

# STATE CHILD ACCESS AND VISITATION PROGRAMS: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the first year's preliminary findings (Fiscal Year 1997 Funding) from a new federal grant program to fund State child access and visitation initiatives. The Administration of Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) was authorized to fund such programs in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. The purpose of the grant program is:

*“...to establish and administer programs to support and facilitate non-custodial parents access to and visitation [with] their children by means of activities including mediation (both voluntary and mandatory), counseling, education, development of parenting plans, visitation enforcement (including monitoring, supervision and neutral drop-off and pick-up), and development of guidelines for visitation and alternative custody arrangements.”*

These grants, authorized under Part IV-D of the Social Security Act, demonstrate a recognition on the part of Congress, the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), the administering unit, and the State IV-D Agencies that it is important to facilitate parental involvement beyond the payment of financial support.

**Exhibit 1: Size of Access and Visitation Grant, by State, FY 1997**

<b>States</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Alabama	\$176,664
Alaska	50,000
Arizona	138,986
Arkansas	95,926
California	1,113,752
Colorado	93,206
Connecticut	124,181
Delaware	50,000
District of Columbia	50,000
Florida	533,258
Georgia	219,034
Guam	50,000
Hawaii	50,000
Idaho	50,000
Illinois	449,673
Indiana	353,005
Iowa	89,393
Kansas	116,319
Kentucky	185,334
Louisiana	205,732
Maine	50,000
Maryland	187,471
Massachusetts	171,787
Michigan	387,344
Minnesota	182,788
Mississippi	137,458
Missouri	173,392
Montana	50,000
Nebraska	50,000
Nevada	50,000
New Hampshire	50,000
New Jersey	202,220
New Mexico	70,682
New York	697,054
North Carolina	233,772
North Dakota	50,000
Ohio	401,541
Oklahoma	102,649
Oregon	113,558
Pennsylvania	356,165
Puerto Rico	109,276
Rhode Island	50,000
South Carolina	130,040
South Dakota	50,000
Tennessee	201,540
Texas	704,262
Utah	72,829
Vermont	50,000
Virgin Islands	50,000
Virginia	194,015
Washington	177,241
West Virginia	57,170
Wisconsin	191,285
Wyoming	50,000
<b>Nationwide Total</b>	<b>\$10 million</b>

Beginning September 12, 1997, OCSE awarded the first round of grants to every State and four jurisdictions — District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. A total of \$10 million was disbursed according to a formula based in part on the number of children in a state who do not live with both biological or legal parents. Each State received at least \$50,000 and the average grant size was \$190,000. The highest funded State, California, received over \$1 million. (See Exhibit 1: *Size of Access and Visitation Grant, by State, FY 1997*.)

States were allowed to administer programs directly or through contracts or grants with courts, local public agencies, or non-profit organizations. States were not required to operate programs on a Statewide basis.

As a condition of receiving a grant, the Act required States to monitor, evaluate, and report on programs funded through these grants. On March 31, 1999, the final regulation that established the requirement for States to report on their access and visitation grants was published in the Federal Register. According to the Final Rule, information collected through reporting will be used to assess:

- (1) the demand for the program and effectiveness of outreach and the ability of the program to meet demand;*
- (2) population served and scope and size of the program;*
- and (3) whether such recipients are completing standard program requirements.*

**Exhibit 2: States Reporting  
and Number of Local  
Projects Funded — FY 1997**

<b>States Reporting †</b>	<b>Local Projects</b>
Arkansas	1
California	14
Colorado	1
Connecticut	1
Delaware	2
District of Columbia	1
Florida	9
Georgia	1
Hawaii	1
Illinois	2
Iowa	Planning
Indiana	6
Kansas	6
Kentucky	7
Louisiana	1
Maine	Planning
Mississippi	3
Missouri	1
Montana	Planning
Nebraska	2
New Jersey	11
New York	9
Ohio	10
Oregon	3
Puerto Rico	1
South Carolina	2
Tennessee	6
Texas	11
Utah	1
Vermont	3
Virginia	7
Washington	3
West Virginia	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>

†At the time of this preliminary report, not all States had reported on their FY 1997 grants. States not yet reporting: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Guam, Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Virgin Islands, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

To facilitate uniform reporting, OCSE and the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in HHS commissioned the American Institutes for Research to develop a simple instrument for States to report on their access and visitation activities and to provide assistance to States in reporting their activities. Thirty-three jurisdictions have reported on their first year activity. This preliminary report summarizes the data from 28 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (hereafter referred to as States), in which 131 local projects were conducting activities that serve non-custodial and custodial parents and their children. See Exhibit 2: *States Reporting and Number of Local Projects Funded* for a listing of States reporting and the number of local projects funded within those States.

Not all States are represented in this preliminary report. Three States — Iowa, Maine, and Montana — reported that they used their initial year’s grant for extensive planning, so had not yet begun to implement service activities, and are therefore not included in this report. In 19 States, the Virgin Islands, and Guam, initial grant award activities have not been completed. The liquidation period permits States one year beyond the end of the obligation period, which ended September 12, 1998, to expend their funds. Thus, some States are not required to report until

October 12, 1999 (30 days after the end of the liquidation period).

## **FINDINGS**

As evidenced by the local projects they funded, States embraced creativity, innovation, and variation in the projects they funded. There is great variation across states in the number of projects funded, project goals, the services offered to prospective clients, service providers, use of Access and Visitation grant funds in combination with other funding sources, and program features. Included in this preliminary report are 30 States and jurisdictions that have funded 131 local projects to which 21,770 parents and children were referred and 19,454 individuals received services.

