

**FATHERS**



**AT WORK**

# *Working Dads*

FINAL REPORT ON THE FATHERS AT WORK INITIATIVE

SHAYNE SPAULDING, JEAN BALDWIN GROSSMAN AND DEE WALLACE



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Public/Private Ventures is a national leader in creating and strengthening programs that improve lives in low-income communities. We do this in three ways:

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## *Executive Summary*

**H**alf of all children in the United States with family incomes below the poverty line live with their mother, with their father living elsewhere (Sorensen 2003). Noncustodial fathers have an essential role to play—both financially and emotionally—in the well-being and support of their children, yet many are poor themselves and face multiple challenges, including low education levels, limited work experience and criminal records. These barriers make it difficult to succeed in the labor market and provide adequate support for their children.

During the past several decades, many efforts have focused on the crisis that lies at the intersection of proliferating single-parent households, absent fathers and poverty. In 2001, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation launched *Fathers at Work* to test approaches for helping young low-income noncustodial fathers provide for themselves and their children; the project was designed to inform practitioners and policymakers about effective interventions for this population. Six community-based workforce organizations from across the country were selected to participate and provided a combination of employment, child support and parenting services. Participants in *Fathers at Work* had an average age of 26 and were overwhelmingly men of color (about three quarters were African American and 18 percent were Hispanic); a majority had a criminal record. Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) was responsible for overseeing the initiative and conducting its evaluation and for creating a series of reports and tools for the field based on lessons from *Fathers at Work*. The final report, from which this summary is drawn, explores the strategies used by the six sites, presents evidence of the program model's effectiveness and offers recommendations for policy and practice.

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### CONTEXT

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From the 1970s to the 1990s, young men of color faced a number of labor market challenges, including declining real wages and increasing unemployment. At the same time, incarceration rates were on the rise, particularly for drug-related crimes, which often carried mandatory minimum sentences. A burgeoning “fatherhood movement” brought new attention to the growing number of fatherless households and the impact of this trend on American families and society. Meanwhile, policymakers sought to make low-income parents more financially responsible for their children by moving families off welfare and by strengthening the child support system in ways that affected families at all income levels.

Policy changes in the 1990s made it easier for states to locate absent fathers, garnish wages and impose penalties for nonpayment of child support. At the same time, most states continued to withhold the majority of the child support collected on behalf of families receiving public assistance (to reimburse welfare costs)—a practice that continues

to this day. As a result, some families receiving welfare are no better off when fathers pay child support. Many noncustodial fathers choose to make financial contributions to their children “informally” by giving money directly to the mother or by purchasing items for their children, rather than paying through the formal child support system.

Several research projects conducted during the 1990s examined approaches to helping noncustodial fathers participate in the formal economy and support their children. Three key evaluations preceded Fathers at Work and offered insights into how to structure Fathers at Work’s programs and services: the Young Unwed Fathers Project (YUFP), Parents’ Fair Share (PFS) and the Office of Child Support Enforcement’s Responsible Fatherhood Programs (RFP). Each provided employment services, addressed child support issues and offered parenting instruction. While these initiatives suggested important lessons about how to shape Fathers at Work, the impact of the programs was either minimal or not measured, leaving many unanswered questions about what works for serving this population.

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## THE FATHERS AT WORK INITIATIVE

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Fathers at Work was created to help young noncustodial fathers achieve three principal goals:

- ◆ Increase their employment and earnings;
- ◆ Become more involved in their children’s lives; and
- ◆ Increase their financial support of their children.

In addition, the initiative sought to explore the role community-based workforce development programs could play in meeting the needs of young fathers.

Organizations were required to demonstrate a history of strong employment services and a track record of working with young, low-income men (Charles Stewart Mott Foundation 2000). While organizations were not expected to start with extensive knowledge of the child support system, they had to develop formal partnerships with their respective local child support enforcement agencies. The six organizations had to commit to serve at least 100 men—placing at least 75 of them into jobs—each year for three years and to provide a minimum of 12 months of retention services. Organizations were also asked to commit to increasing parental engagement and child support compliance. Eligible participants were noncustodial fathers 30 years old or younger earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Two of the six selected organizations exclusively served noncustodial fathers who were formerly incarcerated.

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## THE EVALUATION

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Fathers at Work sites launched their mix of employment, fatherhood and child support services prior to the official start of the evaluation, enabling them to identify and address challenges associated with implementing new programs. The organizations began enrolling fathers for the evaluation between January and June of 2001, and the demonstration continued for three years at each site, through June of 2004.

While the evaluation was initially designed as an outcomes study—analyzing changes in outcomes over time—P/PV later sought to identify a comparison group that could help us understand the participant outcomes we were observing. We were able to find two comparison groups to serve as benchmarks against which we could compare the changes experienced by Fathers at Work participants. Using a statistical method (propensity score matching), we selected two groups of noncustodial fathers (one from the control group of MDRC’s Parents’ Fair Share demonstration and one from the Fragile Families survey dataset) who were very similar to the Fathers at Work participants on a number of different dimensions, such as their age, race, criminal conviction status, prior work experience, the age of their child, etc. We then compared outcomes of the Fathers at Work participants with outcomes of the fathers in the other two datasets. While we cannot be absolutely certain that any differences between the groups’ outcomes are due to the program (because neither of our comparison groups is *exactly* like the Fathers at Work participants), our approach does allow us to explore the promise of the Fathers at Work model beyond what would be possible using a simple outcomes study.

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## THE PARTICIPANTS

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While Fathers at Work participants were drawn from five different cities across the country, the barriers and challenges they faced were remarkably similar. A combination of low education levels, spotty work histories and criminal records created formidable obstacles to financial stability, which likely made it difficult for them to support their children. Furthermore, the fathers had unstable living conditions—many had recently been homeless—and had few people they could go to for help in getting a job. The fathers reported frequent contact and strong relationships with their children but also wanted to spend more time with them. Four out of ten participants were enrolled in the formal child support system, but most provided informal support.

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## THE PROGRAMS AND IMPLEMENTATION

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The organizations chosen for the demonstration were all mature and successful employment and training organizations, though they had not offered the triumvirate of services that characterized the Fathers at Work model: employment, child support and fatherhood services. Although all these programs followed a common model of service provision, sites were given the flexibility to tailor their programs to reflect local circumstances and the particular population served. While all six organizations offered job placement services and based fatherhood workshops on the same curriculum, they diverged in their provision of skills training, the intensity of available fatherhood services and the way they worked with child support.



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## THE ORGANIZATIONS

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The six organizations selected to participate in the initiative were:

**Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)**—Located in downtown Manhattan, CEO has been providing employment and training services to people released from jail or prison since the late 1970s. At the core of CEO's employment strategy is a paid transitional work program. As a part of Fathers at Work, CEO offered a weeklong pre-employment and life-skills training, individualized job development services, fatherhood workshops, child support advocacy and family mediation services.

**Impact Services, Inc. (Impact)**—Since 1974, Impact has offered training programs for low-income people in Philadelphia and its surrounding areas. All of Impact's Fathers at Work participants lived in residential work-release facilities and were expected to find employment and adhere to elements of an individualized release plan. For child support enforcement, Impact developed a unique relationship with the Pennsylvania Family Court, streamlining court processes for its participants.

**Rubicon Programs, Inc. (Rubicon)**—Located in Richmond, CA, Rubicon has been providing a wide array of social services—including housing assistance, mental health services and other support services—since its founding in 1973. Rubicon's Fathers at Work offerings included job readiness and skills training, job placement services, peer support groups and on-site child support assistance provided through a partnership with the Contra Costa Department of Child Support Services (DCSS).

**Support and Training Result in Valuable Employees (STRIVE)**—STRIVE is a nonprofit job training and placement organization that serves low-income residents in Chicago and is part of a national network of affiliated organizations of the same name.<sup>1</sup> Started in 1990, STRIVE Chicago's services consist of four weeks of classroom-based soft skills training, followed by rapid placement into a job and two years of retention services. Through Fathers at Work, the organization also offered parenting support groups for men and women and had an active alumni group.

**Total Action Against Poverty (TAP)**—TAP was founded in 1965 as the designated community-action agency serving the Roanoke Valley in southwest Virginia. TAP operates more than 30 programs, including a wide range of job training and educational services, known collectively as This Valley Works. Core Fathers at Work services included individualized job placement, fatherhood support groups and leadership development activities. In addition, TAP had a staff person dedicated to addressing child support issues who acted as a quasi-employee of the Virginia Office of Child Support Enforcement.

**Vocational Foundation, Inc. (VFI)**—VFI was founded in 1936 to help New York City's disadvantaged youth achieve educational and employment goals. VFI has operated programs for young fathers since 1984, building upon this experience to develop its new Young Fathers program as part of Fathers at Work. Participants were each supported by a primary case manager, called a Career Advisor, who provided career counseling, crisis intervention and resource referrals. Career Advisors also conducted fatherhood workshops and coordinated with child support enforcement, and they provided follow-up support after participants completed the program.

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## THE STRATEGIES

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The following is a summary of the strategies used by the six Fathers at Work sites:

### RECRUITMENT

The organizations enrolled 1,018 participants during the initiative, compared with the goal of 1,800 (300 per organization over the three years of the demonstration). They developed a variety of innovative approaches to attract participants—largely in response to the challenges they encountered—and devoted substantially more resources to recruitment than initially planned. Recruitment strategies included: staff time dedicated to attracting participants, strategic partnerships, the creation of attractive marketing materials and reliance on engaged program participants to draw others to the program.

### EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Each organization was committed to providing employment preparation, placement and retention support to enable young fathers to find, keep and advance in jobs. Most of the organizations focused their employment efforts on short-term job readiness training and job search assistance; limited skills training and paid transitional work were also offered. All the sites were expected to provide retention support for 12 months after participants completed the program. Sites experimented with several efforts to develop “alumni” groups—as a strategy to support the continuing development of fathers and families as well as job retention—throughout the demonstration.

### FATHERHOOD SERVICES

All sites initially based their fatherhood services on *Fatherhood Development*, a curriculum offered by the National Project for Community Leadership (NPCL)—formerly the National Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Planning—a partner in Fathers at Work.<sup>2</sup> This approach uses peer support groups and workshops to teach parenting and communication skills and to provide an outlet for “venting” and troubleshooting in a safe space with others in similar situations.

Each program defined a core set of workshops for participants to attend in order to show progress; beyond these required workshops, however, some sites reported difficulties in keeping participants engaged in this aspect of the program. In addition to providing training in fatherhood skills, the programs also worked to provide appropriate outlets for fathers to interact with their children. They also tried to help fathers build more positive relationships with the mothers of their children through mediation services and counseling with children’s mothers as well as training staff to teach team parenting.

### CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

As part of the initiative, each organization was required to develop a formal relationship with its respective child support enforcement agency to help program participants meet their obligations. These partnerships were also seen as critical for supporting young fathers in their transition to financial stability. Variations in state child support policy and practice meant that each organization developed its own distinct partnership. Fathers at Work programs and child support agencies worked to:

- ◆ Arm fathers with accurate information about child support,
- ◆ Convince fathers of the importance of providing formal support,
- ◆ Modify child support orders,
- ◆ Set reserve or minimum child support orders,
- ◆ Consolidate petitions on multiple child support cases,
- ◆ Reduce penalties for arrears,
- ◆ Offer on-site paternity establishment, and
- ◆ Assist with other issues as needed.

Fathers at Work programs were challenged by the fact that—due to federal and state policies that limit the portion of child support that goes to families on welfare—many fathers wanted to avoid the formal system and preferred to pay informally.

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## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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While there were differences in the strategies used by participating sites, all six implemented a model that included employment, child support and fatherhood services. Findings from our evaluation suggest that this model of combined services holds promise for young noncustodial fathers and their families:

### EMPLOYMENT

- ◆ Fathers at Work participants earned \$11,025 per year at follow-up, about twice as much as comparison group fathers earned at a comparable point in time. These earnings were also \$4,602 more than Fathers at Work participants made during the year prior to enrollment in the program.

### FATHERHOOD

- ◆ The likelihood that participating fathers visited their child in the month before the follow-up survey was similar to that seen in the comparison groups and unchanged from when Fathers at Work participants entered the programs; the quality of the fathers' relationships with their children was also similar to what was reported by the comparison groups.
- ◆ Fathers at Work participants reported more arguments with the mothers of their children than did comparison group fathers. It is possible that the fatherhood workshops increased fathers' interest in and opinions about the well-being of their children, thus creating additional conflict about child-rearing issues.

### CHILD SUPPORT

- ◆ Participants with support orders in place paid an average of \$90.32 in child support in the month before the follow-up interview, significantly more than was paid by comparison group fathers with support orders in place (an average of \$38.13). Participants' payments grew significantly between baseline (about \$32 per month) and follow-up.

- ◆ The average amount of informal support—money given directly to the mother rather than through the formal child support system—reported by the Fathers at Work participants was about the same as that reported by comparison group fathers at follow-up (\$113 compared with \$112), even though the participants were paying more formal support. The percentage of Fathers at Work participants who paid informally also did not differ from the comparison group.

In sum, comparisons with similar young noncustodial fathers suggest that the Fathers at Work programs may have had a strong effect on earnings and payment of child support.

