earned more than $3,000 per month, and 80 percent of the obligation was paid.

Table 12-17. Child Support Obligation Relative to Earnings and Payments Four to Six Months After Mediation, by Earnings — Men With Monthly Support Due

Client's average monthly earnings for the 6 months prior to mediation	Average amount of support to be paid per month	Average monthly support obligation as a percentage of monthly earnings	Percent of support due actually paid in the 6 months post enrollment	*Number of cases*
$0	$317	0%	56%	*15*
$1 - $1,500	$434	65%	58%	*21*
$1,501 - $3,000	$378	16%	87%	*28*
$3,001 and higher	$682	14%	80%	*19*
Payments for the two higher earning groups are significantly higher than those in the two lower earning groups.				*83*

Summary

- More than half (62%) of the cases referred to mediation involved never-married parents. A fifth of the cases involved divorced parents. And nearly a fifth of the cases (17%) involved newly separated parents who were still technically married to one another.

- Most cases involved a noncustodial father with an open child support case (84%). Among those with an open child support case, most (81%) had an order requiring him to pay monthly current child support. In 17 percent of the open cases, only past-due support was owed — there was no current support obligation. In a small number of cases (2%), the support obligation had not been established.

- On average, noncustodial fathers owed $421.54 per month, with order amounts ranging from $29 to $4,319. On average, noncustodial fathers owed $8,590 in past due child support.

- Overall, 58 percent of all cases referred to mediation did not result in a mediation session being held, while 42 percent were held.

- According to the mediator, the top five issues that were discussed were: when (1) each parent will see the children; (2) what goes on during visits; (3) where the children will live; (4) how the children will be raised; and (5) legal custody of children.

- Full agreements were reached in 63 percent of the cases and partial agreements in 12 percent. In 25 percent of the cases, there was no agreement.

- Following mediation, the children's primary residence typically did not change: 91 percent lived with the mother and 5 percent with the father.

- Prior to mediation, 21 percent of the noncustodial fathers reported almost no contact, but only 12 percent of the mediated agreements called for such limited contact. Similarly, while 37 percent of the noncustodial fathers reported at least weekly contact prior to mediation, 46 percent of the mediated agreements specified weekly contact.

- Six months after mediation, most noncustodial fathers said they were either seeing their children about the same amount as prior to mediation (38%) or more often (41%). Only 21 percent said they were seeing their children less.

- Six months after mediation, 44 percent of the noncustodial fathers said they were less satisfied with their access situation than they were at the time of mediation, and most (66%) said their role in decision making about their children had not changed.

- A comparison of child support payment patterns pre- and post-mediation referral showed a significant increase in child support payments from the time before the mediation referral to the time after.

- The increases in child support payments were virtually identical for those who successfully mediated, those who mediated but did not reach an agreement, and those who received a referral for mediation but did not use the process.

- Child support presented a significantly greater burden on noncustodial fathers at lower income levels; these fathers also exhibited significantly poorer payment patterns.

Chapter 13: Program Assessment

In this chapter

- Review of the data limitations
- Overall program ratings
- Ratings of specific aspects of the program
- Comparing life at enrollment and interview
- Other factors affecting clients' lives

This Chapter presents the reactions of program participants to the services they received and their assessment of the degree to which their situation improved or declined following enrollment. Unlike the chapters focusing on program outcomes, this Chapter includes the reactions of all noncustodial fathers who participated in a follow-up interview, including fathers from the California program.

Review of the Data Sources and Limitations

All of the limitations of the interview data noted in Chapter 4 and summarized in Chapter 11 also apply to the analysis in this chapter. Specifically, the reader is reminded that:

- Of the 1,674 noncustodial fathers served by the sites, just under a third (31%) were interviewed.

Refusal rates were very low and stood at only 4 percent. Most fathers could not be located. Given the low response rates, all the findings presented in this chapter are best viewed as exploratory and suggestive, rather than conclusive.

- Those who were interviewed were not fully representative of the clients served at the programs.

The probability of an interview being completed was greater if the noncustodial father was:

- Over age 40 (compared to under 25);
- Ever-married (versus never-married);
- Better educated (some post-high school training versus less than a high school diploma or GED);
- Employed at program entry (rather than unemployed); or
- In a more contentious relationship with the mother of the youngest away child.

General Ratings of the Fatherhood Programs

Figures 13-1 and 13-2 present the ratings of the noncustodial fathers who were interviewed. Overall, the data indicate that the programs were well received by these clients, with large majorities rating the programs as either excellent or good.

- Across all sites, 56 percent of the respondents to the follow-up survey rated the programs as excellent, and 26 percent rated them as good.

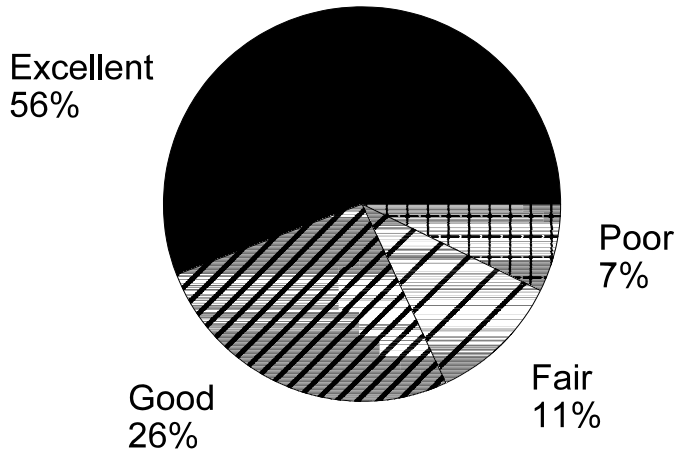
- Only 18 percent rated the programs as fair or poor (11% and 7%, respectively).

- Excluding California and Washington, between 87 and 94 percent of the participants who were interviewed at every site rated the program as excellent or good.

- The ratings for the programs in California and Washington were somewhat lower than at the other sites, yet still fairly high, with 60 and 77 percent, respectively, rating the programs as excellent or good.

It is unclear why fathers at these two sites were more critical than were fathers at other sites. Washington served many more fathers than any of the other programs, enrolling 760 noncustodial fathers, compared with 284 in Massachusetts, the second largest site. The Washington program was also less structured than the other programs and relied on participants' initiative to seek assistance. For example, there were no required classes to attend, and program staff served more as resource people than as case managers. This format may have resulted in Washington clients dropping in and out of the program and using it less intensively.

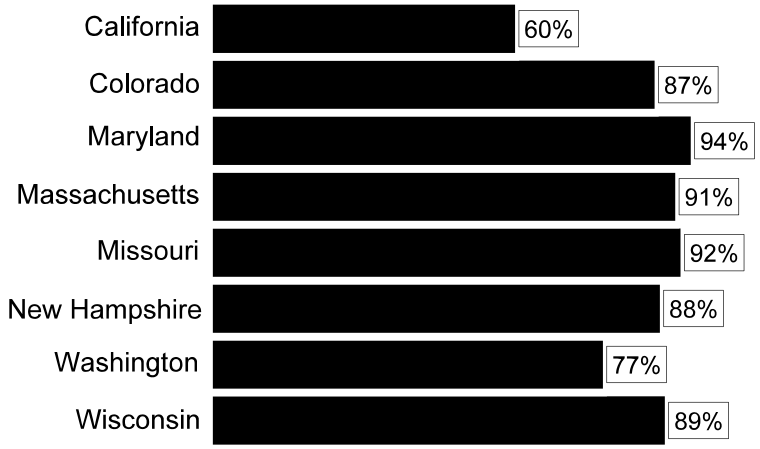
Figure 13-1
Participants' Ratings of the Fatherhood Program (n=450)



The small number of noncustodial fathers interviewed in California makes any conclusions about this site speculative at best. However, the California program was a brief intervention — typically a single session lasting, on average, two hours. In addition, unlike the programs offered in many sites that focused on providing emotional and social support around parenting and life skills, the California program was oriented to solving specific access problems, and slightly more than a third of those who were interviewed did not reach a full agreement on the issues in dispute.