Most data in this report reflects information at the project level rather than at the State level. This allows the report to capture the diversity and volume of services and program features within States funding multiple projects. Four States, Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, and Louisiana, reported implementing Statewide programs, while the remainder of those included in this preliminary report implemented programs in selected jurisdictions.

## **Project Goals**

The goals reported by the local child access and visitation projects represent the comprehensive

nature of these projects. Local project sites were asked to indicate their projects' goals, and were encouraged to check off multiple goals, where appropriate. Possible goals were:

- ❖ To improve child well-being
- ❖ To improve compliance with child support orders
- ❖ To increase visitation between non-custodial parents and their children
- ❖ To improve the relationship between non-custodial and custodial parents
- ❖ To strengthen non-custodial parents as nurturers
- ❖ To promote public awareness about responsible parenthood
- ❖ To broaden custody options for parents
- ❖ Other

Among 124 local projects reporting on project goals, the three most prevalent goals were:

- to increase visitation between non-custodial parents and their children (94%),
- to improve child well-being (90%), and
- to strengthen non-custodial parents as nurturers (81%).

Some local Project Directors cited other goals, such as "to provide a safe, and stress-free environment for children and non-custodial parents, where the court has said the child is at-risk for harm", and "to increase public awareness about [availability of] divorce mediation."

One hundred twenty-four local projects reported on project goals, with most local project reporting multiple goals. The three most prevalent goals were to increase visitation between non-custodial parents and their children (94 percent), to improve child well-being (90 percent), and to strengthen non-custodial parents as nurturers (81 percent). Some local Project Directors cited other goals, such as "to provide a safe, and stress-free environment for children and non-custodial parents, where the court has said the child is at risk for harm," "to educate custodial and non-custodial parents in the traits that enable improved outcomes in both themselves and their children," "to allow for visitation and exchange while keeping apart families involved in domestic violence with

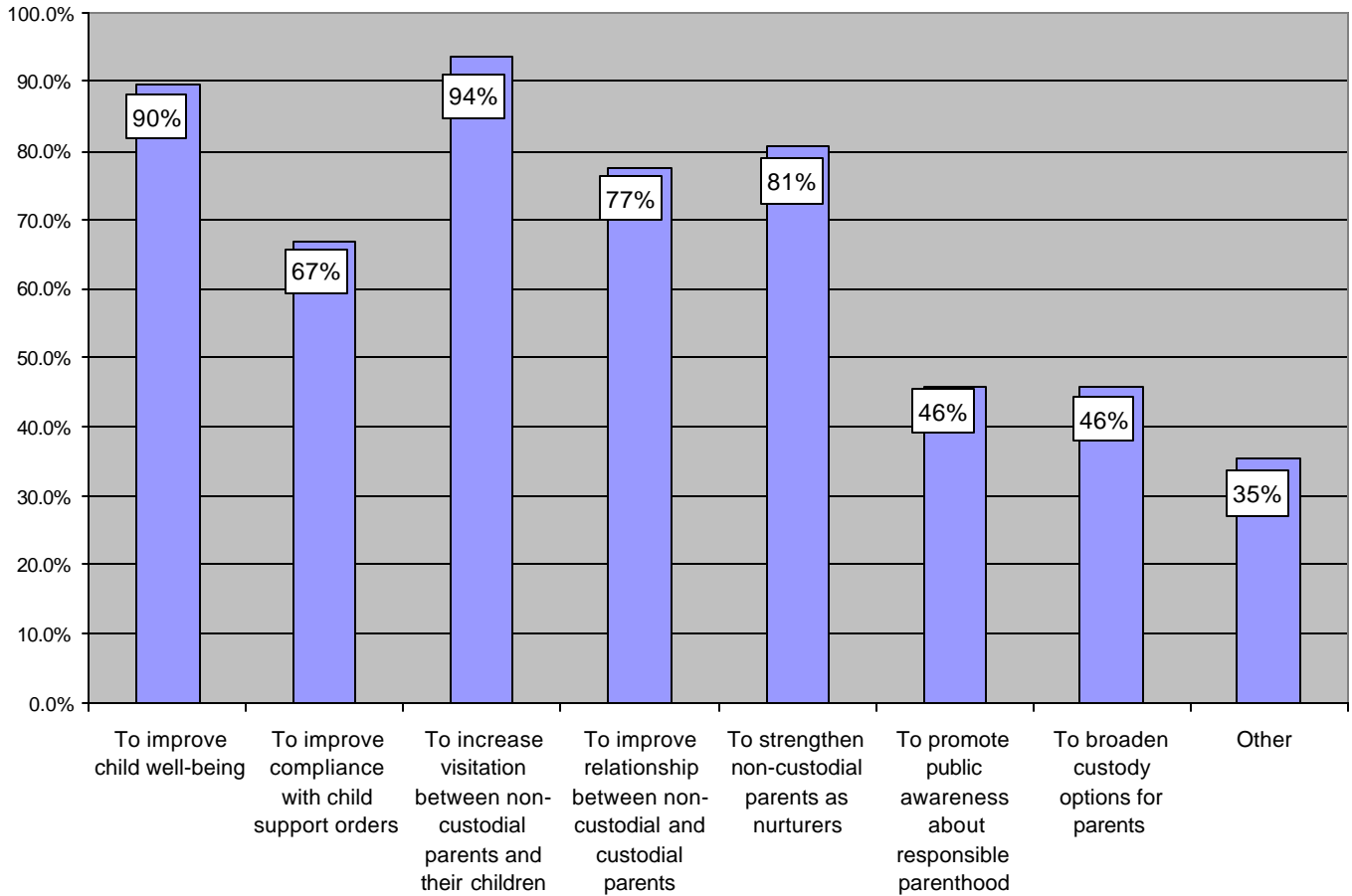
restraining orders,” and “to increase public awareness about [availability of] divorce mediation.” (See Exhibit 3: *Local Project Goals*).