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## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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These results suggest several directions for the future of policy, programs and research related to low-income noncustodial fathers:

- 1. Public dollars could be effectively invested to provide employment and child support services, such as those provided to Fathers at Work dads, through well-established, experienced workforce organizations.** Fathers at Work participants faced a range of interrelated challenges. They knew that getting a job could enable them to provide financial support to their children, but participation in the formal economy might also trigger wage garnishment or other penalties. Fathers said they were interested in providing financial and emotional support for their children, but contentious relationships with the mothers of their children sometimes made this difficult or impossible. The Fathers at Work programs helped participants navigate these challenges. While our findings do not suggest one particular approach to providing employment or child support services, they do point to the potential of providing employment, child support and fatherhood assistance through a single community-based organization with strong linkages to public child support agencies.
- 2. Resources should be invested in strategies that help fathers access higher paying jobs.** While the finding that the fathers earned about \$5,000 more than they would have without the program is certainly significant, fathers still made only \$11,025 annually—barely above the poverty line for a family of one. These financial struggles may, in large part, be a reflection of changes in the labor market over the past several decades, including declining employment prospects for young men, fewer family-sustaining jobs that do not require at least some postsecondary education and an increase in the number of low-wage, service sector jobs. While there are not simple policy solutions, further exploration is needed to identify employment strategies that can succeed in lifting such fathers and their children out of poverty. Several of the sites experimented with some skills training and transitional jobs, but the majority of participants primarily received direct placement services and minimal job readiness training. Our research raises the question of whether a robust skills training component or subsidized work for all participants could have resulted in even stronger employment gains.
- 3. Because the findings related to fatherhood were not significant, more research is needed to understand what strategies might be most effective for improving parenting skills.** Participating in Fathers at Work did not seem to change how fathers viewed their relationships with their children or the way they reported interacting with their children. It is unclear what adjustments in strategy might be needed to

achieve more positive outcomes in these areas. While three of the Fathers at Work organizations tried to engage mothers in the programs and address issues of parental conflict, these enhancements were implemented later in the demonstration and were not a focus of service delivery. A stronger, more deliberate emphasis on both parents might yield more positive results in terms of improving parenting skills. While the Fathers at Work strategies did not appear to have an effect on fatherhood outcomes, our research suggests that there may be a role for peer support in attracting and retaining low-income men in employment programs.

- 4. States should pass through more child support money to families.** For the third of participants whose children received welfare, the additional income contributed by the father resulted in only a very small increase in the support their families received. Aware of this possibility, some fathers may have chosen to remain outside the child support system (that is, not establishing formal orders), as was demonstrated by the fact that there was no change from baseline to follow-up in the percentage of fathers with formal support orders.

While more research is needed, the evaluation of Fathers at Work suggests that such programs could make a real difference for young low-income fathers and their families. However, more than eight years after Fathers at Work was launched, most of the organizations that participated in the project have eliminated or scaled back their child support and fatherhood services. Without the specific allocation of funds, programs were unable to maintain their efforts in these areas; current funding mechanisms make it difficult to offer this intensive set of services to fathers. Given the results of this evaluation, policymakers and funders should consider new ways to support this type of programming. Legislation recently reintroduced in Congress may provide that opportunity.<sup>3</sup>

## *Introduction*

**H**alf of all children with family incomes below the poverty line live with their mother, with their father living elsewhere (Sorensen 2003). Children born into single-parent households are at higher risk of repeating grades in elementary school, dropping out of high school and being out of work as young adults; girls raised in such households are twice as likely to become teenage mothers (McLanahan, Sandefur 1994). Clearly, noncustodial fathers have an essential role to play—both financially and emotionally—in the well-being and support of their children.

Child support, in particular, represents a potentially critical source of income—for some, the difference between poverty and relative financial stability (Sorensen, Zibman 2000). Almost half of all children born in the US today will be eligible for child support before they reach the age of 16 (Fertig et al. 2006). However, of the nearly 11 million fathers who do not live with their children, two thirds do not pay any formal child support (Sorensen, Zibman 2001).

Equally important is the role that fathers can play in the development and upbringing of children. They act as role models, teach core values and essential skills, provide discipline, and nurture and care for their children. Yet, despite the fact that most noncustodial fathers report wanting to stay engaged in the lives of their children at birth and custodial moms generally say they welcome their involvement, research suggests that a large percentage lose contact with their children over time: Only 58 percent of children ages 12 to 18 who were born into single-parent households report having contact with a nonresident father in the previous year (Koball, Principe 2002).

Research has largely dispelled the myth that noncustodial fathers are “deadbeat dads”—men who have the ability to support their children but simply refuse to do so. Of the more than 7 million noncustodial fathers who do not pay child support, 2.5 million are poor themselves and thus have limited capacity to provide financial support for their children. In 1997, more than 40 percent of poor fathers had less than a high school education and just 7 percent had any education beyond high school. Even more striking, 30 percent of these men were incarcerated. For the men who were not incarcerated, employment rates and earnings were low—only 43 percent had worked during the previous 12 months, and average annual earnings for those who worked were just over \$5,600 (Sorensen, Zibman 2001). The inability or failure to contribute financially may lead some noncustodial fathers to withdraw from their children because they cannot fulfill their role as provider, and custodial mothers may restrict access because they are not receiving the necessary financial support (Claessens 2007).

Over the past several decades, many efforts have focused on the crisis that lies at the intersection of proliferating single-parent households, absent fathers and poverty. President Barack Obama has talked openly about his own personal story of growing up without his father and has supported programs and policies that encourage fathers to be actively involved in their children’s lives. As a senator, he wrote legislation (unpassed) with Senator Evan Bayh—who recently reintroduced the bill—aimed at

providing greater financial support to families and giving fathers the tools to be actively involved in their children’s lives.<sup>4</sup> As president, Obama created a Policy Council within the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships that is charged with addressing fatherhood issues. Emerging research will play an important role in guiding public officials’ efforts to develop effective fatherhood policies and programs—i.e., ones that result in significantly more noncustodial fathers who provide emotional and financial support for their children.

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation launched Fathers at Work in 2001 to test approaches for helping young low-income noncustodial fathers provide for their children and emerge from poverty; the project was designed to inform practitioners and policymakers about effective interventions for this population. Six community-based workforce organizations from across the country were selected to participate in the initiative and provided a combination of employment, child support and parenting services. The programs operated in five cities: Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) and Vocational Foundation, Inc., (VFI) in New York City; Impact Services, Inc., in Philadelphia; Rubicon Programs, Inc., in Richmond, CA; Support and Training Result in Valuable Employees (STRIVE)—now a part of Harborquest—in Chicago; and Total Action Against Poverty (TAP) in Roanoke, VA. Participants in Fathers at Work had an average age of 26 and were overwhelmingly men of color (about three quarters were African American and 18 percent were Hispanic); a majority had a criminal record. Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) was responsible for overseeing the initiative and conducting its evaluation and for creating a series of reports and tools for the field based on lessons from Fathers at Work (see below). This final report explores the strategies used by the six sites, presents evidence of the program model’s effectiveness and offers reflections on the future of this work for policy and practice.

### Other Reports and Tools from the Fathers at Work Initiative

- ◆ ***Going to Work with a Criminal Record: Lessons from the Fathers at Work Initiative***, by Dee Wallace and Laura Wyckoff. This guide provides lessons and tools for workforce organizations seeking to connect formerly incarcerated people with employment.
- ◆ ***Navigating the Child Support System: Lessons from the Fathers at Work Initiative***, by Laura Wyckoff, Mary McVay and Dee Wallace. This guide provides a basic introduction to child support enforcement and shares tips, tools and cautions for workforce organizations that aim to help noncustodial fathers understand and manage their obligations.
- ◆ ***Leaving the Streets: Young Fathers Move from Hustling to Legitimate Work***, by Lauren J. Kotloff. Based on an interview study conducted with Fathers at Work participants who had relied on “hustling” as a source of income, this report examines ongoing challenges the men faced and suggests recommendations for programs working with similar populations.
- ◆ ***Young Fathers Video and Workshop Guide***. This two-disc package, featuring the award-winning Fathers at Work documentary and an array of discussion guides, activities and lesson plans, is designed for use in employment or reentry programs or in parenting or marriage workshops.

For more information, please visit [www.ppv.org](http://www.ppv.org).

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## SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLICY CONTEXT

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In the decades leading up to the start of Fathers at Work, young men of color faced a number of labor market challenges, including declining real wages and increasing unemployment. At the same time, incarceration rates were skyrocketing, particularly for drug-related crimes, which often carried mandatory minimum sentences. A burgeoning “fatherhood movement” brought new attention to the growing number of fatherless households and the impact of this trend on American families and society. Meanwhile, policymakers sought to make low-income parents more financially responsible for their children by moving families off of welfare and by strengthening the child support system in ways that affected families at all income levels.

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### CHANGES IN FAMILY STRUCTURE

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The changes in the structure of American families that have occurred over the past several decades are well documented. Not only are divorce rates in the US high—half of all marriages end in divorce—but out-of-wedlock births have become more and more prevalent (Castro Martin, Bumpass 1989). In 1999, just before the implementation of Fathers at Work, it was estimated that a third of all children were born out of wedlock, up from just 3.8 percent in 1940 (Ventura, Bachrach 2000). More recent data suggest this trend has escalated during the years following the demonstration, with nearly 40 percent of children now born out of wedlock (Ventura 2009).

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### LABOR MARKET CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG MEN

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Just as the structure of the American family has changed, so has the labor market—in ways that have tended to negatively impact young, low-income men, particularly those who are African American. These men frequently encounter discrimination and often lack the education, skills and experience to compete in the job market. Since the 1970s, there have been declines in men’s real wages, especially for those with less education. In the 1990s, low-income women fared much better in the labor market compared with their male counterparts (Richer et al. 2003). And, despite general economic growth during that decade, the gap between the employment and earnings for less-educated, African American men and those of their white and Latino counterparts widened (Holzer et al. 2004).

As wages were declining, incarceration rates among young, African American men were on the rise. Incarceration creates additional employment challenges, not only due to time lost from the labor market, but also because of legal barriers to work in certain occupations and discrimination by employers against individuals with criminal records (Holzer et al. 2004).

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### THE FATHERHOOD MOVEMENT

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As the divorce rate climbed, along with the percentage of out-of-wedlock births, a movement emerged in the 1990s to address the issue of fatherless households. The “fatherhood movement” involved a disparate collection of individuals and organizations representing a diversity of perspectives. Some were interested primarily in promoting



marriage (decreasing out-of-wedlock births, increasing marriage rates and making it more difficult for people to get divorced); others focused on education and training programs that could help low-income fathers provide financial support for their children; and still others were concerned with the rights of noncustodial fathers, seeking changes to child custody, child support and divorce rules they believed interfered with fathers' involvement in their children's lives (Koch 2000).

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## WELFARE AND CHILD SUPPORT REFORM

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In the 1990s, the welfare and child support systems were also undergoing profound changes. While several efforts during the 1980s had aimed to improve these systems, none were as sweeping as the changes included in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). PRWORA created a system of time-limited benefits, called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), with an emphasis on rapid job placement. These changes primarily impacted custodial parents, who were more likely to be mothers. However, the act also included several provisions pertaining to noncustodial fathers, including the creation of "new hire directories" to make it easier for state and local child support agencies to garnish wages, increased enforcement of license revocation for failure to pay support, revisions to the paternity establishment process and changes regarding the amount of child support passed through to families receiving and leaving welfare. Before PRWORA, states had been required to pass through the first \$50 in child support paid to families receiving welfare, with most states retaining the remaining dollars to reimburse welfare costs. PRWORA eliminated the \$50 pass-through requirement and, at the same time, demanded that states transfer more to families leaving welfare (who often owe for back payments and interest) than those who remained on the rolls (Turetsky 2005).<sup>5</sup>

The outcomes of the 1996 child support changes have been mixed. On one hand, research suggests that the reforms yielded important gains for certain families, particularly those headed by never-married women earning less than 300 percent of the federal poverty threshold (Sorensen, Oliver 2002). From 1996 to 2001, there was an increase in the percentage of poor families who received support—from 31 to 36 percent—and an increase in the average amount paid—from \$4,390 to \$4,650 (Sorensen 2003). On the other hand, disincentives still existed for fathers to pay through the formal system. This was because—both before and in the years following the passage of PRWORA—most states withheld the majority of the child support collected on behalf of families receiving public assistance. As a result, some families receiving welfare are no better off when fathers pay child support. Many noncustodial fathers choose to contribute financially to their children by giving money directly to the mother or by purchasing items for their children, rather than paying through the formal child support system. Custodial mothers receiving welfare also may prefer an informal arrangement if it enables them to receive more than their benefit checks. Finally, more aggressive enforcement after PRWORA—while associated with increases in child support payments for many families—may have also created disincentives for noncustodial parents to participate in the formal economy (Livingston, Turetsky 2007).

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## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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Since Fathers at Work was launched in 2001, there have been additional changes in federal and state policy that impact noncustodial fathers. The most significant were provisions of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, which allowed states to pass through 100 percent of support payments to families on welfare, although there were provisions making it financially burdensome for states to do so.<sup>6</sup> There remain great variations in state policies governing enforcement and the amount passed through to families. Currently, half of all states pass through at least some support payments; some pass through none; and others have experimented with passing through all of the money paid by fathers to families who receive or have received welfare (Turetsky 2008).<sup>7</sup> The act also included \$50 million per year over five years to support responsible fatherhood programs (Turetsky 2006), typically aimed at helping noncustodial fathers succeed in the labor market so they can provide more support for their children or making it easier for fathers to provide such support—for example, through debt forgiveness in exchange for regular payments.<sup>8</sup> However, without a full pass-through, fathers may not see the value in fulfilling their obligations through the formal system because only a portion of what they contribute makes it to their family. Even those whose children do not receive TANF may choose to avoid the formal child support system because of harsh enforcement mechanisms; this may be especially true for those who have had contact with the criminal justice system.