When the data were combined across sites, there was no relationship between program ratings and participants' demographic characteristics: educational level, age, ethnicity, and employment status. Overall ratings of the programs were not related to whether (1) participants had less than or better than a high school education; (2) participants were under or over 30 years of age; (3) participants were white or African-American; or (4) participants were employed or unemployed at follow-up. This pattern appeared to hold at the site level, although the small number of respondents at most sites precluded extensive analysis.

Figure 13-2
Percent Rating the Program as "Excellent" or "Good," by Site



Ratings of Specific Aspects of the Fatherhood Programs

In order to better understand what aspects of the programs worked well and not so well, interviewed participants were asked to rate how well the fatherhood programs addressed 14 issues. The list of issues came from the array of issues reviewed with clients at intake and assessment to help program staff direct participants to appropriate services. The goal was to determine whether participants had received the help they wanted in the areas they had identified as needs in the intake process.

Average ratings for each issue were computed using a four-point scale:

4	3	2	1
excellent	good	fair	poor

Thus, the *higher* the average rating, the *better* the program did in addressing the issue, and conversely, the *lower* the average rating, the *poorer* the program did in addressing the issue. An average rating of 2.5, the midpoint of the scale, suggests that the program neither did well nor poorly in the opinion of participants. The average ratings for the 14 issues are displayed by site in Table 13-1.

The Table shows that:

- The average rating for each of the 14 issues was above 3.00.

This indicates that those who were interviewed felt the programs did a good or excellent job of meeting their needs.

- The average ratings clustered within a narrow band of scores, the lowest score being 3.02 and the highest being 3.32.

Thus, the programs overall appeared to do well across a broad range of issues in the opinion of those who were interviewed.

- The three issues that received the *lowest* average ratings from those interviewed were:
  - "Improving how well you co-parent with the child's other parent" (average = 3.02);
  - "Improving your chances of getting or keeping a good job" (average = 3.03); and
  - "Providing you with specific job opportunities and getting you job interviews" (average = 3.04).

- The three issues that received the *highest* average ratings from those interviewed were:
  - "Helping you see that other people have similar problems" (average = 3.32);
  - "Helping you understand your situation" (average = 3.28); and
  - "Helping you be a better parent" (average = 3.24).

Only one item — helping you see that other people have similar problems — received an average rating of "good" or "excellent" from the participants interviewed at each of the seven programs. One of the main benefits mentioned by fathers who were interviewed was how valuable the peer support groups or similar discussion forums had been to them. By talking with other fathers, they realized that they were not alone and drew some comfort from that realization.

- Participants interviewed in Maryland gave their program consistently higher ratings on each of the 14 issues covered in the interview than did the participants who were interviewed at the other sites.

Those interviewed in Maryland generally rated all aspects of the program as good or excellent. We can only speculate about why this might be the case. The high ratings may be related to the type of

program Maryland offered. Maryland offered participants small monetary stipends for regular attendance at programs dealing with parenting and life skills. Since the follow-up survey was administered approximately six months after participants enrolled in the program, it is possible that the follow-up interviews were conducted shortly after participants completed the program and received a $50 graduation stipend. Their very high ratings may have reflected their recent completion of an extensive, six-month program that offered lots of opportunity to share experiences and bond with other similarly situated parents.

- Participants interviewed in California, New Hampshire, and Washington gave their programs consistently lower ratings than did participants in other sites; however, almost all ratings were above the 2.50 threshold, indicating that the programs were viewed more positively than negatively.

The small number of respondents in New Hampshire makes it impossible to draw reliable conclusions about that site. The number of respondents from California was also quite small, but as previously noted, the mediation they experienced was a brief intervention, and slightly more than a third of the individuals who were interviewed did not reach an agreement in mediation. The Washington program provided brief services to a large number of NCPs and offered no case management or peer support. This may have translated into lower program ratings.

Table 13-1. Average Ratings of Specific Aspects of the Program by Clients Participating in the Follow-Up Interview, by site w (higher numbers=better ratings)

How well did the program...	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	Total
Number of Noncustodial Fathers	183	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,674
Number of completed telephone follow-up interviews	*32*	*63*	*45*	*110*	*13*	*4*	*232*	*28*	*527*
Help you understand your child support situation	2.60	2.98	3.75	3.26	3.40	2.83	2.92	3.33	3.08
Number with valid information	*10*	*42*	*16*	*47*	*10*	*6*	*120*	*15*	*266*
Help you understand your rights and responsibilities as a father	2.60	3.05	3.77	3.33	3.40	2.50	3.08	3.28	3.19
Number with valid information	*27*	*40*	*30*	*61*	*10*	*6*	*168*	*18*	*360*
Provide group support	i	3.32	3.87	3.53	3.45	2.40	2.72	3.50	3.21

Table 13-1. Average Ratings of Specific Aspects of the Program by Clients Participating in the Follow-Up Interview, by site w (higher numbers=better ratings)

How well did the program...		California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	Total
	Number with valid information	*i*	*28*	*31*	*74*	*11*	*6*	*104*	*18*	*272*
Help you learn about community services		2.50	3.12	3.82	3.23	3.11	2.50	2.85	3.41	3.11
	Number with valid information	*12*	*33*	*28*	*66*	*9*	*6*	*111*	*17*	*282*
Help you to be a better parent		2.80	3.20	3.72	3.50	3.60	2.50	2.91	3.45	3.24
	Number with valid information	*15*	*40*	*32*	*66*	*10*	*7*	*104*	*20*	*294*
Provide you with specific job opportunities and get you job interviews		i	3.03	3.71	3.16	3.29	3.25	2.19	2.88	3.04
	Number with valid information	*i*	*30*	*21*	*31*	*7*	*4*	*21*	*17*	*131*
Improve your chances of getting or keeping a good job		i	2.89	3.47	3.21	3.00	3.00	2.36	3.38	3.03
	Number with valid information	*i*	*28*	*19*	*33*	*7*	*3*	*22*	*16*	*128*
Improve your chances of being involved with your children in the future		2.60	3.02	3.74	3.56	3.75	2.86	2.90	3.41	3.17
	Number with valid information	*27*	*43*	*27*	*57*	*8*	*7*	*144*	*17*	*330*
Help you see that other people have similar problems		2.64	3.46	3.77	3.54	3.22	3.13	3.07	3.44	3.32
	Number with valid information	*14*	*37*	*30*	*65*	*9*	*8*	*133*	*18*	*314*
Give you hope about the future		2.19	3.07	3.79	3.50	3.30	2.75	2.98	3.50	3.21
	Number with valid information	*21*	*41*	*29*	*70*	*10*	*8*	*147*	*18*	*344*
Improve how well you co-parent with the child's other parent		2.26	2.70	3.65	3.42	3.83	2.71	2.53	3.53	3.02
	Number with valid information	*19*	*27*	*23*	*48*	*6*	*7*	*74*	*15*	*219*
Improve how well you communicate with the child's other parent		2.22	3.00	3.70	3.43	3.83	2.50	2.56	3.40	3.07
	Number with valid information	*18*	*19*	*23*	*49*	*6*	*8*	*70*	*15*	*208*
Change your attitude about your relationship		2.58	3.10	3.74	3.31	3.83	2.71	2.62	3.50	3.09
	Number with valid information	*12*	*21*	*27*	*51*	*6*	*7*	*73*	*16*	*213*