## **Service Activities**

States and, thus, local projects have considerable flexibility in the kinds of service activities they can undertake with Access and Visitation grant funds. The regulations specify broad categories of eligible activities that include mediation, counseling, [parenting] education, development of parenting plans, development of guidelines for visitation and custody arrangements, and visitation enforcement. Under the term visitation enforcement, the regulations include monitored visitation, supervised visitation, therapeutic visitation, and neutral drop-off and pick-up. We have defined these terms below:

- ❖ *Monitored visitation*, which involves an outside individual assessing whether or not visitation occurred, relating progress or problems, and providing feedback;
- ❖ *Supervised visitation*, which is court-ordered visitation after an allegation of abuse, or other situations involving acrimony, in which an outside individual is present during the visitation session, and observing participants;
- ❖ *Therapeutic visitation*, which involves a “counselor” facilitating interactions between the non-custodial parent and the child; and
- ❖ *Neutral drop-off and pick-up*, which refers to a location other than the custodial parent’s home or relative’s home where the custodial parent can leave the child for the non-

custodial parent to pick-up for his/her visiting period, and vice versa.



\*Not all states reporting. This graph represents the 124 local projects that reported their project goals (N=124). Some projects reported multiple goals.

In any of the above identified visitation enforcement activities, the court may be notified when visitation fails to occur. In these cases, legal actions, such as a finding of contempt, can ensue.

States have funded, and local projects are offering, all these services, as well as other innovative services. Many local projects offer multiple service activities simultaneously, while some concentrate on one service. Three States are concentrating on a single service. Delaware and Hawaii are providing only visitation enforcement, and Puerto Rico is only providing counseling. Nine States have funded all eligible service activities. (See Exhibit 4: *Activities by State*, Exhibit 5: *Percent of Local Projects Conducting Each Activity*, and Exhibit 6: *Number of Local Projects Conducting Each Activity by State*.)

Of the 30 States reporting, 23 States have funded local projects that offer parenting education and 24 States have funded local projects that offer development of parenting plans. Twenty-four States have funded local projects that offer mediation, and 15 States have funded local projects that offer counseling. Sixteen States have funded local projects that help parents develop guidelines for visitation and custody arrangements.

Twenty-one States have funded local projects that offer visitation enforcement. Visitation enforcement includes any one of four types of



## Exhibit 4A Activities by State — FY 1997

State	Mediation	Counseling	Education	Develop- ment of Parenting Plans	Develop- ment of Visitation Guide-lines	Visitation Enforce- ment	Other
Arizona	✓		✓	✓			
California	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Colorado	✓		✓	✓			
Connecticut	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
District of Columbia						✓	
Delaware						✓	
Florida	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Georgia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hawaii						✓	
Illinois	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indiana	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kansas			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kentucky	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Louisiana			✓	✓			✓
Missouri	✓			✓	✓		
Mississippi	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Nebraska	✓			✓			
New Jersey	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
New York	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Ohio	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Oregon	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Puerto Rico		✓					
South Carolina	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tennessee	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Texas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Utah	✓				✓	✓	
Virginia	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Vermont	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Washington	✓		✓	✓			✓
West Virginia	✓		✓	✓			
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>18</b>

Note. At the time of this preliminary report, not all States had reported on their FY 1997 grants.

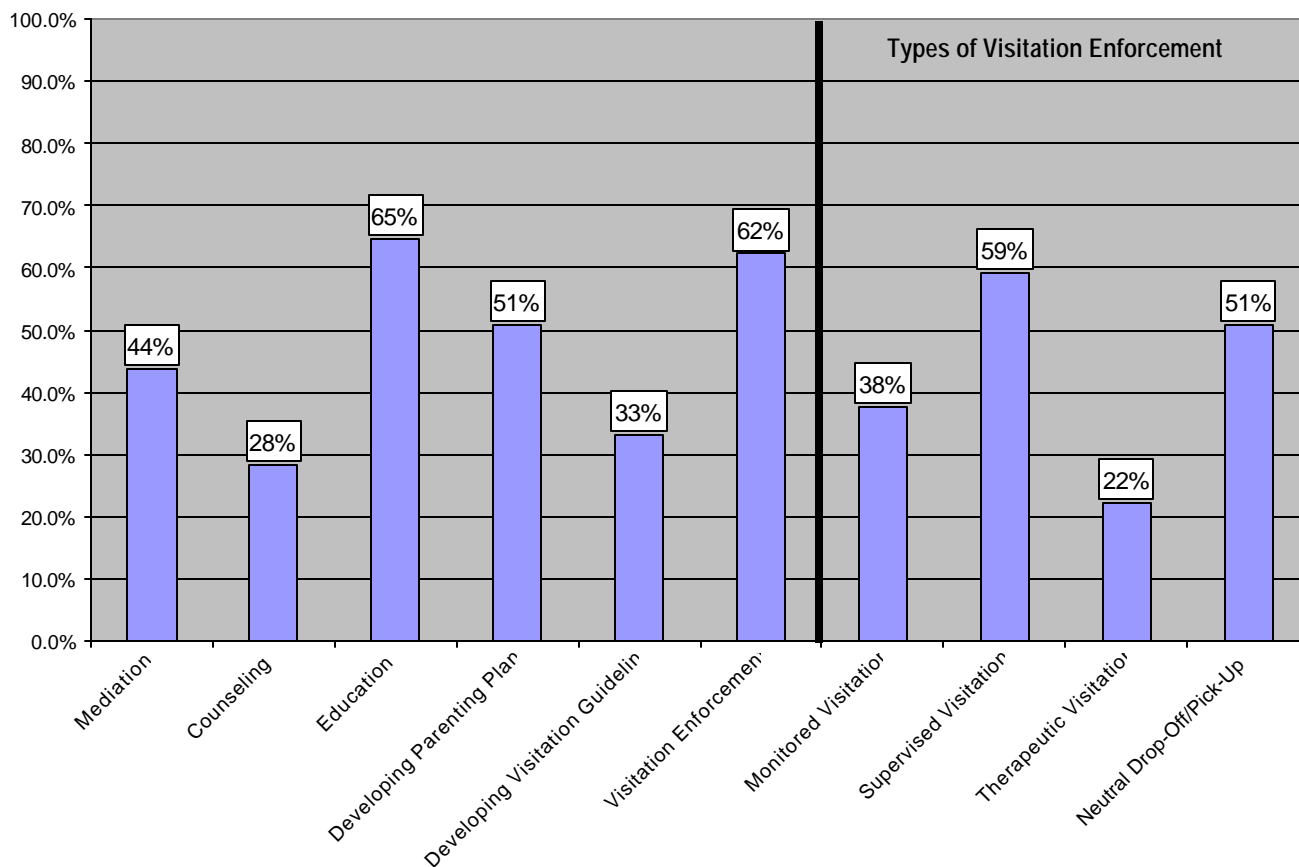
\*Some projects conduct multiple activities.