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## PAST RESEARCH ON PROGRAMS FOR NONCUSTODIAL FATHERS

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Since the early 1990s, several research projects have examined approaches to helping noncustodial fathers participate in the formal economy and support their children. Three key evaluations preceded Fathers at Work and offered insights into how to structure programs and services. Each initiative attempted to assist noncustodial fathers and their children by providing employment services, addressing child support issues and offering parenting instruction. While these initiatives suggested important lessons about how to shape Fathers at Work, the impact of the programs was either minimal or not measured, leaving many unanswered questions about what works for serving this population. A fourth study relevant to Fathers at Work was the Partners for Fragile Families demonstration, which was sponsored by the Office of Child Support Services at the US Department of Health and Human Services and the Ford Foundation and evaluated by the Urban Institute. However, because implementation for this demonstration began in 2000, roughly the same time that Fathers at Work was launched, results were not yet available to inform the design of Fathers at Work.<sup>9</sup> The three studies that informed the design of Fathers at Work were:

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### THE YOUNG UNWED FATHERS PROJECT (YUFP)

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Launched in 1991 by P/PV and funded by several major foundations and the US Department of Labor, this project was aimed at testing local systems for serving young fathers. Lead agencies were required to offer education, training and employment, parenting and case management services with the goal of achieving improvements in parenting skills, labor market prospects and payment of child support. While P/PV's evaluation was not designed to measure program impacts, it revealed how difficult it was to recruit noncustodial

fathers, a challenge experienced by program operators in each of the subsequent demonstrations. Many potential participants were not interested in joining a program that required them to enter the formal child support system, leading to a change in the demonstration's protocols: Sites were asked only to suggest—but not require—engagement with the system.

Findings from the evaluation also showed how regulatory barriers in the child support and job training systems—and the lack of coordination between them, as well as the lack of coordination with community-based organizations serving young fathers—created obstacles to bettering participants' employment prospects (Achatz, MaCallum 1994). While outcomes improved after participation in the program, the fathers' economic situation was still bleak. More success was achieved by the most experienced sites in the demonstration.

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### **PARENTS' FAIR SHARE (PFS)**

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In 1994, the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (now MDRC) launched the PFS demonstration, which attempted to address some of the regulatory barriers within the child support enforcement system by creating an alternative to standard enforcement, including the implementation of more flexible policies, such as reduced child support orders during program participation and order modification once participants became employed. PFS recruited participants who were out of compliance with child support directly from the courts or from child support agencies. Using an experimental design, researchers found no overall employment impacts. As with YUFP, the need to earn money to support themselves and their children led many fathers to opt for low-wage jobs rather than participate in skills training. Participation in the program led to increases in formal child support payments. There were also modest increases in reports of parental conflict (Miller, Knox 2001).

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### **OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT'S RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS (RFP)**

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Launched in 1997, the RFP model relied on states to initiate programs. The target population was broader than PFS and included both individuals who were ordered to participate in the program and those who had volunteered. The evaluation of RFP looked at changes in participants' outcomes after their involvement with the program and found that there were increases in earnings and child support payments, but little change with respect to fathers' involvement with their children. However, because researchers relied on a nonexperimental research design, they were unable to assess the impact of the program on the fathers who participated. The initiative's findings revealed the importance of close connections between site operators and the child support system to increase fathers' payment of child support and the need to develop new ways of educating fathers about child support issues. Peer support was also viewed as an important mechanism for programs to communicate respect and concern for participants and thus cultivate a sense of dignity (Pearson, Thoennes 2000).

Lessons from these evaluations helped inform the design of Fathers at Work. First, participant recruitment was a challenge in all three demonstrations, underscoring the importance of engaging organizations with experience serving this population and with a strong reputation in the community. Second, employment outcomes were less than desired, leading to the decision to include only organizations with a track record of providing effective employment services, particularly to the very disadvantaged. PFS researchers recommended that future programs include opportunities for participants to both take part in training and earn an income, and several of the organizations selected to participate in Fathers at Work took this approach. Findings from PFS also pointed to the need for retention services, which were built in as a requirement of Fathers at Work. Finally, Fathers at Work borrowed what were viewed as some of the successful components of prior initiatives: strong relationships with child support enforcement, alternative child support enforcement efforts and a peer support component.

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## THE FATHERS AT WORK INITIATIVE

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Fathers at Work was created to help young noncustodial fathers achieve three principal goals:

- ◆ Increase their employment and earnings;
- ◆ Become more involved in their children's lives; and
- ◆ Increase their financial support of their children.

In addition, the initiative sought to explore the role community-based workforce development programs could play in meeting the needs of young fathers.

The requirement that organizations demonstrate a history of strong employment services was one of the defining features of Fathers at Work. The six organizations selected also had to show a track record of providing services to young, low-income men (Charles Stewart Mott Foundation 2000). Organizations were not necessarily expected to have prior experience or expertise working with fathers or providing parenting and child support services; there was an interest in learning how workforce development organizations could incorporate such services into their programs, and selected organizations were given time during a planning period to develop the appropriate relationships and services in these areas.

While organizations were not expected to start with extensive knowledge of the child support system, the ability to negotiate on behalf of participants with local child support enforcement agencies was expected to be a key feature of Fathers at Work. Research had documented the importance of strong relationships with the child support system in increasing fathers' financial support of their children through formal payments. Thus, the sites agreed to develop formal partnerships with their respective local child support enforcement agencies.

The six organizations had to commit to serving at least 100 men each year for three years and to provide services designed to achieve the initiative's three main goals. Eligible participants were noncustodial fathers 30 years old or younger who were earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Because previous research had

shown that many low-income noncustodial fathers had criminal records, two of the six selected organizations exclusively served noncustodial fathers who were formerly incarcerated. The expectations regarding employment outcomes were specific and ambitious: Organizations chosen for this demonstration had to commit to placing at least 75 of their 100 fathers each year and providing a minimum of 12 months of retention services designed to help these young men stay employed *and* increase their wages over time. Organizations were also asked to commit to increasing parental engagement and child support compliance.

Acknowledging the importance of substantial employment services, organizations were provided with significant financial support to operate their programs. Each agency received \$300,000 per year over the three-year demonstration period to cover staff and programming at the organizations' discretion.

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## THE EVALUATION

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Fathers at Work sites launched their mix of employment, fatherhood and child support services prior to the official start of the evaluation, enabling them to work out challenges associated with implementing new programs. This pilot period allowed the organizations to both refine their service packages and become acclimated to the research and data collection procedures required. The pilot phase varied by site from six months to approximately one year. The official evaluation period began only after a site's program was deemed fully in place and stable. The participating organizations began enrolling fathers for the evaluation between January and June of 2001, and the demonstration continued for three years at each site, through June of 2004.

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## EVALUATION METHODS

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While initially designed as an outcomes study—analyzing changes in outcomes over time—P/PV later sought to identify a comparison group that could help us understand the participant outcomes we were observing. We were able to find two comparison groups to serve as benchmarks against which we could compare the changes experienced by Fathers at Work participants. Using a statistical method (propensity score matching—PSM), we selected two groups of noncustodial fathers (from the PFS control group and the Fragile Families survey) who were very similar to the Fathers at Work participants on a number of different dimensions, such as their age, race, criminal conviction status, prior work experience, the age of their child, etc. We then compared outcomes of the Fathers at Work participants with outcomes of the fathers in the other two datasets. While we cannot be absolutely certain of the program's effects (because we do not have a perfect comparison group), our approach does allow us to explore the promise of the Fathers at Work model beyond what would be possible using a simple outcomes study.

Information for this report comes from a variety of sources, including site-reported enrollment data, job placement data, survey data collected when participants enrolled (baseline) and 12 months after joining the program (follow-up), and administrative child support data. P/PV also conducted site visits every six months during the demonstration, which included staff interviews, participant focus groups and program observation.

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## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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Findings from the evaluation are as follows:

### EMPLOYMENT

- ◆ Fathers at Work participants earned \$11,025 per year at follow-up, about twice as much as comparison group fathers earned at a comparable point in time. These earnings were also \$4,602 more than Fathers at Work participants made during the year prior to enrollment in the program.

### FATHERHOOD

- ◆ The likelihood that participating fathers visited their child in the month before the follow-up survey was similar to that seen in the comparison groups and unchanged from when Fathers at Work participants entered the programs; the quality of the fathers' relationships with their children was also similar to what was reported by the comparison groups.
- ◆ Fathers at Work participants reported more arguments with the mothers of their children than did comparison group fathers. It is possible that the fatherhood workshops increased fathers' interest in and opinions about the well-being of their children, thus creating additional conflict about child-rearing issues.

### CHILD SUPPORT

- ◆ Participants with support orders in place paid an average of \$90.32 in child support in the month before the follow-up interview, significantly more than was paid by comparison group fathers with support orders in place (an average of \$38.13). Participants' payments grew significantly between baseline (about \$32 per month) and follow-up.
- ◆ The average amount of informal support—money given directly to the mother rather than through the formal child support system—reported by the Fathers at Work participants was about the same as that reported by comparison group fathers at follow-up (\$113 compared with \$112), even though the participants were paying more formal support. The percentage of Fathers at Work participants who paid informally also did not differ from the comparison group.

Comparisons with similar young noncustodial fathers suggest that the Fathers at Work programs may have had a strong effect on earnings and child support. As described later in the report, while there were differences in the strategies used by participating sites, all six implemented a model that included employment, child support and fatherhood services. Findings from our evaluation suggest that this model of combined services holds promise for young noncustodial fathers.

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## THE STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

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In Chapter 2, we provide a description of the individuals who participated in the initiative and their specific needs. In Chapter 3, we describe the organizations and the services they offered to meet the diverse needs of participants. In Chapter 4, we report the findings from our evaluation, outlining the areas where we did observe positive program effects, namely around employment and child support, and where we did not. In the concluding chapter, we discuss the implications of these findings for program operators and policymakers.

## *The Participants*

While Fathers at Work participants were drawn from five different cities across the country, the barriers and challenges they faced were remarkably similar. A combination of low basic skills, spotty work histories and criminal records created formidable obstacles to financial stability, which likely made it difficult for them to support their children. The fathers reported frequent contact and strong relationships with their children but also wanted to spend more time with them. Participants entered the Fathers at Work programs voluntarily—some drawn from the organizations’ existing applicant pools and others recruited specifically for the program.<sup>10</sup>

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### DEMOGRAPHIC AND OTHER CHARACTERISTICS

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Most Fathers at Work participants were minorities: About three quarters were African American, and 18 percent were Hispanic. The programs targeted fathers who were 18 to 30; participants had an average age of 26 years at enrollment.

Participants entered the programs with precarious living situations and impediments to economic stability. Thirty percent of the fathers had no high school diploma or GED, and a substantial portion had a criminal record. In fact, while only two of the sites exclusively recruited men with criminal records, 76 percent of all participants had been convicted of a crime, and 49 percent had been released from jail within the 12 months prior to enrollment in Fathers at Work, creating additional challenges for job placement. These figures are not surprising given the rates of incarceration among young, African American males and the large percentage of African Americans recruited for the program.

Forty-four percent of participants reported renting or sharing the rent upon enrollment, but 36 percent were living with someone else without contributing rent—that is, “crashing” with friends or family. An additional 17 percent were homeless or living in a shelter, halfway house, group home or treatment facility. Most of these were at one site, Impact, which drew the majority of its participants from a work-release facility. More than a third of participants lived in two or more places during the year before entering the program. Nearly a third reported being homeless at some point during their lives.

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### EMPLOYMENT

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Their work histories reflected these challenges. While six out of seven men in Fathers at Work had held a full-time job at some point in the past, only about half had ever held a full-time job for a year or longer. During the year before enrollment, a mere 26 percent had worked steadily for more than six months, and nearly half of participants reported no steady work that year.<sup>11</sup> Among the men who worked at all during the year before enrollment (about two thirds of program entrants), about half earned



less than \$8 an hour at their main job.<sup>12</sup> Fathers at Work participants earned an average of \$6,423 during the year before enrolling.<sup>13</sup> Fewer than 40 percent had health insurance available at the main job they held before enrollment.

The men also had small employment networks (people they could ask for assistance in finding a job). When they enrolled in the programs, more than two thirds of participants reported that they knew two or fewer people who could help them secure employment.

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## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

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Most of the men (55 percent) had just one child when they entered Fathers at Work, while 18 percent had three or more. For the purposes of the study, fathers were asked detailed questions about one child selected at random, termed the “focal child.”<sup>14</sup> Close to 30 percent of these children were infants or toddlers (under two years old) at the start of the initiative; 37 percent were two to four years old; and 36 percent were four or older. Participants were asked about the quality of their relationship with their focal child and that child’s mother. The vast majority of men (four out of five) said they had strong relationships with their children and had seen them in the past month. Nevertheless, four out of five men wanted to spend more time with their children. These data run counter to stereotypes of this population as “deadbeat” dads, men who father multiple children—this was not the norm—and who are not involved in their lives; most reported active involvement and a desire to see their children more often.

More than a third of the men termed their relationship with their child’s mother “great,” while 13 percent said it was “bad.” Although three out of five said they generally agreed with the mom about how their child is raised, fewer than half said they had “a great deal of involvement” in decisions about how their child was raised, with one third saying they had “no or very little involvement.”

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## CHILD SUPPORT

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At enrollment, 84 percent of Fathers at Work participants said they were named as the father of the child on the birth certificate, and 73 percent indicated they had established paternity for that child. Child support agency administrative data put the number with paternity established at a somewhat lower level (64 percent). This discrepancy may be due to a misunderstanding by participants about how paternity is established. Many may believe that their name or signature on the child’s birth certificate is enough to establish paternity, but this is true only if the parents of a child are married. For non-marital births, the father must typically sign a paternity acknowledgment form or use genetic testing to establish whether he is the biological father.

While more than 80 percent of fathers reported that they provided some kind of support to their children, “informal” support proved to be much more prevalent than formal support paid to the child support enforcement agency. Seventy-three percent said they gave in-kind support (e.g., purchased items such as clothing, toys or gifts; paid for food or entertainment; and/or paid for services such as doctor’s appointments). Fifty-two percent of all enrolled fathers indicated that they paid informal child support (made unofficial child support payments to the mother of their child).

Records of the child support agencies showed that only four out of ten participants had formal child support orders on file, and close to 30 percent of these fathers had made any payments in the month prior to enrollment. The average child support order was \$153 per month, but payments totaled an average of only \$193 for all six months, approximately \$32 per month.<sup>15</sup>

For most fathers, the welfare system was not linked to their payment of child support. In fact, only a third of fathers reported that their child was receiving TANF, though 19 percent did not know whether their child was receiving welfare benefits. For those whose child was receiving TANF, states would have passed through \$50 to those families for child support paid because all five states in the initiative maintained a \$50 pass-through after PRWORA (Cancian et al. 2006).