Table 13-1. Average Ratings of Specific Aspects of the Program by Clients Participating in the Follow-Up Interview, by site [w] (higher numbers=better ratings)

How well did the program...	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	Total
Help you understand your situation	2.52	3.38	3.78	3.49	3.70	2.78	3.06	3.26	3.28
Number with valid information	*29*	*39*	*32*	*79*	*10*	*9*	*175*	*23*	*396*

[w] Average ratings are computed using a four-point scale, where 4=excellent, 3=good, 2=fair, and 1=poor. Averages exclude participants not rating an item because (1) it was not an issue for them, (2) they were not in the program long enough, or (3) they did not know how to rate the program on that aspect.

[i] Not asked in California, where the intervention provided was mediation.

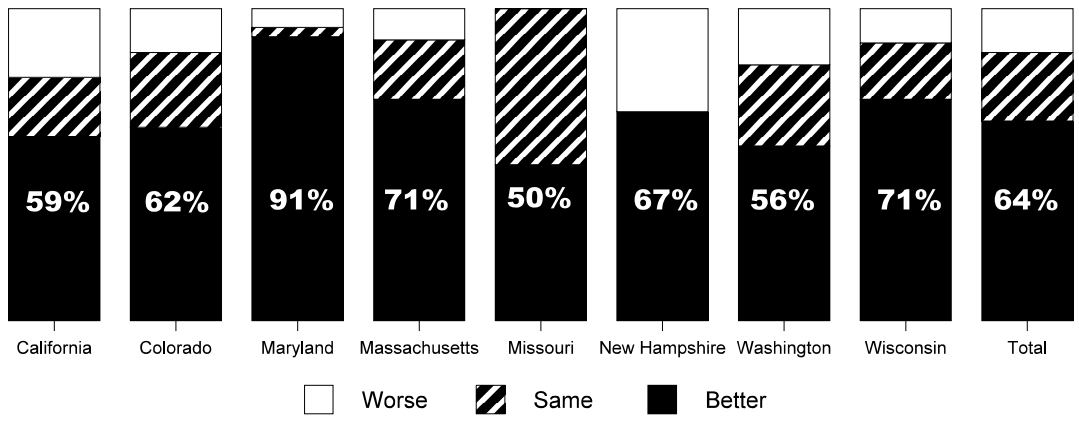
Life Today Compared to Life at Intake

Regardless of how participants rated the fatherhood programs, did they believe they were better off at the follow-up interview than they were at enrollment? Figure 13-3 shows how individuals who were interviewed at each site rated their life at the time of the interview relative to their situation six months earlier as they were enrolling in the program. The figure shows that:

- A majority of participants (64%) rated their life at the six-month follow-up as better or much better than it was at enrollment.
- Another 22 percent of participants claimed life was about the same, and 14 percent claimed it was worse or much worse than at intake.
- At least half of participants interviewed at every site rated their life as better at the follow-up time period than at intake.

The proportions ranged from a low of 50 percent for participants in Missouri to a high of 91 percent for participants in Maryland.

Figure 13-3
Rating of Life at the Time of the Follow-Up Interview
Compared to Life at Enrollment in the Program
(n=489)



To understand in what areas participants felt they were doing better, the same, or worse, interviewed clients were asked to rate their lives in nine areas. Table 13-2 displays the proportion who reported doing better at follow-up than at intake. The Table shows three areas in which participants reported doing better at follow-up than at intake:

- Getting their life together (67%);
- The job they were doing as a parent (58%); and
- Their job skills (54%).

While the gains in these areas were impressive, gains in other areas were less satisfactory. The areas in which participants were least apt to report improvements were:

- Getting their child support situation under control (25%);
- Getting along with the other parent (33%); and
- Providing for themselves financially (34%).

It is perhaps overly optimistic to think that in a six-month period of time, a majority of participants would have experienced substantial improvements in any of these three areas. Nevertheless, it is a concern that so few interviewed clients reported feeling as though they were getting their child support situation under control. The child support agency was the main source of program referrals at some sites, and all programs attempted to help participants with their child support situation. One possible reason for this perception is the fact that few participants experienced downward modifications or any reductions in their child support obligations as a result of program participation.

Table 13-2. Participants' Assessments of Various Aspects of Life Today Compared to Life at Intake, by site (Percent reporting doing better now than at intake)

	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	Total
Number of noncustodial fathers	183	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,674
Number of completed telephone follow-up interviews	*32*	*63*	*45*	*110*	*13*	*4*	*232*	*28*	*527*
Number with valid information	*32*	*72*	*35*	*93*	*12*	*9*	*207*	*28*	*488*
The job you are doing as a parent	75%	68%	71%	64%	58%	56%	49%	59%	58%
How well you get along with the other parent	27%	36%	50%	39%	33%	22%	26%	44%	33%
How well you can provide for your children financially	23%	44%	53%	47%	33%	33%	30%	48%	39%
How well you can provide for yourself financially	14%	42%	41%	37%	25%	33%	27%	44%	34%
Getting your child support situation under control	30%	32%	30%	25%	33%	44%	21%	22%	25%
Your job skills	57%	50%	62%	63%	73%	56%	49%	61%	54%
Keeping a job	43%	45%	47%	54%	75%	44%	38%	61%	45%
Getting your life together	55%	76%	88%	74%	75%	67%	56%	75%	67%
Using contraception regularly	44%	63%	55%	38%	58%	11%	32%	32%	40%

Of course, the changes in the clients' lives that are presented above cannot be attributed entirely to the program. Individuals who were interviewed had experienced a number of life events — good and bad — in the months since enrollment. These life experiences were generally quite independent

of the program, and they were undoubtedly as important, if not more important, than the fatherhood programs themselves in affecting the attitudes and opinions participants expressed in the follow-up survey.

Table 13-3 presents information on events that participants reported having experienced between enrollment and the time of the follow-up interview. The events have been grouped for display purposes into five categories: (1) relationship events; (2) legal events; (3) medical/treatment events; (4) housing events; and (5) other events.

A majority of program participants had experienced at least one major stressful life event between intake and the follow-up interview. The incidence of life events for participants provides a picture of how much stress they faced in their lives over a relatively short period of time. These data indicate that:

- Just over 80 percent of participants who responded to the follow-up survey had experienced at least one of the stressful events listed in the Table 13-3;
- Less than 20 percent reported experiencing none of the events;
- Nearly a third (31%) reported experiencing only one stressful event;
- Nearly a quarter (24%) reported experiencing two stressful events; and
- Nearly a quarter (26%) reported experiencing three or more stressful events.