**Exhibit 4B**  
**State Visitation Enforcement Activities**  
**FY 1997**

State	Monitored Visitation	Supervised Visitation	Therapeutic Visitation	Neutral Drop-Off/Pick-Up
<b>Arizona</b>				
<b>California</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Colorado</b>				
<b>Connecticut</b>		✓	✓	
<b>District of Columbia</b>		✓		✓
<b>Delaware</b>	✓	✓		✓
<b>Florida</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Georgia</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Hawaii</b>	✓	✓		✓
<b>Illinois</b>		✓	✓	✓
<b>Indiana</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Kansas</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Kentucky</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Louisiana</b>				
<b>Missouri</b>				
<b>Mississippi</b>	✓	✓		✓
<b>Nebraska</b>				
<b>New Jersey</b>		✓	✓	✓
<b>New York</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Ohio</b>	✓	✓		✓
<b>Oregon</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Puerto Rico</b>				
<b>South Carolina</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Tennessee</b>				
<b>Texas</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Utah</b>	✓	✓		✓
<b>Virginia</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Vermont</b>	✓	✓		✓
<b>Washington</b>				
<b>West Virginia</b>				
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>

Note. At the time of this preliminary report, not all States had reported on their FY 1997 grants.

## Exhibit 5 Percent of Local Projects Conducting Each Activity FY 1997



Note. N=131

visitation enforcement: monitored visitation, supervised visitation, therapeutic visitation, and neutral drop-off and pick-up. Of the 21 States that offer visitation enforcement, all 21 States offer two or more of these types of visitation enforcement services, and 11 States offer all four services.

Nineteen States offer innovative access and visitation activities. For example, in Oregon one site reported developing a *Parenting Time* Web site. An Illinois project makes an attorney available in

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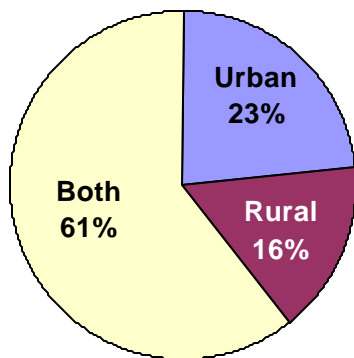
court to assist *pro se*<sup>1</sup> clients in drafting their visitation plans and in obtaining required court orders for access and visitation. Examples of other services include legal services for filing a visitation petition, teaching conflict resolution skills, providing transportation to visitation, and role playing the signs of depression and anger.

### Service Areas and Service Providers

Among the 30 States reporting data on access and visitation services to individuals, 26 States reported information on the service areas and providers for their 125 local projects. Among these local program sites, 23 percent served only urban areas, 16 percent served only rural areas, and 61 percent served areas that included both urban and rural populations (see Exhibit 7: *Service Area of Local Projects*).

A variety of entities administer the local access and visitation projects, including State agencies, non-profit entities, courts, local public agencies and other service provider/administrator (see Exhibit 8: *Service Providers of Local Projects*). States reported that non-profit entities and courts were the most prevalent administrator of local projects, serving as the service provider in 34 percent and 33 percent of local projects, respectively. Eight