In sum, the cohort of fathers who enrolled in Fathers at Work consisted of young men who faced many obstacles to supporting themselves and their young children but were involved in their children's lives and contributing financially. They came to the Fathers at Work programs seeking assistance with employment, child support and parenting. The next chapter describes the nature of the services they received in more detail.

## *The Programs and Implementation*

**T**hrough a proposal process, six nonprofit workforce development organizations were selected to participate in Fathers at Work. The six organizations brought their experience in providing employment services and serving young men to design programs that would respond to the complex needs of participants. In this chapter, we describe these programs in detail and the strategies they used to pursue the three primary goals of the initiative: increasing fathers' employment and earnings; promoting greater involvement in their children's lives; and increasing their financial support of their children.

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### THE ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS

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The organizations chosen for the demonstration were all mature and successful employment and training organizations; one was founded in 1936, four were started during the 1960s and 1970s, and the youngest got its start in 1990. All had years of experience finding jobs for difficult-to-serve men, though they had not offered the triumvirate of services that characterized the Fathers at Work model: employment, child support and fatherhood services.

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#### CENTER FOR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES (CEO)

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Located in downtown Manhattan, CEO has been providing employment and training services to people released from jail or prison since the late 1970s. On average, at the start of the initiative, CEO served 1,800 participants each year, the majority of whom had been convicted of nonviolent crimes—most drug related. At the core of CEO's employment strategy is a paid transitional work program. As a part of Fathers at Work, CEO offered a weeklong preemployment and life-skills training, individualized job development services, fatherhood workshops, child support advocacy and family mediation services.

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#### IMPACT SERVICES, INC. (IMPACT)

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Since 1974, Impact has provided training programs for low-income people in Philadelphia and its surrounding areas. Impact's offerings have included the Helping Offenders Work (HOW) program, which served people with criminal records and histories of substance abuse; the Greater Philadelphia Works welfare-to-work program; and Veteran's Services. Impact's Fathers at Work program, known as Step-up, was created to work with two key referral sources: Philadelphia County's Work Release Program (WRP) and the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP). All participants lived in residential work-release facilities and were expected to find employment and adhere to elements of an individualized release plan. For child

support enforcement, Impact developed a unique relationship with the Pennsylvania Family Court, streamlining court processes for its participants.

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### **RUBICON PROGRAMS, INC. (RUBICON)**

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Located in Richmond, CA, Rubicon has been providing a wide array of social services—including housing assistance, mental health services and other support services—since its founding in 1973. At the time of the Fathers at Work demonstration, Rubicon served approximately 4,000 people per year. While the organization served a diverse population, its focus had traditionally been on people who were homeless, had psychiatric disabilities or were on welfare. Rubicon’s Fathers at Work offerings included job readiness and skills training, job-placement services, peer support groups and on-site child support assistance provided through a partnership with the Contra Costa County Department of Child Support Services (DCSS).

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### **SUPPORT AND TRAINING RESULT IN VALUABLE EMPLOYEES (STRIVE)**

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STRIVE is a nonprofit job training and placement organization that serves low-income residents in Chicago.<sup>16</sup> Started in 1990, the Chicago STRIVE was part of a national network of affiliated organizations—in 18 locations around the country—that each followed a similar model for employment services. STRIVE Chicago’s services were offered in three locations throughout the city and consisted of four weeks of classroom-based soft skills training followed by rapid placement into a job and two years of support services. The program’s focus was on personal responsibility and attitudinal change, combined with training in job search techniques. STRIVE boasts an active alumni group. Through Fathers at Work, the organization offered parenting support groups for men and women.

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### **TOTAL ACTION AGAINST POVERTY (TAP)**

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TAP was founded in 1965 as the designated community-action agency serving the Roanoke Valley in southwest Virginia. At the start of the initiative, TAP served more than 6,000 individuals annually in 3,000 families through more than 30 programs, from Head Start centers and housing support to transitional living services and food banks. TAP also operated a wide range of job training and educational services, known collectively as This Valley Works. Core Fathers at Work services included individualized job placement, fatherhood support groups and leadership development activities. In addition, TAP had a staff person dedicated to addressing child support issues, who acted as a quasi-employee of the Virginia Office of Child Support Enforcement.

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### **VOCATIONAL FOUNDATION, INC. (VFI)**

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VFI was founded in 1936 to help New York City’s disadvantaged youth achieve educational and employment goals. VFI has operated programs for young fathers since 1984, building upon this experience to develop its new Young Fathers program as part of Fathers at Work. Participants were each supported by a primary case manager, called a Career Advisor. Career Advisors provided career counseling, crisis intervention and

resource referrals; they conducted fatherhood workshops and coordinated with child support enforcement; and they provided follow-up support after participants completed the program.

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## PROGRAM STRATEGIES

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Although all these programs followed a common model of service provision, there were vast differences in the specific strategies used by the sites to achieve desired outcomes. The remainder of this chapter explores those differences.

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## RECRUITMENT

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The organizations had difficulty meeting their recruitment goals, enrolling 1,018 participants during the initiative, compared with the goal of 1,800 (300 per organization over the three years of the demonstration). The challenge of participant engagement was not unique—other studies have shown that young men can be particularly difficult to engage, especially in fatherhood programs, as was found in other fatherhood demonstrations (Achatz, MaCallum 1994; Miller, Knox 2001). One of the reasons recruitment was believed to be a problem in past demonstrations targeting young noncustodial fathers was that the entrance requirements to these programs were overly narrow or discouraged participation. For example, PFS limited participation to those with unpaid child support orders and required them to participate in a court hearing before beginning the program. YUFP initially required participants to open a child support case as a condition of enrollment but then changed this policy when it was found to interfere with recruitment. It was believed that the relatively open entrance requirements of the Fathers at Work programs, combined with their experience working with the target population, would make recruitment easier than it had been in past demonstrations.

The organizations developed a variety of innovative approaches to attract participants—largely in response to the challenges they encountered—and devoted substantially more resources to recruitment than initially planned. They realized early on that more substantial and consistent investments in recruitment would be needed, including the creation of attractive marketing materials and reliance on engaged program participants to draw others to the program. The two sites serving exclusively formerly incarcerated individuals had the least difficulty with recruitment. Both CEO and Impact developed or already had long-standing relationships with the criminal justice system, which provided a steady flow of candidates for their Fathers at Work programs. Their experience was consistent with research on programs for people leaving jail or prison, which has shown recruitment to be easier than for general workforce development programs (Buck 2000).

## STAFF OUTREACH

Staff spent considerable time each week making presentations, distributing flyers and reaching out to young men on the street. These staff-centered efforts were strengthened by the creation of attractive postcards and brochures, as well as by the institutional relationships they developed with partner organizations.

## PARTNERSHIPS

All six organizations developed a network of informal relationships and formal partnerships with public agencies and other nonprofits to support their recruitment efforts. Impact developed a relationship with Volunteers of America, which was serving formerly incarcerated individuals in a transitional residential setting. Impact also developed a strong relationship with the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole; parole officers included participation in Fathers at Work and establishment of child support orders with the Philadelphia Family Court in men’s release plans. CEO relied on its relationship with various correctional facilities—including the state’s “boot camp” program, which applies the intensive techniques of military training in an effort to achieve attitudinal change and reduce recidivism—for recruitment purposes. STRIVE developed an effective, though less formal, partnership with a local work-release facility on the west side of Chicago, which became a significant referral source. Child support agencies also became important referral partners for some Fathers at Work programs. For example, Rubicon benefited from the public relations efforts of the Contra Costa County DCSS, which featured Rubicon frequently in its press releases, television interviews and community meetings, as it sought to market a friendlier face to the public.

## ADVERTISING

As programs encountered challenges in recruiting the required number of participants, several programs developed creative advertising strategies to achieve their goals:

- ◆ Public access television—Rubicon, TAP and VFI invested resources in advertising on public access television. The ads ran during daytime hours, thought to be a cost-effective time to reach the program’s target audience of unemployed men. However, because the ads were offered as a community service by the media outlets at low rates, programs did not always have control over the exact timing and frequency of the commercials.
- ◆ Movie theater advertising—Both Rubicon and VFI ran ads in local movie theaters as a way to attract participants. Like the public access television ads, programs could not dictate the timing and frequency of the ads.
- ◆ Newspapers—STRIVE ran ads in local newspapers to draw participants.
- ◆ Signage—After seeking input from program participants on how to attract additional participants, Rubicon designed a banner that was hung on the outside of its building to elicit interest from people in the community. Rubicon also invested in advertising on bus-stop benches.
- ◆ Postcards and flyers—Two of the sites, Rubicon and TAP, created visually appealing postcards for distribution to potential participants. In November 2002, TAP distributed 1,500 postcards describing the Fathers at Work program and its promised benefits: employment, better interactions with the local child support agency and an improved relationship with participants’ children. The cards were distributed throughout the Roanoke Valley, with a special emphasis on local public-housing communities.

For both TAP and Rubicon, their concentrated advertising efforts were followed by increases in the numbers of participants recruited. Prior to its advertising campaign and the efforts of the Contra Costa County DCSS, Rubicon enrolled an average of five

fathers per month. In the six months after these activities began, enrollment increased to 15 new participants per month and remained high over the following year (13 per month). TAP experienced a similar increase: Prior to November 2002, TAP enrolled an average of six men per month, while in the year following these outreach activities average enrollment increased to 13 per month. VFI also experienced positive results from its experimentation with new, low-cost media strategies for recruitment; when asked how they heard about the program, focus group participants frequently answered, “I saw it on BCAT (Brooklyn Cable Access Television),” or “My girl saw it at the movies and told me about it.”

## PARTICIPANTS

As the programs developed, participants themselves became important recruiting sources. Indeed, many who eventually enrolled said that knowing other participants made them feel the program had credibility. Rubicon built on these ties by hiring program graduates as peer outreach workers, who assisted in recruiting by distributing program postcards in areas where potential participants congregated, such as malls and barbershops. Other organizations, including STRIVE and VFI, offered participants financial incentives to recruit others, but these did not prove particularly effective.

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## EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

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Each of the organizations was committed to providing employment preparation, placement and retention support to enable young fathers to find, keep and advance in jobs. Sites were given the flexibility to determine how those services were provided so that the program design at each organization could reflect their local circumstances and the particular population served. Table 1 summarizes the employment services provided by each site. Most of the organizations focused their employment efforts on short-term job readiness training and job search assistance. Impact and TAP focused principally on immediate job search and placement; Rubicon, CEO and STRIVE required one to four weeks of job readiness training prior to participants’ job search; and CEO and, to a lesser extent, Rubicon offered participants paid transitional employment while they were beginning the job search and placement process. CEO and Rubicon also offered short-term skills training to some of their participants. VFI was the only organization in the initiative to start the demonstration with longer-term (six- to nine-month) occupational training options in addition to individualized job placement; however, the program struggled to enroll fathers who met the academic entry requirements and who could commit to unpaid training at the expense of taking a job. Most of VFI’s fathers took advantage only of individualized job search assistance.

## JOB PLACEMENT

Program staff provided most participants with individualized job placement assistance, generating job leads at a range of companies. In some cases, organizations developed specialized relationships with a single employer or industry. For example, CEO developed a partnership with a large supermarket chain, which resulted in several entry-level jobs for participants. While these positions tended to be part time, they offered participants the opportunity to demonstrate skills and build up their résumés as job development staff helped them secure full-time employment. Impact developed strong relationships with a prominent residential construction company and a well-established

**Table 1**  
**Employment Strategies of the Fathers at Work Organizations**

Organization	Employment Strategy
<b>Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)</b>	Paid transitional work program; one week of life skills training; job development services; skills training available to some participants in culinary arts, building maintenance, information services and customer service; preemployment job coaching to encourage the development of positive work behaviors and to provide case management; limited access to subsidized employment with outside employers through wage subsidy program.
<b>Impact Services, Inc.</b>	Individualized job development and direct placement services; partnership with work-release facility, which made employment a requirement of residence.
<b>Rubicon Programs, Inc.</b>	Two-week job readiness training; individualized job development and direct placement services; Career Center with resources for self-directed job search activities; paid skills training in commercial property maintenance, landscaping and baking; paid transitional employment for some participants in the biotechnology industry and construction.
<b>STRIVE</b>	Four-week attitudinal and job readiness program; job placement assistance; two years of retention services; limited access to skills training and temporary employment opportunities.
<b>Total Action Against Poverty (TAP)</b>	Two-hour soft skills class; individualized job development and direct placement services; referrals to training.
<b>Vocational Foundation, Inc. (VFI)</b>	Individualized job development and direct placement services for most participants; six- and nine-month skills training program for some participants in computer technology.

meatpacking business and was able to provide shared van transportation to suburban job sites for a number of participants.

Rubicon sought to build relationships with the burgeoning biotechnology industry in the Bay Area. One employer partner offered transitional job opportunities for participants, which were designed to turn into permanent hires after six months. These opportunities were available only to participants without recent convictions, due to federal safety regulations governing the industry. Rubicon also placed participants in permanent jobs with several other companies in the industry.

TAP experimented with operating its own temporary employment agency—a strategy that helped it work with employers initially reluctant to hire men with criminal records. Fathers at Work staff placed participants in positions with targeted companies through TAP’s own temp agency; after successful performance in the job assignment, some men were hired permanently at the company. However, the organization was unable to sustain the staff and resource investment necessary to operate such a business for more than a brief time during the demonstration.

### EMPLOYMENT RETENTION

One goal of the programs was to provide employment retention for at least one year following placement, though most of the Fathers at Work programs focused their retention efforts on the first few months of employment. Retention services were provided by different staff depending on the organization. At Rubicon, for example, retention was the responsibility of job development staff. At VFI and CEO, specialized



employment counselors handled retention, as well as case management, during the program. Often, however, retention services were provided by fatherhood staff as well, in part because they were leading regular fatherhood sessions, which men participated in after they were employed, and because participants often had the strongest relationships with these staff. In general, retention services consisted of monthly telephone calls; only STRIVE and VFI provided more intense levels of retention services, with staff contact occurring several times per month before tapering down.