Some of the most common events participants experienced in the six months prior to the interview included court appearances (43%), continuing transportation problems (30%), moving (23%), and a family or personal illness (15% and 14%, respectively).

Table 13-3. Self-Reported Life Events Between Intake and Follow-Up, by site (Percent of Noncustodial Fathers Experiencing Each Event)

	California	Colorado	Maryland	Massachusetts	Missouri	New Hampshire	Washington	Wisconsin	Total
Number of Noncustodial Fathers	183	163	97	284	53	24	760	110	1,674
Number of completed telephone follow-up interviews	*32*	*63*	*45*	*110*	*13*	*4*	*232*	*28*	*527*
Number with valid information	*32*	*57*	*35*	*94*	*12*	*9*	*211*	*29*	*479*
Relationship Events									
Got married	9%	3%	6%	4%	0%	11%	1%	4%	3%
Began living with the mother of any of your children	3%	4%	3%	4%	8%	11%	0%	7%	3%
Began living with girlfriend	3%	14%	11%	11%	8%	0%	9%	21%	11%
Had more children	9%	9%	3%	4%	0%	0%	4%	11%	5%
Legal Events									
Got arrested	6%	12%	6%	4%	25%	33%	8%	7%	9%
Spent time in jail	6%	12%	11%	3%	25%	11%	10%	18%	10%
Went to court	38%	57%	23%	34%	42%	67%	47%	29%	43%
Had a restraining order	i	10%	3%	7%	8%	0%	8%	4%	7%
Medical/Treatment Events									
Suffered a serious illness, injury, or disability	13%	18%	14%	8%	17%	44%	15%	7%	14%
Had problems with drugs or alcohol	6%	1%	6%	3%	8%	0%	4%	4%	4%
Went to a drug or alcohol treatment program	9%	11%	11%	12%	0%	0%	9%	7%	9%
Had a family member experience a serious illness	19%	11%	9%	17%	8%	22%	17%	14%	15%
Housing Events									
Stayed in a shelter or temporary housing	i	0%	6%	9%	0%	0%	3%	14%	5%
Moved or changed living situation at least once	19%	25%	20%	27%	8%	22%	22%	29%	23%
Moved or changed living situation three or more times	i	5%	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%	7%	2%
Miscellaneous Events									
Used a food bank or soup kitchen	3%	0%	6%	4%	0%	33%	10%	11%	7%
Had transportation problems	25%	39%	26%	18%	25%	56%	30%	47%	30%

i Not asked in California.

Summary

- Given the low response rates to the follow-up surveys with program participants, all the findings presented in this chapter are best viewed as exploratory and suggestive, rather than conclusive.

- Across all sites, 56 percent of the respondents to the follow-up survey rated the programs as excellent, and 26 percent rated them as good.

- Only 18 percent rated the programs as fair or poor (11% and 7%, respectively).

- Client ratings for the programs in California and Washington were somewhat lower than at the other sites, yet still fairly high, with 60 and 77 percent, respectively, rating the programs as excellent or good.

- When clients rated specific aspects of the program, most were rated either "good" or "excellent."

- A majority of participants (64%) rated their life at the six-month follow up as better or much better than it was at enrollment.

- Another 22 percent of participants claimed life was about the same, and 14 percent claimed it was worse or much worse than at intake.

- On a site-by-site basis, no less than half of participants interviewed rated life better at the follow-up time period than at intake.

- Areas in which participants reported doing better at follow-up than at intake included:
  - Getting their life together (67%);
  - The job they were doing as a parent (58%); and
  - Their job skills (54%).

- Clients noted fewer improvements in these areas:
  - Getting their child support situation under control (25%);
  - Getting along with the other parent (33%); and
  - Providing for themselves financially (34%).

Chapter 14: Summary and Discussion

In this chapter

- Review of major implementation findings
- Review of major outcomes
- Discussion of key findings

This evaluation describes the characteristics, service needs, and experiences of noncustodial fathers who enrolled in the OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs in eight states between October 1998 and December 31, 2000. The programs offered low-income, noncustodial parents a variety of services to enhance their financial and emotional participation in the lives of their children.

This final Chapter provides a summary of key findings related to program implementation and outcomes, and a discussion of what these findings mean for future policy, programs, and research.

Summary of Key Program Implementation Findings

The programs' origins and early start-up experiences are discussed in the report, *OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Early Implementation Lessons,* (Pearson, *et al*, 2000). This report looked at two aspects of program implementation:

- Referral strategies, sources, and problems; and
- Characteristics and problems of clients who enroll in responsible fatherhood programs.

Referral Strategies, Sources, and Problems

Finding: At all sites, recruitment was difficult and time consuming.

Programs should be prepared to devote considerable resources to recruitment and use a variety of strategies. The sites varied enormously with respect to the total number of clients enrolled, but even those with the largest volume made tremendous efforts to identify and enroll participants.

Finding: The programs differed significantly in the referral sources that they employed.

Some programs, such as New Hampshire and Colorado, relied heavily on referrals from child support agencies. Other sites had virtually no referrals from this source. Similarly, while some sites (Maryland, Massachusetts, and Colorado) received a substantial number of referrals from criminal justice agencies and criminal courts; such referrals were of lesser import at other sites. Word-of-mouth referrals accounted for 49 percent of participants in Maryland, but only 5 percent in New Hampshire and Colorado.

Finding: Referrals by child support workers are important and do not make participants feel that they are being mandated to participate.

California relied on technicians to make all referrals to its program offering mediation services. New Hampshire and Colorado also relied heavily on child support technicians to identify noncustodial parents who might benefit from their programs. Referrals by child support staff were not perceived as mandatory or coercive by clients. For example, although 41 percent of Colorado participants were referred by child support technicians, only 2 percent felt as though they had been required to attend the program. Responsible fatherhood programs give child support technicians an opportunity to be responsive to the complaints that noncustodial parents make about their child access and employment problems, which may enhance customer satisfaction and client perceptions of the child support program.

Finding: Some targeted referral sources did not generate clients at any site.

Program staff in Colorado and Washington devoted a tremendous amount of effort to recruiting participants from hospitals. Colorado staff also attempted to recruit delinquent child support payers from court settings. Both hospitals and courts presented significant logistical barriers to recruitment.

Staff in both Colorado and Washington concluded that there was little time to do program outreach with new parents at the hospital, and noncustodial parents who were delinquent in their child support payment often failed to appear at court.

Characteristics of Participants Served

Finding: The participants served by the programs were diverse.

The average ages of noncustodial fathers enrolled in the programs ranged from 27 to 33 years. Maryland served a greater percentage of young fathers than did the other sites (22% in Maryland were age 20 or younger, compared to 2% to 18% elsewhere). Similarly, although most participants had low levels of educational attainment, the percentage without even a GED ranged from 13 percent in Colorado to 71 percent in New Hampshire's small program. Racial and ethnic differences were also apparent across the sites, reflecting the characteristics of the communities in which they were based. For example, in Maryland and Missouri, over 80 percent of the fathers who enrolled were African-American, while virtually all of the clients in New Hampshire were white. More than half of the NCPs who mediated access disputes in California's program were Hispanic.