**Exhibit 7**  
**Service Area of Local Projects**  
**FY 1997**



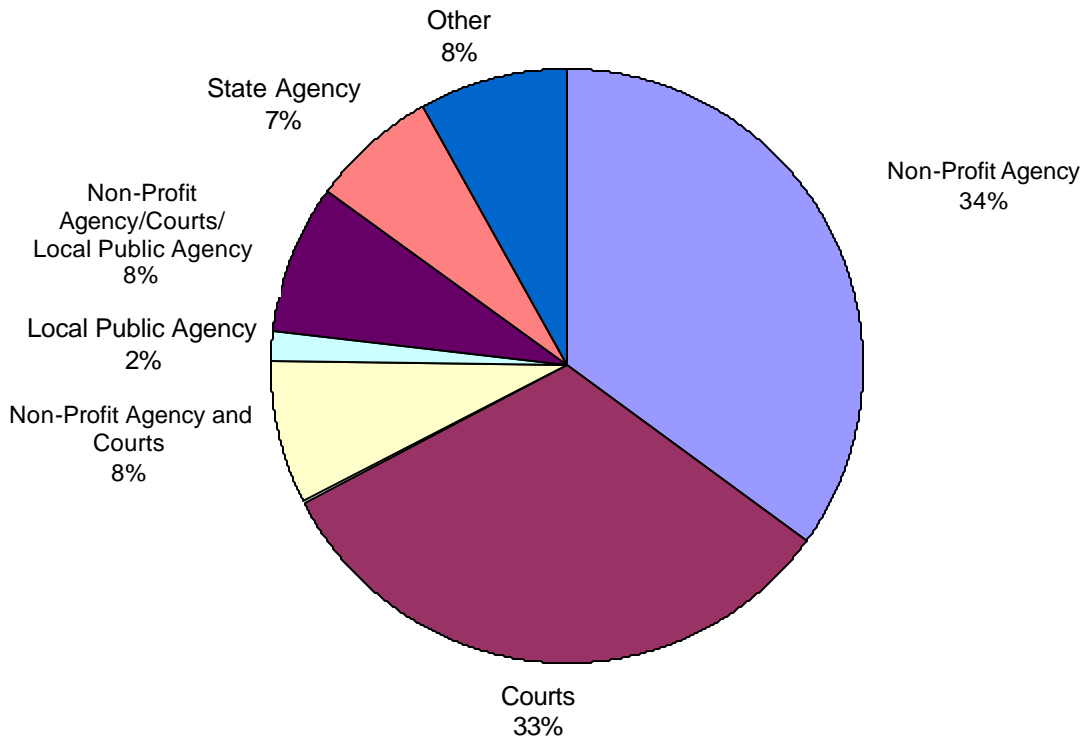
Note. N=125

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<sup>1</sup> *Pro se* clients are those representing themselves in court, without benefit of an attorney.

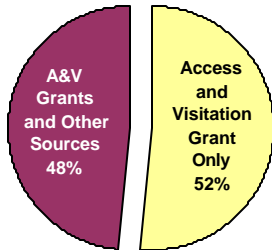
percent of projects were identified as partnership between the courts and a non-profit entity, and another eight percent of projects were administered through a joint effort of the courts, a non-profit entity, and a local public agency. Other service providers or administrators (eight percent) included for-profit organizations and State Universities. See Exhibit 8: *Service Providers of Local Projects* for a summary of the different service providers.

**Exhibit 8**  
**Service Providers of Local Projects**  
**FY 1997**



Note. N=128. Some projects are joint efforts of multiple entities.

**Exhibit 9  
Funding Sources for Access  
and Visitation Projects  
FY 1997**



Note. N=29 States

Access and Visitation grant funds may be used to fund stand-alone services or may be combined with other state and local funds to provide their child access and visitation services. Among the 29 States reporting, 14 States indicate they fund services with a combination of Access and Visitation grant funds and other funding sources.

## Combining Funding Sources

Access and Visitation (A&V) grant funds may be used to fund stand-alone services or may be combined with other state and local funds to provide their child access and visitation services. Among the 29 States responding to this question, 14 States (48 percent) indicated they fund services with a combination of Access and Visitation grants and other funding sources. On average, among States combining funding sources, 52 percent of the funds come from Access and Visitation grant funds. The survey did not solicit the source of those other funds, but anecdotal information from States suggests that one supplemental funding source is domestic violence grants from the Administration for Children and Families. See Exhibit 9: *Funding Sources for Access and Visitation Projects*.

## Mandatory or Voluntary Nature of Activities

Local Project Directors reported to States which of their service activities required mandatory participation, which permitted voluntary participation, and which were offered on both a mandatory and voluntary basis. As seen in Exhibit 10: *Mandatory and Voluntary Nature of Activities*, most of the services, except supervised visitation, were not exclusively mandatory. About half of the projects reported that counseling and the



development of parenting plans were exclusively voluntary. Many projects, however, reported offering most activities on both a mandatory and voluntary basis.

**EXHIBIT 10**  
**Mandatory and Voluntary Nature of Activities**  
**FY 1997**

ACTIVITY	PARTICIPATION BASIS		
	Mandatory Only	Voluntary Only	Both Mandatory and Voluntary
Mediation	12%	39%	49%
Counseling	16%	51%	33%
Education	30%	30%	41%
Visitation Enforcement	31%	22%	47%
• <i>Monitored Visitation</i>	32%	13%	54%
• <i>Supervised Visitation</i>	51%	8%	41%
• <i>Therapeutic Visitation</i>	29%	21%	50%
• <i>Neutral drop-off/pickup</i>	33%	14%	53%
Development of Parenting Plans	20%	48%	32%

Note. N=131.