Sites experimented with several efforts to develop “alumni” groups—as a strategy to support the continuing development of fathers and families as well as job retention—throughout the demonstration. However, programs struggled to sustain these efforts: It was difficult to carve out staff time from existing work with current participants and individualized assistance to recent program graduates in order to recruit and support alumni groups. Furthermore, alumni were difficult to engage in postprogram activities because many were attempting to manage work and family commitments.

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## FATHERHOOD SERVICES

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### THE CORE CURRICULUM

All sites initially based their fatherhood services on *Fatherhood Development*, a curriculum offered by the National Project for Community Leadership (NPCL)—formerly the National Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Planning—a partner in Fathers at Work.<sup>17</sup> This approach uses peer support groups and workshops as the core of service delivery for young fathers, teaching parenting and communication skills and providing an outlet for “venting” and troubleshooting in a safe space with others in similar situations. In many cases, the Fathers at Work programs built creative partnerships and expanded hours of operation to incorporate this new approach. In Chicago and Philadelphia, STRIVE and Impact initially forged partnerships with local fatherhood and family health organizations to deliver fatherhood development workshops, choosing to marry their organizations’ core competence in workforce development with external partners more experienced in fatherhood services. However, by the end of the demonstration, these sites had brought these services “in-house” and were delivering workshops using their own staff. Other organizations, like VFI and CEO, increased the capacity of their existing case managers to deliver fatherhood services by providing training, while Rubicon and TAP hired staff with specific fatherhood expertise. This wide variety of strategies appears to have been influenced not only by organizational resources but also by resources available in the community. The fatherhood services offered by the Fathers at Work organizations are described in Table 2 on page 21.

Each program defined a core set of workshops for participants to attend in order to show progress; beyond these required workshops, however, some sites reported difficulties keeping participants engaged in this aspect of the program. To reduce the barriers to participation, most Fathers at Work organizations held sessions during evening and weekend hours and provided transportation and/or childcare assistance. In focus groups with participants across the sites, fathers frequently described the peer support groups as important outlets for venting frustrations and as an experience that encouraged change in their behaviors toward their families and work.

**Table 2**  
**Fatherhood Services of the Fathers at Work Organizations**

Organization	Fatherhood Services
<b>Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)</b>	One three-hour workshop, including a segment on navigating the child support system, conducted during the week of life skills training; eight parenting classes, two of which were based on the NPCL curriculum; workshops conducted by partnering agencies and institutions on financial planning and management, nutrition and health, and smart shopping; family mediation provided by a partner agency; assistance with custody and visitation; group trips and activities, family picnics and a children’s holiday party organized for participants.
<b>Impact Services, Inc.</b>	A 12-week parenting class, held for three hours on Saturday mornings at the work-release residence and for two hours on Tuesday and Thursday nights at Impact’s center, conducted by Impact’s parenting coordinator and based on the NPCL curriculum; at least one family outing per cohort; alumni activities for completers of the 12-week program.
<b>Rubicon Programs, Inc.</b>	Participants required to attend one fatherhood session per week for a total of 20 weeks, with sessions offered on Tuesday afternoons and Thursday evenings (Rubicon case management staff conducted these workshops based on the NPCL curriculum); family outings organized by peer support group.
<b>STRIVE</b>	Parenting classes for all male enrollees at three STRIVE Chicago locations—at one location, sessions were held twice per week for three weeks and conducted by a community partner, Healthcare Consortium of Illinois, using its own curriculum; at the other two sites, sessions were held twice per week for four weeks and were conducted by a STRIVE case manager using a curriculum designed by the Center for Improvement in Child Caring. Alumni fatherhood groups held every other Saturday at alternating sites, following the NPCL curriculum; some joint parenting classes for mothers and fathers; family outings, organized once per month, designed to be educational and to include children and their mothers.
<b>Total Action Against Poverty (TAP)</b>	Two-hour Fatherhood Support Groups, one morning and one evening per week (with alumni participating in the same groups as current participants), led by TAP staff and based on the NPCL curriculum; participation in 12 workshops required for graduation. Family outings scheduled throughout the year; recreational and leadership development events planned by an alumni group.
<b>Vocational Foundation, Inc. (VFI)</b>	Fatherhood workshops held twice per week (Friday afternoons for daytime training-class students and Thursday evenings for direct placement, evening training-class students and alumni), based on the NPCL curriculum and led by VFI case managers. Participation in two sessions was required for enrollment in the program; beyond that, participation was optional but encouraged. Family outings scheduled throughout the year.

## FAMILY OUTINGS

In addition to providing training in fatherhood skills, the programs also worked to provide opportunities for fathers to interact with their children. Programs planned group events like picnics, visits to the circus and holiday parties to support the fathers in providing for their children in ways that may have been previously unavailable to them.

STRIVE offered these family outings on a monthly basis to participants, their children and the mothers. Rubicon engaged participants in the process of planning a FatherFest in Contra Costa County, a daylong event held in the summer that was geared toward fathers and their families. Participants were involved in every step of making the event happen, from applying for city funds to supporting the event to organizing the day’s activities. Impact also hosted family events, including amusement park visits, dinners and movies.

CEO and VFI organized a series of picnics that brought young fathers together with their families, as well as a joint retreat for program graduates. TAP also held a retreat for its participants, which gave fathers a chance to get together without distractions and talk about the most pressing fatherhood issues they were facing.

### RELATIONSHIPS WITH MOTHERS

One area in which programs reported being challenged was in helping fathers develop more positive relationships with their children’s mothers. “Baby mama drama”—a term fathers used to describe the conflict they experienced with the mothers of their children—was a common theme in participant focus groups. The Fathers at Work organizations developed programming to respond to these issues, which included offering mediation services and counseling with children’s mothers as well as training staff in teaching team parenting.

STRIVE included women in some fatherhood sessions as a way of getting both the men and the women to see the other’s perspective. They also held joint sessions on the topic of domestic violence, which were cofacilitated by a male and a female social worker. CEO, through a partnership with an outside agency, was able to offer participants mediation services, which were instrumental in helping several participants secure visitation rights.

Near the end of the demonstration, Impact’s case management team included a member trained in mediation and family counseling who offered these services to fathers upon their request.

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### CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

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One of the primary goals of Fathers at Work was to help young fathers increase their financial support of their children. As part of the initiative, each organization was required to develop a formal relationship with its respective child support enforcement agency—a state or local entity authorized to provide child support services by Title VI-D of the Social Security Act—to better help participants meet their obligations. These partnerships were also seen as critical for supporting young fathers in their transition to financial stability. The idea was that by working with the child support agency to set reasonable monthly payments, participants would have an easier time getting back on their feet and would, in turn, be able to take financial responsibility for their children. At the same time, child support agencies nationwide were beginning to recognize the need to work with noncustodial parents and combat the perception of child support as an entity from which to hide. Table 3 summarizes each site’s approach to child support.

### NO COOKIE-CUTTER APPROACH

While welfare reform mandated national changes in how states approached child support, there remained great differences in state and local policy and practice. At the start of Fathers at Work, this variation was observed across the five states where the programs were located. At one end of the spectrum was Virginia, a state with a relatively rigid child support system, which was generally unwilling to make concessions to low-income noncustodial fathers. At the other end of the spectrum was California,

**Table 3**  
**Child Support Strategies of the Fathers at Work Organizations**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Child Support Strategy</b>	<b>Child Support Partner</b>
<b>Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)</b>	Child support advocates assisted in preparing and filing petitions for child support modifications; in scheduling and participating in telephone hearings (hearings conducted with cities or counties outside of NYC); and in accompanying clients to the OCSE customer services unit, where they could get liens on driver's licenses lifted and "add amounts" removed or reduced. Advocates also assisted in filing petitions for hearings to vacate arrest warrants due to child support issues and in filing acknowledgment of paternity or requesting DNA testing.	<b>New York City Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE)</b>
<b>Impact Services, Inc.</b>	Staff researched potential participants' Family Court status prior to enrollment to ensure that men either had an existing child support case or were in the system with a potential case pending. Once enrolled in the program, participants had their Family Court processes streamlined; Impact was able to "bundle" several petitions together for a single hearing process.	<b>Philadelphia Family Court</b>
<b>Rubicon Programs, Inc.</b>	The child support liaison provided information and individualized assistance to participants in addition to managing Rubicon's relationship with the Contra Costa County DCSS. The liaison also worked with other counties to obtain necessary information and modify orders. Participants met individually with staff from the child support agency at Rubicon's offices or by videoconference to discuss their cases.	<b>Contra Costa County Department of Child Support Services (DCSS)</b>
<b>STRIVE</b>	Case managers were responsible for helping participants with child support by accompanying them to court, helping them file necessary petitions and providing them with general information on child support. STRIVE staff were trained and authorized by IDPA to establish paternity for participants who wanted to do it voluntarily. IDPA staff conducted an information session at STRIVE on a monthly basis. Participants were required to meet with IDPA staff at their offices if they were opening a child support case or had one open.	<b>Illinois Department of Public Aid (IDPA)</b>
<b>Total Action Against Poverty (TAP)</b>	Individualized case research was provided by the TAP child support specialist, who, in a unique arrangement, was hired by TAP but functioned as a quasi-employee of the Virginia OCSE. This specialist split her time between TAP and OCSE.	<b>Virginia Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE)</b>
<b>Vocational Foundation, Inc. (VFI)</b>	Young Fathers career advisers obtained information on the status of a father's case from NYC OCSE upon program enrollment and provided individualized support as fathers petitioned for modifications and established paternity or child support orders.	<b>New York City Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE)</b>

which had taken steps to transform its child support agencies from prosecutorial entities into customer-friendly agencies. Leading this charge was the Contra Costa County DCSS, which was eager to work with noncustodial fathers to modify orders—even going so far as to set orders at zero while fathers were attending Rubicon. These differences meant that programs had to craft approaches to child support that worked best in their state and local policy context.

### DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships with state or local child support agencies were new for the Fathers at Work organizations, which had never before established formal relationships around child support. The partnerships were also new for many of the child support agencies; while some, such as the New York Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), had started to work more directly with community-based organizations, many had not worked closely with organizations serving low-income fathers. The initiative required that organizations partner with their local child support entity, but these relationships took time to nurture and build. Ultimately, solid partnerships were developed that could support participants in their quest for financial stability and responsible fatherhood.

### ROLES OF CHILD SUPPORT STAFF

The five child support agencies (VFI and CEO both partnered with one agency, the New York OCSE) had different levels of involvement with the Fathers at Work programs. In some cases, agency staff worked directly with Fathers at Work participants. For example, in Contra Costa County, a single staff person was assigned to work with Rubicon participants and held meetings with fathers at Rubicon’s offices on a regular basis. In Virginia, OCSE, which handles cases for the entire state, was initially resistant to giving any special treatment to Fathers at Work participants, in part because the agency was short-staffed. To help create buy-in on the part of the agency, TAP used some of its Fathers at Work grant to hire a new employee, who split her time between OCSE and TAP.

### ROLES OF FATHERS AT WORK STAFF

All the Fathers at Work organizations dedicated some staff time to addressing the issue of child support. CEO created the position of child support advocate to work directly with participants on their child support cases; child support advocates also played a role in helping participants negotiate the court process for visitation and custody cases, though these issues are addressed separately from child support. Most programs relied on other staff, such as case managers or employment counselors, to address child support issues.

### WORKING TOGETHER TO BENEFIT YOUNG FATHERS

By collaborating, the Fathers at Work programs and child support agencies helped participants navigate the complex world of child support, enabling young fathers to begin taking greater financial responsibility for their children. Partnerships with child support agencies proved to be critical to assisting participants in the following areas:

### PROVIDING ACCURATE INFORMATION

The enforcement tactics that had been used in the past by many of the state and local child support agencies caused fear and considerable avoidance by many low-income noncustodial fathers. While some agencies changed their approach, noncustodial fathers may not have been aware of these changes or the help they could receive if they came forward. One of the most important things that Fathers at Work programs provided to participants was information. For example, more participants reported having paternity orders established and child support orders in place at enrollment than was reflected in the administrative data, suggesting that participants might not have had accurate information about their cases when they began the program. By educating participants about the laws and their rights and giving them information on their individual child support cases, the Fathers at Work programs and their partners helped participants take responsibility for their child support obligations. This included letting them know whether paternity had been established or whether they had a child support case open.

In some cases, the child support partner conveyed this information directly to participants. For example, a representative of the Illinois Department of Public Aid (IDPA) gave a presentation to each STRIVE class stressing the importance of not ignoring child support obligations, and participants met individually with child support staff at IDPA to discuss their cases. In addition, STRIVE staff were well educated about child support generally and received specific information on client cases from IDPA so they could provide their participants with effective assistance.

At CEO, child support advocates were the primary sources of information for participants about child support and their individual cases. Child support advocates received information on each participant's case so they could determine what type of assistance was needed. They then helped participants file motions and accompanied them to court and to the customer services unit of the New York City OCSE—which reviewed case histories with clients and had the option to remove and reduce amounts added to a father's obligation due to outstanding arrearages, as well as the ability to remove liens, schedule hearings and assist fathers in other ways.

### SELLING FORMAL SUPPORT TO PARTICIPANTS

Only half of participants were “in the system” (i.e., they had not established paternity and did not have a formal child support order in place), and many had preconceived notions about the harshness of that system. This meant that sites often faced the task of convincing participants to enter the system at all, rather than just helping them negotiate a system in which they were already involved.

Fathers at Work organizations noted reluctance among participants to establish formal child support orders. Many preferred to avoid the system and pay support informally to the custodial parent; some did this because they wanted to avoid a system that they perceived as overly aggressive, demanding higher amounts than they could afford. For those whose children received welfare, avoiding the formal system allowed the custodial parent and child to receive more money than if the funds went through the child support system, in which the state kept all but \$50 of the father's payment. Giving the money informally may have seemed like the best option to both the custodial and noncustodial parent because the child could be supported by both this payment and by welfare.