Finding: Few participants lived alone at enrollment; most lived with their parents, a spouse, or a girlfriend.

While many participants at each site lived with their parents, there was significant variation in the percentage who reported living with a spouse or girlfriend at enrollment, ranging from a low of 11 percent in Maryland to a high of 47 percent in New Hampshire. There was also considerable variation in the percentage of clients who reported living in a halfway house or shelter at enrollment: ranging from fewer than 5 percent in New Hampshire and Missouri to nearly 18 percent in Colorado.

Finding: The participants at all sites were quite comparable with respect to the number and ages of their nonresident children.

Most noncustodial fathers who enrolled in the programs had one or two nonresident children, the youngest of whom typically was between the ages of four and six. The overwhelming majority of these children lived with their mothers.

Finding: Noncustodial fathers and the mother of his youngest, nonresident child had various marital histories and relationship statuses.

Across the sites, more than two thirds (69%) of fathers had never been married to the mother of their youngest, nonresident child, with a quarter reporting no cohabitation. However, the percentage of never-married parents varied across the sites, ranging from a low of 62 percent in Washington to a high of 89 percent in Maryland. There was wide variation in how fathers characterized their relationships with these mothers. Nearly a third (31%) reported the relationship was "friendly," and 38 percent characterized the mother as supportive of the father-child relationship. At the other end of the spectrum, 28 percent characterized their relationship with the mother as "hostile," and 21 percent reported having no relationship with her at all. The matters that precipitated the most parental conflict were (1) visitation; (2) how the child was being raised; and (3) issues not related to the child.

Finding: At all of the sites, a substantial number of enrolled, noncustodial fathers had a criminal history.

The proportion of fathers with a felony conviction ranged from a low of 33 percent in New Hampshire to a high of 89 percent in Missouri, with a cross-site average of 40 percent. If misdemeanors are included, all the participants enrolled in Missouri had a criminal record and the cross-site average for participants was 67 percent.

Finding: When asked whether their drug and/or alcohol use might cause problems for them in locating or keeping a job, more than 20 percent of those enrolled in Colorado, Maryland, Missouri, and New Hampshire said "yes."

Drug and/or alcohol problems were less frequently noted in Massachusetts, Washington, and Wisconsin. However, since alcohol and drug use is frequently under-reported in surveys, it is likely that many of the programs had to deal with the special challenges faced in providing services to clients with substance abuse issues.

Finding: Clients faced many other serious problems, such as the lack of a permanent address, no reliable transportation, and health problems.

The lack of reliable transportation was a problem for 19 percent of noncustodial fathers across the sites, but was more severe in Colorado, Missouri, and New Hampshire. Between 25 and 40 percent of the fathers in Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Missouri said that they did not have a

permanent home when they enrolled in the programs. Approximately 20 to 67 percent of the fathers in Maryland, New Hampshire, Washington, and Wisconsin reported having significant health problems that might affect their ability to obtain and keep a job.

Summary of Key Program Outcomes

The programs varied in the specific types of services that they provided and the goals they held for clients. However, all of the programs focused on providing services related to one or more of the following:

- Improving employment and earnings for noncustodial fathers;
- Improving the payment child support among noncustodial fathers; and
- Increasing or maintaining regular contact between the noncustodial fathers and their children.

Changes in Employment and Earnings

Finding: Rates of employment at program enrollment varied across the sites, but were generally low, based on both client self-reports and UI wage records.

Rates of employment reported by noncustodial fathers when they enrolled in the programs ranged from a low of 20 percent in Missouri to a high of 63 percent in Washington, with a cross-site average of 55 percent**.** Rates of employment reflected in UI wage records in the quarter prior to enrollment were somewhat lower at some of the sites but reflected similar trends, and ranged from 13 percent in Missouri to 64 percent in Washington.

Finding: At enrollment, noncustodial fathers reported average monthly earnings that ranged from a low of $1,071 in Missouri to a high of $1,903 in Washington.

Average and median monthly earnings reported by noncustodial fathers across the sites were $1,716 and $1,537, respectively. Earnings from UI records were also generally low in months prior to enrollment, ranging from a quarterly average of $404 in Missouri to $2,873 in Washington. At most sites, more than half of employed, noncustodial fathers reported receiving no employer-paid benefits, and most said that their job did not meet their financial needs.

Finding: At six of the seven sites that offered employment assistance, more than half of the noncustodial fathers wanted this type of assistance when they enrolled in the programs.

Client interest in employment assistance was lowest in Washington, where only 24 percent wanted help finding a job and 23 percent wanted help finding a better job. At sites other than Washington, client interest in employment assistance was substantially higher, with the percentage ranging from 57 percent in Massachusetts to 82 percent in New Hampshire.

Finding: At the sites that offered employment assistance, at least half of the noncustodial fathers enrolled in the program received some type of help.

Records maintained by program staff show that at six of the seven program sites, at least half of the clients received employment services. The figure ranged from 49 percent in Massachusetts to 97 percent in Maryland.

Finding: A review of UI wage data for fathers prior to and following their enrollment in programs showed that the rate of employment increased at most sites. The changes were only statistically significant at the sites with the lowest pre-program employment rates.

A comparison of UI wage data for noncustodial fathers in the quarter prior to and two quarters following program enrollment showed increases at most program sites, although the increases were only statistically significant at those sites with the lowest pre-program employment rates. For example, the rate of employment among noncustodial fathers in Maryland rose from 18 to 51 percent, while the rate changed in Missouri from 13 to 52 percent. In contrast, there were no significant increases in Colorado, New Hampshire, and Washington, where higher percentages of clients showed UI-reported employment when they enrolled in fatherhood programs. The UI wage system reflected less employment activity and lower earnings than those reported by clients themselves.

Finding: UI data showed earnings increased significantly over time but remained extremely low. Clients who entered the programs already employed experienced significant increases in earnings at three sites.

Noncustodial fathers in Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin showed significant increases in earnings following program enrollment but continued to earn very low wages, with

average quarterly earnings ranging from $704 in Missouri to $3,095 in Washington. Only in Colorado, Wisconsin, and Washington did fathers who were employed when they entered the programs show significant increases in earnings. On average, fathers who were employed when they enrolled had post-enrollment, quarterly earnings that ranged from $2,736 in Wisconsin to $4,359 in Massachusetts. This suggests that the programs had their greatest impact with clients who were unemployed when they enrolled and that there was less evidence that the programs led to increased earnings among employed clients. Client age, race/ethnicity, high-school education, felony status, or substance abuse history did not appear to affect post-enrollment patterns dealing with employment and earnings.

Improving the Child Support Situation

Finding: Most noncustodial fathers entered the programs with large monthly child support obligations and significant arrears balances.

When they enrolled in the programs, most noncustodial fathers had at least one open child support case, although the proportion differed across sites. They ranged from a low of 59 percent in Massachusetts, where most clients were recruited from community-based organizations, to 100 percent in New Hampshire, where all clients were referred by child support technicians. Among those with orders in place, average monthly order levels ranged from $187 per month in Maryland to $380 per months in Washington. Most clients with child support orders also owed back-due support, with average arrears ranging from $7,978 in New Hampshire to $15,341 in Washington. Average total monthly obligations for current support and arrears ranged from $187 in Maryland to $415 in Massachusetts.