**Sources of Referral**

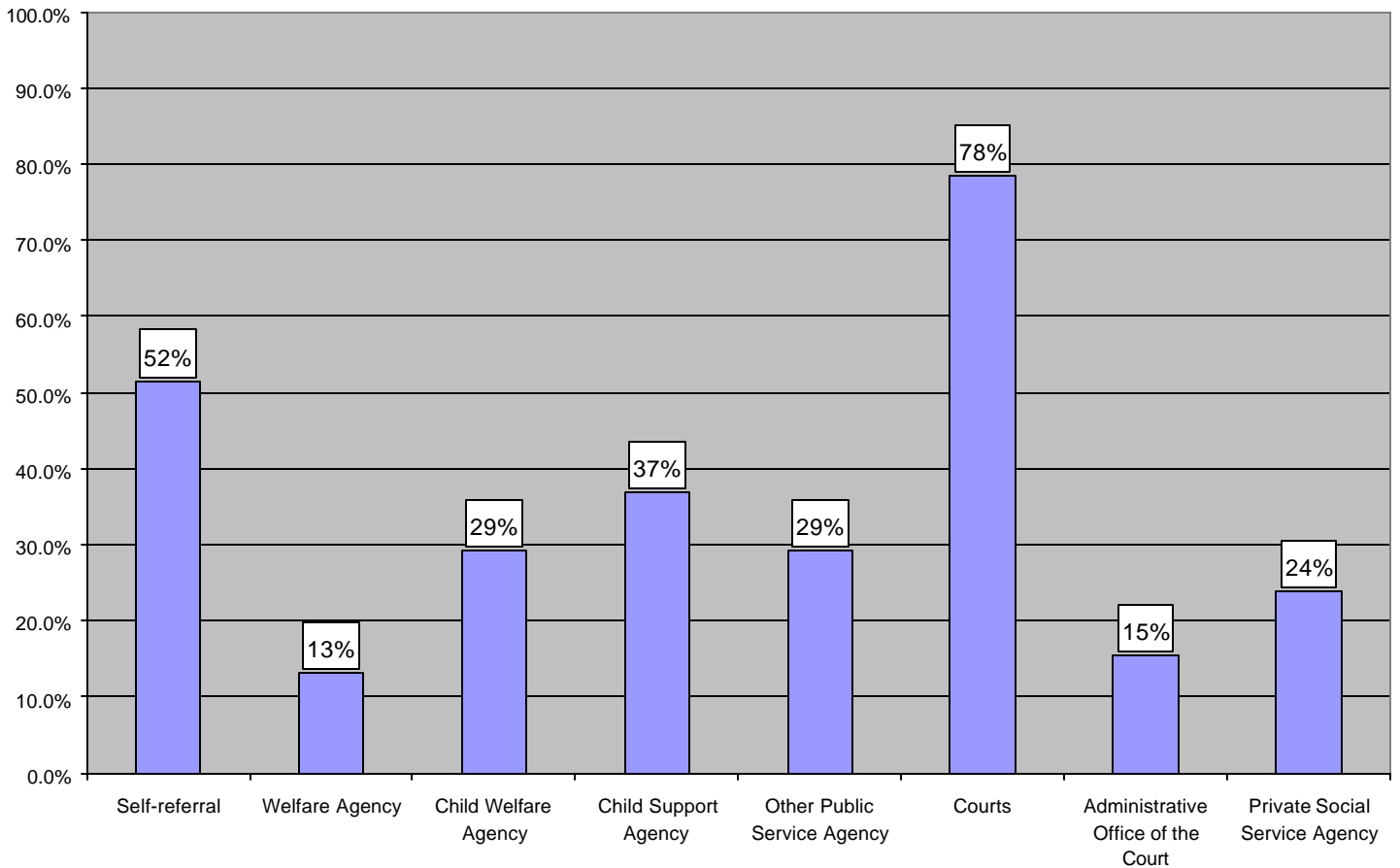
Participants are referred to local project offices from a wide variety of sources. Common sources of referral reported were:

- ❖ self-referral/individual initiative;
- ❖ welfare agency;
- ❖ child welfare agency;
- ❖ child support agency;

- ❖ other public social service agency;
- ❖ court or administrative office of the court;
- ❖ private social service organization; or
- ❖ other.

The primary entity referring clients to the five major service activities was the courts, followed by self-referral (see Exhibit 11: *Sources of Referral*). Seventy-eight percent of local projects received referrals from the courts and 52 percent of local projects received self-referrals. There was wide variety in the types of courts referring parents to services. Referrals come from Superior, Circuit, Family Law, and County Criminal courts, as well as Court Masters for the child support agency. Thirty-seven percent of local projects receive referrals from the child support agency. Twenty-nine percent of local projects receive referrals from the child welfare agency, 24 percent of referrals come from private social service organizations, and 13 percent receive referrals from the welfare agency.

## Exhibit 11 Sources of Referral to Local Projects FY 1997



Note. N=131

Other interesting sources of referral were reported. Georgia indicated that some referrals come from their fatherhood initiative projects, and from retail services such as the local barber shop. In Indiana programs received referrals from the District Attorney's office, attorneys, and volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for abused and neglected children. At a Nebraska project, some clients are referred by the Children's Rights Council, and at one New York project by school social workers. An Oregon project noted

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that some referrals come from other family members. A local project in Texas pointed to programs where guardians of the children and mediation service providers refer parents to access and visitation services.

## Intake Procedures

The predominant intake procedure involves interviews between the non-custodial parent and various program staff. One hundred and thirty of the 131 local projects reported on their intake procedures. Ninety-four (72 percent) local projects reported that an interview with both the custodial and non-custodial parent is conducted as part of the intake procedure for some activities. Interviews were also conducted with children in 39 percent of local projects. Some projects also conducted interviews with a judge or other court officer (24 percent), a mediator (25 percent), or another individual. At a Kentucky project, for instance, interviews were conducted with grandparents, stepparents, counselors and attorneys of the parents. Ohio projects sometimes interviewed Child Protective Services workers. In addition to interviews, other intake procedures included review of written referral information and mediators screening for domestic violence, emotional problems, and substance abuse. Written applications were used as part of the intake process in 48 percent of local projects.