One important role played by the organizations was to educate participants about the risks of informal payments. First, for a custodial parent on welfare, the failure to identify the noncustodial parent could have resulted in sanctions and a possible denial of benefits. Second, informal payments depended on a stable relationship between the custodial and noncustodial parent: If at any point the relationship deteriorated and the custodial parent decided to report the noncustodial parent to the child support agency, the noncustodial parent could be asked to make back payments. With no proof that he had been paying support informally, a father could end up paying twice. Even if he had kept receipts of his financial support, these were often not recognized as child support payments by the court. One TAP participant, who presented the judge with a shoe box of receipts, was reportedly told that these expenditures counted as gifts, not as child support.

### ORDER MODIFICATION

Noncustodial parents can modify their child support order any time there is a change in circumstance, such as job loss (downward modification) or pay raise (upward modification), to set their required monthly payment at a level that reflects the new circumstances. Modifications can be important for low-income fathers who have lost their jobs or are participating in full-time training, because these situations will likely affect their ability to pay child support at a level that was set when they were working. Furthermore, because many fathers avoid the child support system altogether, an unrealistic level of payment may be set. Modification is also important for the families that noncustodial fathers help support in that it provides a process for increasing payments based on fathers' increases in earnings. In many instances, orders can be modified only through the courts; however, in some states the child support agency can make a recommendation to the court about the level at which an order should be set.

### RESERVE ORDERS AND MINIMUM ORDERS

Child support agencies can temporarily set orders at zero (a "reserve order") or at a minimum level while participants are enrolled in a training program or looking for a job. For example, New York City set minimum orders at \$25. In Contra Costa County, DCSS initially wanted to set reserve orders for Rubicon participants, but Rubicon, believing it was important to get participants in the habit of paying something, convinced the agency to set payments at \$10 per month.

### BUNDLING PETITIONS

Child support agencies can alleviate some of their administrative difficulties by consolidating petitions on multiple cases. For example, at Impact, all participants were either in work release or under community supervision in a transitional housing facility following incarceration. To petition for a modification to their case, fathers would typically have to make separate trips to the court for each case. Family Court streamlined the court process for Impact participants, including allowing Fathers at Work participants to "bundle" several petitions together for a single hearing instead of requiring them to deal with child support orders for different children at separate times.

### REDUCING PENALTIES FOR ARREARS

When noncustodial parents fail to pay support and accumulate arrears, child support agencies charge them interest on this unpaid amount, which is added to what noncustodial fathers are required to pay every month. New York City OCSE reduced or suspended the monthly amount that participants were required to pay. While the agency could not make preexisting debts disappear, it temporarily reduced the additional amounts that participants had to pay so they could become financially stable.

### ON-SITE PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT

The Fathers at Work programs stressed the importance of formal paternity establishment to their participants. Legal paternity is essential not only to open a child support order but also for the noncustodial parent to gain visitation rights and for the child or children to have the right to death benefits should the noncustodial parent die. In Illinois, both parents were required to go to the child support offices at the same time for a noncustodial father to establish paternity. Initially, STRIVE was having a hard time getting participants to establish paternity because both the father and the mother were hesitant to go to the child support offices together. IDPA agreed to train STRIVE staff in voluntary paternity establishment so it could be done on-site at STRIVE.

### OTHER ASSISTANCE

Child support agencies use a variety of mechanisms to compel noncustodial parents to pay their obligations, such as driver's license suspension, professional license suspension, freezing bank accounts, placing liens on property and incarceration. The child support agencies that partnered with Fathers at Work programs showed a willingness to work with participants who demonstrated a commitment to finding gainful employment and paying child support. The agencies recognized that a suspended driver's license or professional license could be a major barrier to participants' finding the employment that would enable them to support their children.

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## SUMMARY OF SITE STRATEGIES

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It is clear that while the sites were asked to follow a common model of service provision, they each used a tailored approach to meet the needs of participants in their locality. Most of the sites relied on direct job placement as their primary employment intervention, despite the availability of skills training—and occasionally paid skills training—at four of the six sites. While all six sites entered into formal relationships with their respective child support agencies, they structured these relationships differently. Some programs relied predominantly on their own staff to provide child support services, while others received on-site assistance from child support agency staff. Fatherhood instruction occurred in workshop form but varied in length and intensity. Peer support seemed to be an essential component at each of the sites and was used to address parenting and child support issues as well as to recruit new participants. This strategy was complemented by the development of innovative marketing strategies at several of the sites. In the next chapter, we will look at how the general approach of providing employment, fatherhood and child support services was associated with program outcomes and how these outcomes compare with those of similar fathers.



## *The Effects of Fathers at Work on Program Participants*

**T**he main objectives of the Fathers at Work programs were to increase participants' earnings, to increase the amount of child support they paid as a result and to help them become more involved in their children's lives. This chapter presents the outcomes for participants in comparison with those of two similar groups of fathers and seeks to answer the question: Were Fathers at Work participants better off than they would have been without the program? We look at outcomes across the six sites, focusing on how the three-part service model was associated with programmatic outcomes.

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### COMPARISON GROUPS

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Fathers at Work was originally designed as an outcomes study in which we planned to examine changes in participants' outcomes from when they entered the program to 12 months after they enrolled. However, given the strong earnings gains we saw for participants from baseline to follow-up, we sought a way to determine if these were attributable to the program. To do this, we had to identify a comparison group that would allow us to assess what would have happened to the participants had they not enrolled in Fathers at Work.

In the end, we found two groups of noncustodial fathers who were similar to the Fathers at Work participants in important ways. The first comparison group of fathers was drawn from the Fragile Families (FF) Study dataset. This study gathered data on a random sample of unmarried parents (living in cities with populations over 200,000) starting in approximately 2000.<sup>18</sup> The second comparison group was drawn from noncustodial fathers who were eligible to enroll in a similar fatherhood/employment program, PFS, but who were randomly assigned to a control group that did not receive services.<sup>19,20</sup> Like Fathers at Work, PFS was a demonstration project that provided employment and training services to low-income noncustodial parents (mostly fathers) in the hopes that they would be able to meet their child support obligations. From each of these datasets, we used a statistical method called propensity score matching to pick out fathers who were most like the Fathers at Work participants (Rosenbaum, Rubin 1983; Rubin, Rosenbaum 1985; see the appendix for details).

In order to find "like" fathers, we identified individuals in the comparison group datasets that matched the Fathers at Work participants on as many of the baseline characteristics as possible. We were able to match only on the basis of variables that were present in both datasets. Table 4 presents these variables and shows the characteristics of the Fathers at Work participants in relation to the fathers in the two comparison groups. In general, the comparison fathers were very similar to the Fathers at Work participants: They were young noncustodial fathers with young children and low levels of education.

**Table 4**  
**Characteristics of the Fathers at Work Participants and the Fathers in the Two Comparison Groups**

Characteristics at Baseline	Fathers at Work Participants <sup>a</sup>	Comparison Group 1 (chosen from Fragile Families sample)	Comparison Group 2 (chosen from Parents' Fair Share control group)
(Sample size)	N=754	N=718 <sup>b</sup>	N=598 <sup>b</sup>
Race			
Black	79%	83%	—
Hispanic	19%	13%	—
Other minority	2%	4%	—
or Total minority	100%	100%	94%
30 years old or younger	100%	100%	100%
Father has HS diploma/GED	70%	63%	68%
Focal child age			
Under 2	27%	92%	33%
2-4	36%	8%	44%
Older than 4	37%	0%	23%
Father's name on birth certificate	83%	93%	84%
Father employed at baseline	24%	22%	—
Convicted of a crime prior to baseline	75%	79%	—
Released from jail in year prior to baseline	47%	51%	—
Child support order at baseline	40%	40%	100%
Informal child support at baseline	53%	36%	—
Visit with child in last month	79%	82%	—

Note: A dash indicates that data were not available for that indicator.

<sup>a</sup> The sample of Fathers at Work participants used for the analysis was slightly smaller than the full sample of 812 due to missing variables or values in the data. Compared with the full sample of 812, the analysis sample was younger and less likely to be employed at baseline. (See Appendix Table 1 for a full comparison.)

<sup>b</sup> Because the best individual in the comparison group was chosen for each Fathers at Work participant even if a comparison father had already been previously chosen, the sample size in the table is weighted. In fact, there are 263 unique Comparison Group 1 fathers and 429 unique Comparison Group 2 fathers.

Comparison Group 1 (chosen from the FF sample) was constructed by matching Fathers at Work participants to the FF fathers on 11 characteristics (shown in Table 4).<sup>21</sup> This first comparison group, thus, can be used to compare the outcomes of Fathers at Work participants with the outcomes of young disadvantaged unwed fathers in the general population. Comparison Group 1 fathers were primarily black and had low levels of education, and most were not employed at baseline.<sup>22</sup> Many had been convicted of a crime (and/or had recently been released from jail) and had visited their child during the previous month, like the Fathers at Work participants. However, they had younger children and were less likely to be providing informal support.

Similarly, Comparison Group 2 (chosen from the PFS control group) was a group of young noncustodial fathers with low levels of education and young children. While we could match on only five specific variables<sup>23</sup>—age, race, education, age of the focal child and having the father’s name on the birth certificate—we have reason to think this comparison group is similar to the Fathers at Work participants in an important way: All the fathers in Comparison Group 2 were referred to (but randomly chosen not to participate in) a program much like Fathers at Work. Thus, in terms of unobservable motivational characteristics, Fathers at Work participants and Comparison Group 2 may be somewhat more similar than Fathers at Work participants and Comparison Group 1.<sup>24</sup>

Although the PFS dataset we had access to had few baseline characteristics, the original MDRC reports indicate that the Comparison Group 2 population was similar to that of Fathers at Work in other dimensions. Two thirds (67 percent) of PFS participants had been convicted of a crime prior to applying for the program (compared with 75 percent for Fathers at Work, which had two sites that exclusively served formerly incarcerated individuals), and 41 percent had provided informal financial support in the prior six months (compared with 53 percent for Fathers at Work).<sup>25</sup> PFS fathers differed from Fathers at Work participants in that 100 percent had formal child support orders in place (a requirement of PFS), in contrast with only 40 percent of Fathers at Work participants.

While our comparison group approach enhanced our understanding of Fathers at Work outcomes, neither comparison group provided a perfect match. Perhaps most important, we could not match participants with young men in their same labor market. Other researchers have found it critical to match people from the same labor market in constructing a strong comparison group because the level of employment and wages are closely tied to particular labor markets (Heckman, Smith 1995 and 1999; Heckman et al. 1999). We also could not match well on motivational characteristics. The fathers from FF were not actively enrolling in an employment and training program, while the Fathers at Work participants were. The fathers in the PFS sample applied to a program that was quite similar to Fathers at Work, but application was mandatory if the father chose to show up for his court hearing (which only half the identified individuals did). Given these differences, the underlying fatherhood and employment motivations for the comparison group fathers are likely distinct from those of the Fathers at Work participants. Thus, the comparisons presented in the next section should be viewed as a way of benchmarking Fathers at Work participants’ outcomes, rather than precise impact estimates.

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## EFFECTS ON FATHERS AT WORK PARTICIPANTS

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Because neither of the comparison groups perfectly matched the Fathers at Work participants, we used statistical analysis to control for the remaining differences and decided to use the outcomes of both comparison groups to provide a sense of the range of effects Fathers at Work may have had.<sup>26</sup> We looked at outcomes in three areas: employment, family involvement and child support.

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### EMPLOYMENT

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Fathers at Work participants earned \$4,602 more at follow-up than they reported earning in the year prior to the program—\$6,423 at baseline, compared with \$11,025 at follow-up. Furthermore, as Table 5 on the next page shows, Fathers at Work participants earned more than similar young fathers who did not participate in the program. For example, the average Fathers at Work participant earned \$5,371 more in the 12 months prior to follow-up than the average father in Comparison Group 1—\$11,025 versus \$5,654. Compared with fathers in Comparison Group 2, Fathers at Work participants earned \$4,954 more—\$11,025 versus \$6,071.<sup>27</sup>

These differences were seen because Fathers at Work participants were more likely to be employed and worked more hours.<sup>28</sup> They were approximately twice as likely to be employed full-time, and they worked more months per year (5.3 months more) and more hours per week (3.2 hours more). Compared with the jobs secured by Comparison Group 1 participants, the Fathers at Work participants' jobs paid significantly less. But compared with other fathers who sought help from social service agencies—Comparison Group 2 fathers—the wage rates are roughly the same. The jobs of the Fathers at Work participants paid somewhat more than jobs of the Comparison Group 2 fathers, \$0.86 more per hour (a difference that is not statistically significant), and their jobs were no more likely to have health benefits.

While fathers seemed to be more financially stable after participating in Fathers at Work, their earnings were still low and fell just above the federal poverty line for a family of one. Other studies of fatherhood programs have found similarly low earnings, despite increases after participation. For example, in the evaluation of the Partners for Fragile Families demonstration (different from Fragile Families dataset used for Comparison Group 1), participants saw an average increase of \$598 in quarterly earnings (approximately \$2,392 annually) from baseline to one-year follow-up. Like Fathers at Work, the \$9,880 in earnings that Partners for Fragile Families participants earned at follow-up was only just above the poverty line for a family of one.