Finding: Most noncustodial fathers with child support obligations paid little or no formal child support in the six months prior to their enrollment in responsible fatherhood programs.

Overall, about half of the men with orders had paid no child support in the six months prior to their enrollment in responsible fatherhood programs. The percent making no payments ranged from lows of 18 to 25 percent in New Hampshire and Wisconsin, respectively, to over 60 percent in both Maryland and Missouri. The average percent of owed monthly support that participants paid prior

to their enrollment ranged from lows of 14 to 18 percent in Missouri and Maryland, respectively, to highs of 40 to 46 percent in Washington and New Hampshire, respectively.

Finding: More than half of noncustodial fathers wanted assistance with child support.
When they enrolled, 57 percent of noncustodial fathers said they wanted help with child support payments. According to program staff, clients needed help with their arrears balances and with reducing their child support obligations. While it appears that about half of enrolled fathers met with program staff and/or child support technicians to review the possibility of modifying their orders and/or to discuss their arrears, these meetings led to few changes. None of the child support agencies at the program sites offered participants an arrears forgiveness option or other incentives to promote payment.

Few noncustodial parents met with technicians to establish paternity and/or a child support order. For those noncustodial parents not in the child support system, the program staff would have had no reason to initiate child support activity. However, substantial proportions of clients at several sites (*e.g.*, 55% in Maryland and approximately 30% each in Colorado, Massachusetts, and Missouri) were in the child support system and needed an order to be established. It is unclear why program staff did not initiate client contact with child support agencies for order establishment. At some sites, program staff did not have access to child support records. Alternatively, staff may not have wanted to jeopardize their rapport with clients by promoting the establishment of child support orders, which would have increased the financial obligations that fathers faced.

Finding: Participation in responsible fatherhood programs led to substantial increases in client involvement in the child support system only at sites with close connections with the child support agency and referrals from technicians.
In programs that maintained close connections with the child support agency, fathers who enrolled became more involved with the child support system, and there were increases in the percentage of fathers with an open case on the child support system, the percentage with an order established, and the percentage paying any formal support through CSE. This was the case for fathers in Colorado, Missouri, and New Hampshire. The sites showing the fewest changes in clients' child support status were Maryland and Massachusetts, both of which operated independently from the child support agency and received few referrals from child support technicians.

Finding: Client child support obligations and arrears balances did not change as a result of participating in responsible fatherhood programs.

Child support order levels and arrearage balances were essentially the same at enrollment and 12 months later. Under existing state child support guidelines, few of the programs' clients qualified for modifications. None of the child support agencies extended any special incentives, such as arrears forgiveness, to program participants.

Finding: In California, child support payments improved significantly among all clients referred for mediation.

All fathers referred for a court-based mediation intervention improved their child support payment patterns regardless of whether they attended the mediation, failed to appear, or were successful or unsuccessful in producing an agreement. According to child support staff, the referral increased payment because it eliminated an excuse for nonpayment and improved relationships between the father and the agency. It may also be that the meeting between the NCP and child support staff that produced the mediation referral helped the worker to initiate wage withholding and other enforcement actions that led to payment activity.

Finding: Child support payments improved significantly among clients enrolled in programs in Colorado, Maryland, and Massachusetts, chiefly as a result of declines in the percentage of clients who paid nothing.

A comparison of the percentage of child support paid by noncustodial fathers in the six months prior to, and 12 months following, their enrollment in responsible fatherhood programs showed statistically significant increases in Colorado (from 24 to 36 percent), Maryland (from 18 to 27 percent), and Massachusetts (from 33 to 42 percent). At all three sites, the increases appeared to be due to a decline in the percentage of clients who paid nothing.

Finding: There was little evidence that clients who paid at least some child support before enrolling in the program increased their child support payments after enrollment.

Clients who had paid some support in the six months prior to enrolling in the programs paid roughly equivalent amounts 12 months later. For example, noncustodial fathers in Colorado who had paid some support at enrollment paid about 45 to 49 percent of what they owed at both pre- and post-enrollment time points. In Maryland, pre- and post-enrollment payment stood at 46 and 48 percent, respectively, while in Massachusetts, it was 53 and 55 percent, respectively. And in Washington,

it was 63 and 64 percent, respectively. Given the fact that most employed clients did not experience changes in their child support obligations or their earnings as a result of program participation, it is not surprising that their payment behavior did not improve. To the extent there were increases in payment, they appeared to be due to traditional enforcement activity, particularly the use of wage withholding, which led to reductions in the percent of clients who paid nothing. The exception to this pattern were NCPs in California, all of whom paid more after referral to mediation, regardless of whether they attended the mediation session or reached an agreement.

Finding: Child support payment activity increased with earnings.

A comparison of UI earnings and child support payment records shows that at all program sites, noncustodial fathers with higher earnings did a better job of paying child support. The analysis of earnings and child support payment activity also demonstrated that ordered levels of child support were unrealistically high for many clients in responsible fatherhood programs and that child support consumed a huge proportion of income among those with the lowest earnings.

Improving Access to Children

Finding: Noncustodial fathers reported varying levels of contact before enrolling in the programs, but substantial proportions reported being dissatisfied with their access situation.

Based on data from the RFMIS, it appears that there was considerable variation in the amount of contact that noncustodial fathers had with their children in the months prior to enrollment. For example, more than half of the fathers in Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin said that they saw their youngest nonresident child at least once a week in the year prior to enrollment. At most sites (including California), about one-fifth of the fathers had not seen their youngest, nonresident children at all in the 12 months prior to program enrollment. At every site, parents who reported high levels of contact lived closer to their children than those reporting low levels of contact. Despite high levels of parent-child contact reported by many fathers, a large proportion of fathers were dissatisfied with the amount of time they spent with their child.

Finding: Most noncustodial fathers did not have court-ordered child access arrangements and some had court orders restricting child access.

Given their never-married status, it is not surprising that most noncustodial fathers (64%) lacked court-ordered child access arrangements when they enrolled in the programs. A number of fathers had visitation restrictions in place at enrollment. Across the sites, 15 percent of noncustodial fathers had court orders that placed restrictions on their contact with the children..

Finding: More than half of noncustodial fathers wanted help with getting to see their children more often.

When they enrolled, 53 percent of noncustodial fathers said they wanted help getting to see their children more. Half (51%) wanted help with parenting, improving the relationship with the other parent, or managing anger. There were significant differences by site in the level of client interest in these services. Fathers in Colorado and Washington were most apt to want help with getting to see their children, while fathers in Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin wanted to improve their parenting skills. Combining data across all the sites shows that approximately half of the fathers were reported to have received access services.

Finding: Overall, most clients interviewed six months after enrollment said there had been few changes in the time they spent with their children following enrollment. Those who reported changes were more likely to report increased, rather than decreased, contact.

About half the fathers (58%) who were interviewed six months after they enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs said that they were seeing their children about the same amount as before enrolling, 27 percent said that contact had increased, and 14 percent said it had decreased. At both enrollment and at the follow-up interview, about 44 percent reported seeing their children at least weekly, while about 20 percent reported no contact.

Overall, at the follow-up interview, more fathers were dissatisfied (55%) than satisfied (45%) with the amount of visitation they had. This was true even in California, where the program focused solely on child access. At all of the sites, clients largely attributed changes in contact levels to improvements or deteriorations in their relationships with custodial parents.