## Length and Features of a Complete Service

Local sites were asked to report to States on the typical sequence or cycle of services offered to participants. A sequence or cycle was defined as a set number of days, weeks, or months that participants are supposed to continue in the service. Among the five principal service activities of mediation, counseling, education, visitation enforcement, and development of parenting plans, most activities (64 percent) did have a typical sequence or cycle. Mediation, for example, generally lasts for less than 4 weeks, while counseling tends to occur for 3 months. Parenting education lasts, on average, for less than 3 months, with a range of one 1-hour session to a 14 week class. Participation in the development of parenting plans generally is scheduled to continue until both parties agree on the provisions of the parenting plan.

Visitation enforcement cycles are more difficult to generalize, and elicited more “situational” responses. Often the courts determined the length of visitation enforcement. Common responses were “until the least restrictive level of visitation has been reached” or “depends upon the court order” or “until parents mutually agree on visitation” or “until the parent terminates.” Some local projects do have specific time frames for visitation enforcement. For example, one local project in

Vermont requires parents to continue weekly monitored and supervised visitation for one year, while a project in Georgia requires that visitation is established and maintained for 90 days.

Some local projects do have specific time frames for visitation enforcement. For example, one local project in Vermont requires parents to continue weekly monitored and supervised visitation for one year, while a project in Georgia requires that visitation is established and maintained for 90 days.

In addition to the typical sequence or cycle, the survey asked local sites to report on how long, on average, mothers and fathers actually participate and receive services. Again, mediation participation continued on average for less than 4 weeks and counseling continued for less than 3 months, with fathers and mothers participating for the same length of time. Participants continued in parenting education for less than four weeks with no difference between fathers' and mothers' participation. In fact, the vast majority of projects reported no difference between fathers' participation and mothers' participation. Furthermore, the length of time mothers and fathers actually received services closely approximated the full project cycle.

### **Completion, Follow-up and Sanctions**

Sites reported to the States on what constitutes *completion* of program services, what follow-up activities staff conduct with participants who have left the program, and what sanctions there are for mandatory participants who fail to comply or complete the program.

### *Completion*

The range of responses to what constitutes completion of program activities is broad. Several projects report that completion of mediation occurs when the partners reach agreement on a co-parenting or visitation plan, or one party terminates. Completion of parenting education is more quantifiable, and projects defined it as attendance at 6 hours of classes, or 14 sessions, or 6-11 weeks of attendance.

### *Follow-up*

Slightly more than half of local projects (54 percent) report that they *do not* follow up with participants who have left or completed the program. Sixteen States report that one or more projects systematically send client satisfaction surveys to parents, either by mail, telephone, or both. Ohio reports exit surveys following mediation and that the juvenile court follows up with 30-, 60-, and 90-day phone calls to parents.

### *Sanctions*

Sanctions vary widely for participants who drop out of program services, and 48 local projects (36 percent) impose no sanctions at all. When sanctions are imposed, they vary by State, by projects within a State, and by service. Of a total of 131 local projects submitting data, 83 (63 percent) report imposing sanctions for at least one service component. A common sanction is for the service agency to refer/report the offending parent back to

Sanctions vary widely for participants who drop out of program services, and 48 local projects impose no sanctions at all. When sanctions are imposed, they vary by State, by projects within a State, and by service. A common sanction is for the service agency to refer/report the offending parent back to court where there may be a finding of contempt. There, one project noted that the judge may suspend visitation privileges until compliance with program requirements is achieved.

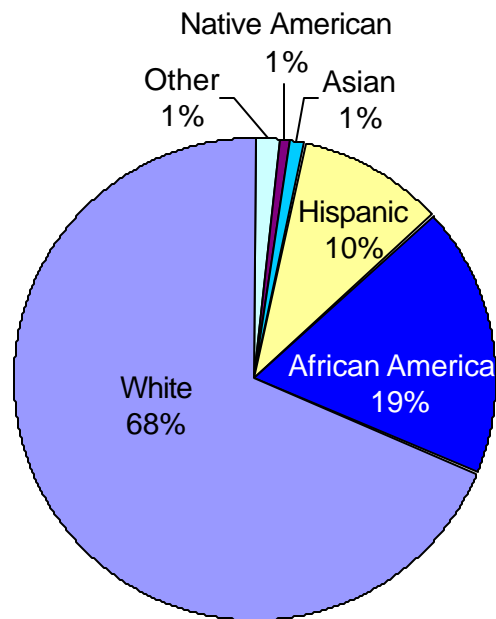
court, where there may be a finding of contempt. There, as one project noted, the judge may suspend visitation privileges until compliance with program requirements is achieved. The local project in Arkansas reported that in some areas where divorce education is mandated, the court will not set a hearing until the education course is completed. The Utah and West Virginia projects report that sanctions can include a change in custody of the child(ren).

### **Composition of Participants Served**

To determine who was being served in local projects, respondents were asked about the racial composition and marital status of participants. Across the 105 local projects reporting on the racial composition of participants, 69 percent of participants served were white (non-Hispanic), 19 percent were African-American, and 10 percent were Hispanic. Much smaller percentages of participants were Native American (1 percent) and Asian (1 percent). See Exhibit 12.