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### FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

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The percentage of fathers who visited their child remained the same between the baseline and follow-up surveys; about four out of five said they had seen their child in the past month. Table 6 on page 34 shows that Fathers at Work participants, after participating in the program, were 31 percent less likely to visit their child than were fathers in Comparison Group 1 at follow-up; however, it should be recalled that children of the fathers in this comparison group (the FF dataset) were almost all younger than children of the Fathers at Work participants. This may be significant because some (but

**Table 5**  
**Employment Outcomes for Fathers at Work Participants and Comparison Group Fathers**

	Average for Fathers at Work Participants <sup>a</sup>	Average for Comparison Group 1 Fathers <sup>b</sup>	Difference Between Fathers at Work Participants and Comparison Group 1 Fathers (from FF)	Average for Comparison Group 2 Fathers <sup>b</sup>	Difference Between Fathers at Work Participants and Comparison Group 2 Fathers (from PFS)
Earnings over the past 12 months	\$11,025	\$5,654	\$5,371 more ***	\$6,071	\$4,954 more **
Percentage employed full time	58%	29%	104% more *** likely	—	—
Percentage employed at all	81%	—	—	49%	67% more ** likely
Months worked during last year	7.1 months	—	—	1.8 months	5.3 more months ***
Hours worked per week at main job <sup>c</sup>	31 hours	—	—	27.8 hours	3.2 more hours *
Wage per hour at main job (conditional on being employed)	\$9.68	\$12.65	\$2.97 less *** per hour	\$8.82	\$0.86 more per hour
Health insurance at main job	34%	—	—	32%	5% more likely

\*\*\*  $P < .01$  \*\*  $P < .05$  \*  $P < .10$

Note: The Fathers at Work group averages are the unadjusted means at follow-up. The comparison group values are calculated as the difference between the Fathers at Work group value and the estimated impact (or with dichotomous outcomes where the impact is a percentage change, it is calculated based on the Fathers at Work means). Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences. Two-tailed tests are applied to the impact estimates. A dash indicates that data were not available for that indicator.

a The sample of Fathers at Work participants used for the analysis was slightly smaller than the full sample of 812 due to missing variables or values in the data. Compared with the full sample of 812, the analysis sample was younger and less likely to be employed at baseline. (See Appendix Table 1 for a full comparison.)

b Because the best individual in the comparison group was chosen for each Fathers at Work participant, even if a comparison father had already been previously chosen, the sample size in the table is weighted. In fact, there are 263 unique Comparison Group 1 fathers and 429 unique Comparison Group 2 fathers.

c An employed father's main job is defined as the job at which he worked the longest period of time in the year prior to enrolling in Fathers at Work.

not all) studies have shown that noncustodial fathers are most involved during the first couple of years of their child's life (McLanahan et al. 1998). There was no significant difference in visitation between Fathers at Work participants and Comparison Group 2 fathers. Thus, while we cannot be sure, it is unlikely that Fathers at Work had an impact on how much the fathers visited their children.

However, there is some evidence that the program may have led fathers to be more opinionated concerning how their children should be raised. Table 6 shows that Fathers at Work participants were 144 percent more likely than Comparison Group 2 fathers to disagree all or most of the time with the mother about how to raise the focal child. The two groups, on the other hand, did not differ in how often they argued about visitation (17 percent versus 14 percent). Thus, while Fathers at Work participants did not seem to visit their children more often, it appears they were trying to be more involved in how their children were raised. This could be a result of the fatherhood classes each site offered.

The PFS evaluation similarly found an increase in disagreements between the mother and the father about child-rearing issues but not visitation.

Similarly, Fathers at Work participants rated their relationships with the mothers less positively than did comparison group fathers. On average, they rated their relationship with the mother as a 6.72 out of 10, compared with ratings of 7.37 for Comparison Group 1 fathers and 7.02 for Comparison Group 2 fathers. However, only the difference between Fathers at Work participants and Comparison Group 1 fathers was statistically significant; this may have been due to the younger age of the children in Comparison Group 1, which was likely associated with stronger relationships between the parents.

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### CHILD SUPPORT

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It was expected that if Fathers at Work participants earned more, they would provide more monetary support for their children. To ascertain if this occurred, we examined changes in formal and informal financial child support from baseline to follow-up.

The number of Fathers at Work participants with formal child support orders in place changed relatively little during the 12 months; 40 percent had orders at baseline, while 42 percent did at follow-up. However, there were other changes between baseline and follow-up: Payments went from about \$32 per month before entering the program to \$90 in the month prior to the follow-up interview.

Furthermore, at follow-up, among fathers with formal support orders, Fathers at Work participants were more likely to make a payment and typically paid more than Comparison Group 2 fathers (as shown in Table 7 on page 35).<sup>29</sup> While only 27 percent of Comparison Group 2 fathers with orders made a formal payment in the relevant month, 42 percent of Fathers at Work participants did. Thus, they were 53 percent more likely to make a formal payment. In addition, in the month prior to being interviewed, Comparison Group 2 fathers with orders paid \$38, compared with \$90 for Fathers at Work participants with orders—or \$52 more per month. One reason Fathers at Work participants might have paid more is because they were earning more. Indeed, we found that all of the increase was due to the participants' increased income.

Many fathers also supported their children informally by giving the mother money or necessary items (such as formula or diapers) or purchasing goods or services directly for their children. We found that there was a small decrease between baseline and follow-up in the percentage of fathers who made informal child support payments to the mother and that the amount of informal support declined by 45 percent. These declines over time are not surprising, given that many fathers provide more informal support when their children are younger. There was in fact no difference between participants in Fathers at Work and Comparison Group 2 in terms of the proportion of fathers who provided informal support (43 percent compared with 44 percent) at follow-up. Furthermore, the amount of informal support at follow-up was on average the same as it was for Comparison Group 2 fathers (\$113 compared with \$112), regardless of the fact that Fathers at Work participants paid more in formal child support. Thus, the decline in the amount of informal payments is unlikely to be related to paying more formal support or participating in the Fathers at Work program.

**Table 6**  
**Father Involvement Outcomes for Fathers at Work Participants and Comparison Group Fathers**

	Average for Fathers at Work Participants <sup>a</sup>	Average for Comparison Group 1 Fathers <sup>b</sup>	Difference Between Fathers at Work Participants and Comparison Group 1 Fathers (from FF)	Average for Comparison Group 2 Fathers <sup>b</sup>	Difference Between Fathers at Work Participants and Comparison Group 2 Fathers (from PFS)
Visited child in the past month	80%	116% <sup>c</sup>	31% less likely **	68%	13% more likely
Parents disagree always or most of the time about how child is raised	13%	—	—	5%	144% more likely ***
Parents disagree always or most of the time about how often father visits	17%	—	—	14%	20% more likely
Quality of relationship with mother (1-10 scale, 10 excellent)	6.72	7.37	0.65 points lower ***	7.02	0.28 points lower
Quality of relationship with child (1-10 scale, 10 excellent)	8.61	—	—	8.73	0.12 points lower

\*\*\*  $P < .01$  \*\*  $P < .05$  \*  $P < .10$

Note: The Fathers at Work group averages are the unadjusted means at follow-up. The comparison group values are calculated as the difference between the Fathers at Work group value and the estimated impact (or with dichotomous outcomes where the impact is a percentage change, it is calculated based on the Fathers at Work means). Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences. Two-tailed tests are applied to the impact estimates. A dash indicates that data were not available for that indicator.

a The sample of Fathers at Work participants used for the analysis was slightly smaller than the full sample of 812 due to missing variables or values in the data. Compared with the full sample of 812, the analysis sample was younger and less likely to be employed at baseline. (See Appendix Table 1 for a full comparison.)

b Because the best individual in the comparison group was chosen for each Fathers at Work participant even if a comparison father had already been previously chosen, the sample size in the table is weighted. In fact, there are 263 unique Comparison Group 1 fathers and 429 unique Comparison Group 2 fathers.

c As per the note above, because this variable is dichotomous, we calculated the comparison group mean using the following formula:  $.8 \times (1/1 - .31) = 1.16$ . As this value is greater than 100 percent, it implies we were unable to fully control for all the factors influencing why fathers visited their children.

## SUMMARY

In sum, it appears that the Fathers at Work programs achieved many of their goals. Fathers at Work participants earned 80 to 90 percent more than both typical young minority unwed fathers (Comparison Group 1) and demographically similar young men who applied but did not get into another fatherhood program (Comparison Group 2). Compared with typical young unwed fathers, Fathers at Work participants were twice as likely to be employed full time. Compared with similar fatherhood program applicants, Fathers at Work participants worked more months and more hours during the prior 12 months. However, Fathers at Work participants' earnings were still low; \$11,025 a year puts fathers only just above the 2003 federal poverty limit of \$8,980 for a family of one.

**Table 7**  
**Formal and Informal Child Support Paid by Fathers at Work Participants and Comparison Group Fathers**

	Average for Fathers at Work Participants <sup>a</sup>	Average for Comparison Group 2 Fathers <sup>b</sup>	Difference Between Fathers at Work Participants and Comparison Group 2 Fathers
<b>Formal child support</b> (Conditional on having formal order in place at follow-up) <sup>c</sup>			
Formal child support paid in last month	42%	27%	53% more likely *
Amount of formal child support paid in last month	\$90.32	\$38.13	\$52.19 more **
<b>Informal support</b>			
Informal support paid in last month	43%	44%	1% less likely
Amount of informal support paid in last month <sup>d</sup>	\$113.09	\$111.89	\$1.20 more

\*\*  $P \leq .05$  \*  $P \leq .10$

Note: The Fathers at Work group averages are the unadjusted means at follow-up. The comparison group values are calculated as the difference between the Fathers at Work group value and the estimated impact (or with dichotomous outcomes where the impact is a percentage change, it is calculated based on the Fathers at Work means). Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences. Two-tailed tests are applied to the impact estimates.

a The sample of Fathers at Work participants used for the analysis was slightly smaller than the full sample of 812 due to missing variables or values in the data. Compared with the full sample of 812, the analysis sample was younger and less likely to be employed at baseline. (See Appendix Table 1 for a full comparison.)

b Because the best individual in the comparison group was chosen for each Fathers at Work participant, even if a comparison father had already been previously chosen, the sample size in the table is weighted. In fact, there are 429 unique Comparison Group 2 fathers.

c 251 Fathers at Work fathers had child support orders in place at follow-up, and 452 Comparison Group 2 members did.

d The analysis of whether a father provided any informal support was conducted using the full sample, while the analysis of the amount provided excluded those who did not provide any informal support in the prior month (286 Fathers at Work participants and 370 Comparison Group 2 fathers).

Fathers at Work participants were also more likely to pay child support if they had an order in place, and they paid more on average than applicants to another fatherhood program. While the Fathers at Work participants did not visit their child any more often than the other two comparison groups, they did seem to argue, or perhaps talk, more with the mothers about how to raise their children. The level of informal support provided by Fathers at Work participants was approximately the same as that given by other similar noncustodial fathers, despite the fact that Fathers at Work participants seemed to provide more formal support.

While we cannot be confident that all these differences were due solely to the Fathers at Work program, these findings are encouraging. The increases seen in fathers' earnings and child support payments have important implications for young, low-income families and for public policy.



## *Conclusions and Recommendations*

**F**athers at Work set out to identify an effective approach to helping young, low-income, noncustodial fathers succeed in the workplace and as parents. Findings from the evaluation reveal that community-based organizations, particularly those experienced in workforce development, may be able to help these vulnerable dads by extending their services to include fatherhood and child support services. The six organizations that participated in Fathers at Work played an important role for such fathers by providing employment, child support and fatherhood services together. Across the demonstration, participants seemed to fare better than other similar young unwed fathers, working more hours, resulting in greater earnings. This employment success, in turn, seemed to benefit their children, increasing the amount of formal child support payments, while not reducing the amount of informal support. It appears that sites helped fathers face their obligations and more effectively navigate the child support system.

These results suggest several directions for the future of policy, programs and research related to low-income noncustodial fathers:

**Public dollars could be effectively invested to provide employment and child support services, such as those provided to Fathers at Work dads, through well-established, experienced workforce organizations.** Fathers at Work participants faced a range of interrelated challenges. They knew that getting a job could enable them to provide financial support to their children, but participation in the formal economy might also trigger wage garnishment or other penalties. Fathers said they were interested in providing financial and emotional support for their children, but contentious relationships with the mothers of their children sometimes made this difficult or impossible. The Fathers at Work programs helped participants navigate these challenges. While our findings do not suggest one particular approach to providing employment or child support services, they do point to the potential of providing employment, child support and fatherhood assistance through a single community-based organization with strong linkages to public child support agencies. There have been several demonstrations and special allocations of funds for fatherhood programs, but more should be done to align the nation's workforce development and child support systems.

**Resources should be invested in strategies that help fathers access higher-paying jobs.** Despite the gains made by participants, those who completed Fathers at Work were still very poor. Differences in earnings were due primarily to the fact that more fathers were working and they were working more hours, not because they were earning higher hourly wages. While the improved earning power that resulted from working more was good for the participants, an annual income of \$11,025 is not a family-sustaining wage. It falls below the 2003 federal poverty limit for a family of two (\$12,120) and for a family of three (\$15,260). Even if the father had only himself to support (a family of one), he would be just barely above the poverty line. Thus,

despite the significant gains for participating fathers, they continued to struggle financially after engagement in the program.

These financial struggles may, in large part, be a reflection of changes in the labor market over the past several decades. Key trends affecting Fathers at Work participants include declining employment prospects for men, fewer family-sustaining jobs that do not require at least some postsecondary education and an increase in the number of low-wage, service-sector jobs. At the same time, the United States has seen high school dropout and incarceration rates swell, meaning more barriers to labor market success for young noncustodial dads.

While there are not simple policy solutions to respond to these complex trends, further exploration is needed to identify employment strategies that can succeed in lifting such fathers and their children out of poverty. While several of the sites experimented with some skills training, the majority of participants received primarily direct placement services and minimal job readiness training. Our research raises the question of whether a robust skills training component for all participants could have resulted in even stronger gains. Given the fathers' need for income to support themselves and to meet their financial obligations, the success of longer-term skills training might hinge on finding mechanisms by which fathers can earn income *while* learning new skills.