Assessment of the Program

Finding: Responsible fatherhood clients rated the programs highly and appreciated seeing that other people have "similar problems."

With the exception of Washington, between 87 and 94 percent of interviewed fathers at every site gave the programs a rating of "excellent" or "good." Among the aspects of the program that were most appreciated were "helping you see that other people have similar problems," "helping you to understand your situation," and "helping you to be a better parent." The three areas in which interviewed parents were least apt to report progress were "getting their child support situation under control" (25%), "getting along with the other parent" (33%), and "providing for themselves financially" (34%).

Finding: Those fathers who could be located and interviewed six months following program enrollment generally reported their lives were better.

In follow-up telephone interviews conducted approximately six months after they enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs, two-thirds of interviewed clients reported that their life was "better" or "much better" than it had been. The three areas in which clients reported making the most progress were "getting their life together" (67%), "doing a better job as a parent" (58%), and "having better job skills" (54%).

Discussion of Key Findings

To date, architects of responsible fatherhood programs have naturally focused on the most basic issues: how to develop, fund, and operate a program. Our first report on the OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs, *Early Implementation Lessons* (Pearson, *et al.*, 1996), presented findings on start-up and operational issues and discussed the formats pursued at the various sites to meet the goals of helping poor, noncustodial parents get their lives together and become more effective parents. This report analyzed quantitative data from the eight OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs to examine fundamental questions about the types of fathers served at each program; the types of assistance they wanted and received; and client outcomes dealing with employment and earnings, the payment of child support, and parent-child contact. While these issues have not been fully resolved, this report has identified the next generation of issues that will confront policy

makers, program providers, and evaluators as they struggle to design effective interventions for low-income fathers.

Conclusion:Low-income, noncustodial fathers are a difficult population to recruit and serve. Unlike PFS, which limited enrollment to fathers in the child support system who were delinquent in their payments, or PFF, which seeks to attract young fathers with no history with the child support agency, the OCSE responsible fatherhood programs made services available to low-income fathers of all ages and with all child support agency statuses. The programs utilized a broad range of recruitment techniques ranging from referral by the child support agency to informal, word-of-mouth approaches and community-based strategies. And although several programs made concerted efforts to recruit young, unmarried fathers, the programs did not impose any age or marital requirements.

Despite these broad-ranging eligibility criteria and broad-based recruitment efforts, all the programs struggled to enroll and serve low-income fathers. Enrollment was extremely low at several program sites, and at some sites, attrition was high. Future programs will clearly have to grapple with the difficulty of locating, recruiting, and retaining low-income NCPs in programs designed to help them become better earners, payers, and parents. This study showed that many recruitment strategies were helpful, including referrals by child support workers, and that programs should employ a variety, rather than relying on any single methodology.

Conclusion: Many NCPs face severe limitations to employment, child support payment, and child access.

It was expected that fathers in the programs would have limited education and employment experiences. What program architects did not perhaps realize was how many other challenges fathers who enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs faced. With 40 percent of noncustodial fathers reporting a felony conviction and 27 percent reporting a misdemeanor conviction, this evaluation shows that a criminal history was the norm, rather than the exception, among program participants. Indeed, 100 percent of the fathers who enrolled in the Missouri Proud Parents program had a criminal history. Programs will need to ensure that they collaborate with employment programs that are experienced in working with hard-to-employ men and that they cultivate ties with employers who are willing to hire ex-offenders.

Ongoing drug and alcohol problems were other barriers noted by 14 percent of enrolled fathers across the sites. At some sites, the incidence was substantially higher, with 22 to 27 percent of fathers reporting substance abuse problems. Although substance abuse treatment was available at some sites with strong connections to health service providers, it was not among the mix of services available in most programs. Programs will need to decide whether they can allocate resources to ensure that clients can access quality services and address substance abuse problems.

Finally, fathers faced a variety of expected and unexpected barriers to increased parent-child contact. About two-thirds of enrolled fathers across the sites lacked court-ordered visitation arrangements, which is typical of never-married fathers. It was less expected that 15 percent would have court-ordered restrictions on child access, including no contact or overnights, or requirements to use supervised visitation. Lack of access to reliable transportation also presented barriers to regular parent-child contact and employment. Across the sites, 19 percent of fathers reported transportation problems, with the proportions at some sites as high as 40 percent.

Conclusion: Many unemployed NCPs find jobs, but it is low-wage work, with relatively few clients experiencing increased earnings or earnings that are adequate to meet their financial needs and those of their children.

Employment activity increased at every program site, but the improvement was only significant at sites with the lowest pre-enrollment employment rates. And although fathers at four sites also experienced significant increases in earnings, their wages were extremely low, with average *quarterly* earnings ranging from $704 in Missouri to $3,095 in Washington. Only fathers in Colorado, Wisconsin, and Washington who were employed when they entered the programs showed significant wage increases, although their salaries remained low, with post-enrollment *quarterly* earnings for these men ranging from $2,736 in Wisconsin to $4,359 in Massachusetts.

These patterns suggest that many unemployed fathers were able to find low-wage work but that few fathers had jobs that paid enough for them to support themselves or pay their child support obligations. Not surprisingly, few clients interviewed six months after enrollment reported feeling as though they were making progress in getting their child support situation and finances under control.

To have a greater impact on earnings, policy makers and programs need to develop a stronger array of training opportunities for low-income fathers. Most programs offered fathers assistance with job search. Relatively few fathers participated in skill-building activities. More attention needs to go to creating on-the-job training slots and stipends or part-time employment situations that would enable clients to develop marketable skills. Programs and policy makers need to examine the efficacy of providing low-income fathers with job search services and consider earmarking more resources for intensive, skill-building, and training activities that have the potential to lead to something other than low-wage work.

Conclusion: Child access problems are hard to define and to resolve.

Noncustodial fathers reported a wide array of contact patterns, ranging from frequent contact to no contact at all. Parents who saw their children infrequently, if at all, reported being dissatisfied with this arrangement and anxious to increase their contact. This is an understandable problem, even if it is not easily resolved. Other access problems were more nebulous, however, since many parents with frequent contact with their children were still dissatisfied with their access situation. For some parents, there may be no satisfactory substitute for living with their children on a full-time basis.

In situations where the access problem is clearly tied to low levels of contact with children, programs will face considerable obstacles to increasing contact. Many noncustodial fathers (15%) had legal barriers to contact, including legal restrictions on child access, such as a no-contact or a supervised visitation order. More than half of the fathers (52%) who were dissatisfied with the amount of time they spent with their children said that the other parent did not want them to see the children. Others cited problems with the distance or travel time involved with visiting (32%) and a lack of transportation (19%).

It is understandably difficult to address entrenched relationship problems and physical distance factors with the short-term, voluntary access interventions pursued in most programs and the limited resources of the participants. While some sites offered clients assistance with legal filings to establish or modify visitation orders, more commonly, program staff contacted the custodial parent to attempt to informally negotiate a contact arrangement, a type of intervention that is not likely to be effective with high-conflict parents.

California was the one site to routinely offer NCPs and the other parent the opportunity to participate in free, court-based mediation services to address child access issues. Although mediation was highly effective among those who tried, with 72 percent reaching an agreement, less than half (42%) of the referred families attempted to mediate. Mediation did not occur in a majority of cases because of the failure of fathers (15%) or mothers (24%) to appear at the session or the inability of staff to contact both parents to schedule mediation (19%). These patterns suggest that while nonappearance is a substantial problem, mediation should be available for NCPs with access problems.