## Exhibit 12: Racial Composition of Participants in Local Projects FY 1997

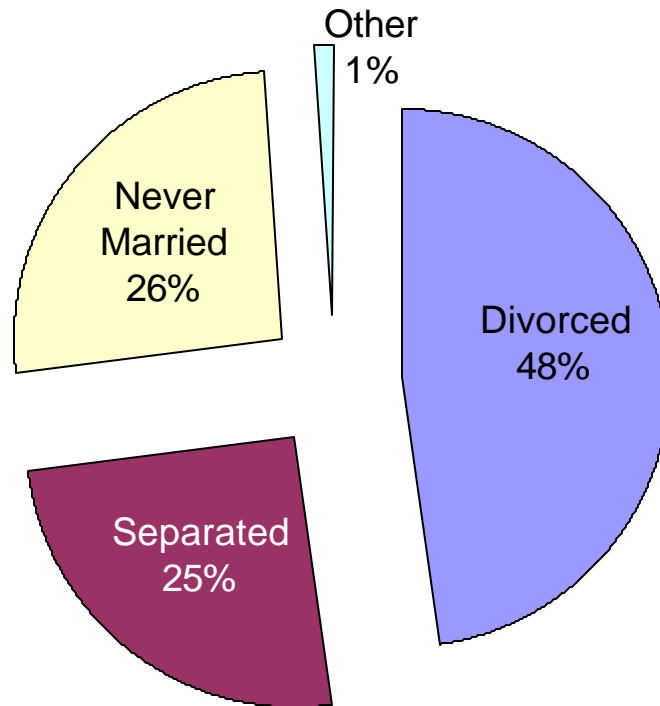


Note. N=105

Of interest to policymakers are data on participants' marital status, particularly as projects begin to reach out specifically to the never-married population. The Census Bureau reports that of the estimated 8 million families with child support awards, 20 percent have never been married. Among the 101 local projects reporting on the

marital status of participants, 26 percent were never married, 48 percent of participants were divorced, and 25 percent separated. Exhibit 13 summarizes the marital status of participants in local projects.

**Exhibit 13**  
**Marital Status of Participants in Local Projects**  
**FY 1997**



Note. N=101.

### **Participant Data**

Local project sites reported on the total numbers of applicants/referrals to program activities, total numbers of participants, and totals completing

program activities. A total of 109 project sites in 29 States and jurisdictions reported participant data. The results are presented in Exhibit 14.

Projects reported to States that a total of 19,454 participants were served across all services and that 11,714 participants completed program activities. Of those, the largest number — 10,130 — participated in parenting education and 8,408 completed this activity.

Due to the different tracking systems used by local projects during this first year of grants and different definitions of survey items, participant data were not always reported in a consistent manner. For example, some states defined “participant” as the number of mothers and father receiving services, while other states reported all individuals served, including children, grandparents, and other family members. Therefore, totals for each activity in Exhibit 13 do not always reflect the sum of mothers and fathers. Additionally, some states only recorded the number of families referred, while others counted the number of individuals referred. Therefore, the actual number of individuals referred is higher than Exhibit 14 represents.

Completion figures, represented in Exhibit 14, may under report the actual number of completions to be expected from the projects. Due to the length

**Exhibit 14  
Participant Data  
FY 1997**

ACTIVITY	APPLICANTS OR REFERRALS	PARTICIPANTS			THOSE COMPLETING PROGRAM ACTIVITIES		
		Total	Fathers	Mothers	Total	Fathers	Mothers
<b>TOTAL IN PROJECT</b>	21,770	19,454	8,492	9,178	11,714	5,306	5,325
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Fathers</b>	<b>Mothers</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Fathers</b>	<b>Mothers</b>
1. Mediation	4,334	3,787	1,142	1,419	1,810	765	932
2. Counseling	2,562	1,879	808	1,048	1,646	458	669
3. Education	12,996	10,130	4,609	5,236	8,408	3,902	4,462
4. Visitation Enforcement	1,229	816	399	417	374	176	189
<i>4a. Monitored Visitation</i>	1,307	878	448	430	442	231	201
<i>4b. Supervised Visitation</i>	4,451	3,476	1,787	1,689	1,213	593	567
<i>4c. Therapeutic Visitation</i>	320	333	167	166	99	61	38
<i>4d. Neutral drop-off/pickup</i>	1,021	780	335	331	308	107	129
5. Development of Parenting Plans	6,339	4,699	2,168	2,374	4,214	1,914	2,150
6. Other	1,837	1,264	388	399	681	94	104

Note. N=109

of the program for some activities (e.g., mediation programs often continue until an agreement is reached, not for a specific time period) and the later starting date for some local projects in this first year, many individuals may not have had sufficient time to complete program requirements. Data in subsequent years, therefore, should more accurately reflect how well participants were able to meet program requirements.

## **CONCLUSION**

All States (as well as the District of Columbia and eligible territories) participated in the program in FY 1997 (by applying for their full allocation of grant funds). This preliminary assessment of the first year of the Access and Visitation Grant Program demonstrates that States are serving a significant number of individuals — nearly 20,000 in the 29 States serving individual clients. Given that this is the first year of a brand new Federal/State initiative, these numbers are impressive. And the numbers served are likely to grow substantially, when the remaining States report.

States embraced creativity and innovation as reflected in the numbers of projects funded and the variation in project goals. The local projects, in turn, offered a wide variety of services to diverse clients, utilizing different types of service providers. States are using multi-faceted approaches to facilitate the program goal of increasing non-custodial parents' access to and visitation with their children. Parenting education and the development of parenting plans were the two most frequently used services and most of those referred completed their program.

Local projects represented a variety of service providers and the providers, in turn, served a diverse population in terms of racial composition and marital status. There is, for example, a balance of providers in urban and rural areas of the States. And it is noteworthy that approximately one-quarter of participants were never married (to the custodial parent of their children), as this group often has less access to these services than parents who are separated or divorced.

Finally, it should be remembered that this preliminary report only reflects reports from 33 of the 54 jurisdictions that received FY 1997 access and visitation grants. When reporting is complete, we anticipate that there will be a substantial increase in the number of participants served and additional diversity in the services provided. These trends will accomplish the program goal of increasing access and visitation services for non-custodial parents and their children.