Conclusion: Current child support guidelines result in orders for low-income, noncustodial parents that are unrealistically high.

While child support payments improved significantly among clients enrolled in several programs, the increases were chiefly due to declines in the proportion of clients paying nothing. Among payers, there was no increase in the proportion of the child support obligation that was paid. At most sites, both prior to and following enrollment, clients who paid child support paid approximately 40 percent of what they owed. This is similar to patterns gleaned in several recent studies of low-income, noncustodial parents in Colorado, all of which showed that low-income, noncustodial parents in service programs ultimately paid about 40 percent of what they owed (Pearson and Davis, 2001).

Fathers in California were the exception to this pattern. Child support payments improved for every group referred to mediation: those who reached agreement, those who mediated but did not reach agreement, those who did not appear for mediation, and those who did not even receive a mediation appointment. While some of the increase was due to a drop in the percentage paying nothing, the average percentage of the obligation that fathers paid rose from 41 percent to approximately 66 percent, with half the fathers paying at least 50 percent of what they owed. Relative to the other sites, fathers in California reported the highest rates of employment and earnings. Indeed, there was so little demand for job assistance at the California site that the program focused exclusively on access mediation and dropped employment services altogether. Nevertheless, even at this site, child support payment activity did not improve for fathers who mediated but had no income.

The similarity in payment outcomes among noncustodial fathers in the OCSE responsible fatherhood programs and the other Colorado studies suggests that order levels may simply be too high for low-income parents. A comparison of order levels and earnings for fathers based on both client reports and UI data confirms that among the lowest earners, child support obligations comprised between 21 to 61 percent of monthly earnings. It was only at higher income levels, those exceeding $2,000 per month, that child support obligations comprised more realistic percentages of incomes, ranging from 8 to 21 percent. Sorensen and Zibman (2002) reached a similar conclusion in their recent analysis of arrears in California. Child support debtors with net incomes below $5,000 had median child support awards that were twice as high as their net monthly income. Those earning between $5,000 and $10,000 faced order levels that represented 44 percent of their net income. To contrast, debtors with net incomes over $70,000 had child support orders that represented only 8 percent of their net income.

The Colorado Child Support Guidelines Commission recently recognized that orders for low-income parents were too high and recommended, and the legislature approved, changes to the guidelines. Effective January 1, 2003, new child support orders and motions for modification in Colorado were set at $50 per month when parents' monthly adjusted gross income is less than $850. Those parents who earn more than $850 but less than $1,850 per month will be subject to a new low-income adjustment calculation that will be added to minimum child support amounts of $75 for one child and $150 for two (SB 02-021, 2002). Other states should review their guidelines and default procedures to ensure that they do not generate orders that are unrealistic.

Conclusion: Child support agencies need to collaborate with fatherhood programs and pursue routine enforcement activities, as well as adopt policies and incentives that are responsive to low-income fathers.

Increases in child support payments among program participants were chiefly due to decreases in the percentage paying nothing. This was largely accomplished through the implementation of wage withholding when fathers became employed. The sites that registered the largest gains in payment received referrals from child support agency workers and implemented wage withholding on an expedited basis, without waiting for new hire reporting to take effect. Programs that received referrals from child support workers were also more apt to have new child support orders

established. This pattern underscores the importance of child support agencies collaborating with fatherhood programs to refer clients, address their child support questions, and work their cases.

At the same time, this study shows that traditional child support policies are not sufficient for low-income fathers and that agencies need to change their way of doing business. One needed change is the ability to address access problems. California fathers who were referred by child support workers to a free, court-based mediation program paid more child support, regardless of whether they mediated successfully or even appeared for mediation. Child support workers at that site believe that the mediation offer served a customer relations function because it acknowledged a problem that the fathers were having and helped to eliminate a common excuse for nonpayment. The mediation referral also may have focused worker attention on low-income, nonpaying cases that had been a low priority and resulted in new wage withholding orders. Although nonappearance was a serious problem, mediation was highly effective for parents who tried. Child support agencies should explore partnerships with courts and other entities to deliver mediation services to families in their caseload with access problems.

Incentives are another practice that child support agencies need to consider adopting in order to promote payment among low-income fathers. None of the child support agencies in the communities in which the programs were housed extended any incentives to program participants. There were no arrears forgiveness opportunities; few participants qualified for downward modifications under prevailing state guidelines. Not surprisingly, client child support obligations and arrears balances did not change as a result of participating in a responsible fatherhood program. On average, noncustodial fathers in the programs owed between $186 (Missouri) and $372 (Washington) for monthly child support. They carried arrears balances that ranged from $9,170 (Wisconsin) to $14,809 (Washington), not including interest and penalties. In Massachusetts, the addition of interest and penalties meant that average arrears balances rose from $10,983 to $17,276. In the absence of increased and sufficient income and responsive child support policies, it was difficult for program staff to motivate participants to improve their payment behavior. Staff at some programs were reluctant to work closely with child support technicians for fear of jeopardizing their relationships with fathers.

Properly structured, fatherhood programs can help to get fathers to pay at least some formal child support. To realize these benefits, child support agencies need to develop reciprocal relationships with responsible fatherhood programs. As part of the bargain, they will have to adopt more realistic default policies, lower orders for low-income earners, streamline modification procedures, and develop methods of reducing the tremendous arrears balances that many low-income fathers have accrued.

Conclusion: Future research in the field should address the data gaps that currently exist.

Future evaluation will need to confront the problems involved in accurately measuring income, especially in a low-income population. The evaluation pursued an ambitious data collection strategy that involved the extraction of information on child support payments and earnings from automated databases maintained by state child support and employment agencies in eight states. Despite these arduous efforts, evaluators discovered that UI wage reports were often missing or incomplete as a result of cash employment, short-term or minor jobs, and the possible failure of some employers to report. Self-reports of earnings pose their own research challenges, both because of questions regarding reporting accuracy, but also because collecting such information will require training and close monitoring of program staff. In addition, collecting self-reports of earnings by surveying program participants means a high survey response rate is critical. The responsible fatherhood evaluation reveals the difficulty in tracking extremely mobile and disadvantaged clients. Although clients were offered an incentive to participate in the interview and asked to provide a secondary phone contact, and interviewers made up to eight call-back attempts to reach potential respondents, most clients could not be located; only about a third were successfully interviewed, making it difficult to generalize from those interviewed to all program participants.

Conclusion: Future research should address ways of meeting methodological challenges that have confronted researchers to date.

Future researchers should explore ways of expanding data collection to allow for information to be gathered from noncustodial parents, custodial parents, and perhaps even children. In the present study, data were gathered primarily from the noncustodial parent. We cannot be certain how different the picture might have looked had other family members provided their perspectives.

Finally, without random assignment of participants to a treatment and control group, there is no way to determine how a comparable group of noncustodial parents might have fared with respect to employment and earnings, child support payments, and contact patterns in the absence of programs offering services in these areas. This is a severe limitation. Lacking a control group, we must seek confirmation of findings through comparisons of client characteristics and outcomes across the program sites and PFS, which used a rigorous experimental design and had a non-treatment control group.

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