**More research is also needed to understand what strategies might be most effective for improving parenting skills.** Participating in Fathers at Work did not seem to change how fathers viewed their relationships with their children or the way they reported interacting with them. It is unclear what adjustments in strategy might be needed to achieve more positive outcomes in these areas. Parental conflict was certainly common for participants. There may be alternate ways for programs to engage custodial parents—in most cases the moms—so that parental conflict can be addressed directly with both parents and conflict resolution can be used to increase the broader parenting skills of both parents, ultimately benefiting their children. While three of the Fathers at Work organizations tried to engage mothers in the programs and address issues of parental conflict, these enhancements were implemented later in the demonstration and were not a focus of service delivery. A stronger, more deliberate emphasis on both parents might yield positive results in terms of improving parenting skills.

In focus groups, Fathers at Work participants generally placed tremendous value on the peer support they received during fatherhood workshops. Regardless of the lack of positive results observed in terms of fatherhood, there may be a role for peer support in attracting and retaining low-income men in employment programs. Certainly, this recommendation is supported by findings from other evaluations of fatherhood programs in which peer support was determined to be a critical service component. In addition, the fact that Fathers at Work participants rated relationships with the custodial parent lower and disagreed with them more about childrearing than comparison group fathers may mean that fathers in the study were trying to be more actively involved in their children's lives.

Finally, different data would likely be necessary to truly gauge improvements in parenting and relationships. The Fathers at Work evaluation design did not include a focus on the outcomes for children or observations of interactions between parents and their children, which would have helped to understand whether programs actually improved parenting skills. However, these data were outside the scope of this study.

**States should pass through more child support money to families.** While child support payments increased as a result of the initiative, this did not necessarily mean that participants' children were better off. For the third of participants whose children received welfare, the additional income contributed by the father resulted in only a very small increase in the support families received. Aware of this possibility, some fathers may have chosen to remain outside the child support system (that is, not establishing formal orders), as was demonstrated by the fact that there was no change from baseline to follow-up in the percentage of fathers with formal support orders. Much has been written about the potential benefits of increasing the amount of child support that gets “passed through” from a noncustodial father to his children receiving TANF. An experiment in Wisconsin revealed that when more money was passed through, fathers were more likely to pay child support and paid higher amounts (Meyer, Cancian 2001). The fact remains that the majority of child support paid by fathers whose children are on welfare goes to the state to recoup welfare expenses. Passing through additional money to families could result in more substantial contributions by fathers, though it would also increase the state's welfare burden.

Recently revived fatherhood legislation (initially introduced in 2007 by Senator Evan Bayh and then Senator Barack Obama) proposes that additional money be passed through to families, while also strengthening child support enforcement mechanisms. As president, Obama has also convened a council of clergy and nonprofit leaders to address the issues related to the large number of children who live without their dads and do not receive financial support.

While this study points to the potential of combining employment, fatherhood and child support services—and for community-based organizations to play a critical role in delivering or brokering these services—we do not know exactly what it is about the strategies used by the six sites that led to their success, because the application of the model was so varied. While we encourage larger-scale adoption of combined services, future research also needs to focus on one or two promising strategies, such as skills training and direct placement, combined with a consistently applied approach to child support and fatherhood. Investigation into these promising strategies should also be done using an experimental design in which fathers recruited to the program would be randomly assigned to either a “treatment” or “control” group—allowing researchers to account for participant motivation and thus better measure the true impact of the program.

Despite the need for more research to understand specifically what works when serving this population, the evaluation of Fathers at Work suggests that such programs could make a real difference for young, low-income fathers and their families. However, more than seven years after Fathers at Work was launched, most of the organizations that participated in the project have eliminated or scaled back their

child support and fatherhood services. Without the specific allocation of foundation funds, programs were unable to maintain their efforts in these areas; current funding mechanisms make it difficult to offer this intensive set of services to fathers. Given the results of this evaluation, policymakers and funders should consider new ways to support this type of programming.

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## ENDNOTES

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- 1 In 2003, the Chicago STRIVE merged with the Suburban Joblink Corporation to form Harborquest.
- 2 *Fatherhood Development* was developed over several years—beginning in 1990—through the collaborative efforts of P/PV, MDRC and NPCL in conjunction with the Young Unwed Fathers Project and Parents’ Fair Share. In 1997, P/PV exclusively licensed the curriculum to NPCL, which is responsible for dissemination and related training.
- 3 On June 19, 2009, Senator Evan Bayh (D-IN) revived the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act. The bill, now called the Julia Carson Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009, is cosponsored by Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-AK) and Roland Burris (D-IL). For more information, visit: <http://bayh.senate.gov/news/press/release/?id=61A8775F-8CB7-4F8B-8025-9073DFE2CC36>.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 PRWORA entered into a deliberate trade-off between families receiving welfare cash assistance and those who had left assistance and were trying to make it on their own. Under PRWORA, families leaving welfare received more of the child support collected by states—but families on welfare received less child support. Prior to the enactment of the legislation, the majority of states withheld most of the child support collected on behalf of families receiving assistance to reimburse welfare costs. Even after a family left assistance, most states continued to keep the money. But states were required to “pass through” the first \$50 in child support recovered from the noncustodial parent to the custodial parent. To ensure the “pass-through” benefited families, states also were required to “disregard,” or ignore, the \$50 when determining how much money the custodial parent could collect in welfare benefits, so the money passed through to the family would always be in addition to what they could collect through the welfare system. Federal and state governments shared in the costs of the \$50 pass-through and disregard (Turetsky 2005). PRWORA required states to pay more of the collections to families leaving welfare. But it made the pass-through and welfare disregard optional and eliminated the federal cost-sharing feature. Those states that elected to continue passing through support were nonetheless required to pay a share of the passed-through collections to the federal government, leading many states to stop passing through money to families receiving welfare. Despite the changes in the pass-through and welfare disregard regulations under PRWORA, many states maintained the practice of allowing families receiving welfare to receive some child support when a noncustodial parent chose to pay through the formal system (Cancian et al. 2006).
- 6 The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 was signed into law in February 2006.
- 7 Since the passage of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA), half of states now pass through at least some of the child support payments, and 16 states pass through at least \$100 or had legislation pending to do so in 2007. The legislation also included a limited waiver of the requirement that states pay the federal government a share of the support payments passed on to families receiving TANF. However, this waiver of the federal share is limited to a \$100 pass-through for one child and \$200 pass-through for two or more children. In addition, the DRA also cut federal funding to state child support agencies by 20 percent, which—along with state budget shortfalls—made it difficult for states to enact such pass-through policies. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provided temporary fiscal relief to states in this area (Turetsky 2009; US Department of Health and Human Services 2009).
- 8 Many states—such as New York, Georgia, Maryland, Wisconsin and Virginia—have also sponsored Fatherhood Initiatives.
- 9 The Partners for Fragile Families Demonstration targeted a slightly different population than did Fathers at Work; the initiative was aimed at fathers ages 16 to 25 whose previous interaction with the child support system had been limited. The rationale was to reach young fathers when they were still in contact with their children; previous research had indicated that noncustodial fathers are more involved with their children in the few years after their birth. The overarching goal of the initiative was to help state child support agencies and community-based organizations offer services that were more flexible and responsive to young noncustodial fathers. Specifically, the organizations that implemented the program—well-established community-based organizations—were asked to help participants establish

- paternity, connect with the child support system, improve parenting and relationship skills, secure employment and provide them with other services to strengthen their family ties. The narrow eligibility requirements and orientation toward formal support made participant recruitment a challenge. Researchers looked at the employment and child support outcomes of participants before and after enrolling in the program. Overall, employment rates and earnings were low, though earnings increased over time. The number of child support orders, number of child support payments and amount paid in child support also increased over time. However, without a comparison or control group, there was no way to determine if these changes were the result of the program or due to other factors (Martinson et al. 2007).
- 10 The Fathers at Work organizations began enrolling fathers between January and June of 2001, eventually enrolling 1,018 fathers, who completed baseline surveys across all six sites through 2004. Data presented in this chapter are for the 830 participants who completed follow-up surveys, excluding some with missing values, bringing the sample size to 812. Figures may differ slightly from data presented in Chapter 4, which focuses on 754 participants we were able to match with comparison group fathers.
  - 11 Defined as 20 or more hours per month.
  - 12 An employed father's main job is defined as the job at which he worked the longest period of time in the year prior to enrolling in Fathers at Work.
  - 13 Annual earnings were adjusted to 2003 dollars to be consistent with earnings reported in Chapter 4, which were also adjusted to 2003 dollars.
  - 14 The baseline survey asked participants to list all of their biological children; researchers then randomly selected one child as the "focal child" about whom they asked for more detailed information. The follow-up survey asked about the same child as a way of looking at changes over time in their relationship and in the relationship with the child's mother.
  - 15 These amounts were adjusted to 2003 dollars.
  - 16 In 2003, the Chicago STRIVE merged with the Suburban Joblink Corporation to form Harborquest.
  - 17 *Fatherhood Development* was developed over several years—beginning in 1990—through the collaborative efforts of P/PV, MDRC and NPCL in conjunction with the Young Unwed Fathers Project and Parents' Fair Share. In 1997, P/PV exclusively licensed the curriculum to NPCL, which is responsible for dissemination and related training.
  - 18 To learn more about this sample, go to [www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/about.asp](http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/about.asp).
  - 19 The data used in this report were derived from data files that were graciously made available to P/PV researchers by colleagues at MDRC. The authors of this report remain solely responsible for how the data have been used or interpreted.
  - 20 To be eligible for PFS, "fathers had to be under- or unemployed and have child support orders in place but not be making regular payments. In addition, the children for whom they owed support had to be current or past recipients of welfare. In most cases, the men were referred to the program during court hearings or appointments scheduled by child support agencies.... For the men who were referred to the program, participation in the PFS core activities was mandatory, and fathers were expected to participate until they found a job and started paying child support. Those who failed to participate were referred back to the child support agency for follow-up, which sometimes led to an additional court hearing" (Miller, Knox 2001).
  - 21 Both the FF sample and the Fathers at Work sample were separated into those who had been convicted of a crime at baseline and those who had not. Convicted Fathers at Work participants were matched as closely as possible on the 11 characteristics with convicted FF fathers. Similarly, nonconvicted Fathers at Work participants were matched as closely as possible on the 11 characteristics with nonconvicted FF fathers.
  - 22 We designated the first-year follow-up (after the baby's birth) as the baseline for the FF fathers. The outcomes data are from the third-year follow-up. We statistically adjust for the longer gap between the baseline and follow-up in the FF groups, compared with the Fathers at Work group. See Appendix A.

- 23 The fact that there were few common baseline variables in the PFS dataset provided by MDRC was due to confidentiality issues.
- 24 Fathers were referred to PFS at a child support hearing. Once referred, participation was mandatory, but the fact that a father appeared at a hearing (rather than skipping it as half the potential participants did) may indicate greater willingness to be involved with his child or get a job.
- 25 While we did not have individual-level baseline data for PFS fathers on conviction status or whether a father provided informal support, due to confidentiality issues, Miller and Knox (2001, Table 3) provided these baseline averages for the PFS participant sample.
- 26 The estimated impacts in this chapter are all regression-adjusted using either ordinary least squares or logits (if the dependent variable is dichotomous), controlling for matching factors. The estimates based on Comparison Group 1 control for indicators of: Fathers at Work participation; the father's education; his age; if he was employed full time at baseline; the log of earnings in the 12 months prior to baseline; if he had been convicted of a crime in the 12 month prior to baseline; if he had been released from prison or jail in the 12 months prior to baseline; if he had a child support order in place at baseline; if he was giving informal child support to the focal child at baseline; and if he had seen the focal child in the month prior to baseline. The estimates based on Comparison Group 2 controlled for indicators of: Fathers at Work participation; if he was employed at baseline; the log of his earnings in the 12 months prior to baseline; if the focal child was under age 2 at baseline; if the father's name appeared on the focal child's birth certificate; the father's race; and the log of the amount he paid in child support in the 12 months prior to baseline. The Fathers at Work group averages are the unadjusted means at follow-up. The comparison group values are calculated as the difference between the Father at Work group value and the estimated impact (or with dichotomous outcomes where the impact is a percentage change, it is calculated based on the Fathers at Work means). Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences. Two-tailed tests are applied to the impact estimates.
- 27 The follow-up data for PFS fathers was collected approximately five years earlier than the Fathers at Work data (from 1995 to 1997, versus 2002 to 2004). We adjusted the PFS earnings by the US consumer price index to put all earnings in 2003 dollars.
- 28 To investigate how these differences were achieved, we relied primarily on comparisons with the fathers in Comparison Group 2 (PFS). Only the PFS dataset included this more detailed employment information.
- 29 Because the dataset for Comparison Group 1 did not include information about the amount of formal child support fathers paid in the month before follow-up, we were only able to use Comparison Group 2 for this analysis.

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## APPENDIX

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### METHODS FOR ESTIMATING IMPACTS

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As described in Chapter 4, we estimated impacts using a comparison group design in which the outcomes of the Fathers at Work participants were compared with the outcomes of two groups of similar fathers who did not receive the program. In this appendix, we describe in more detail how the comparison groups were selected and how impacts were estimated.

#### COMPARISON GROUP SELECTION

To gauge the program’s effectiveness, one would ideally like to observe the outcomes of a group of noncustodial fathers who were just like the Fathers at Work participants—especially in terms of characteristics that could affect the outcomes we examined—but did not take part in the program. Given the large number of characteristics that could potentially affect the outcomes of interest (employment, earnings, child support activity and the quality of the father’s relationships), exactly matching on all characteristics would have been impossible.

#### PROPENSITY SCORE MATCHING

Fortunately, in the early 1980s, Rosenbaum and Rubin developed a technique, called propensity score matching (PSM), which enables one to draw a sample that is similar to the participant group on a large number of characteristics (Rosenbaum and Rubin 1983; Rubin and Rosenbaum 1985). One does so in three steps:

1. **Estimate a regression model of being a participant.** We combined the Fathers at Work dataset with the data on all the members of a particular potential comparison group. Then we estimated a regression in which the dependent variable was Fathers at Work participation status (1 for all Fathers at Work participants and 0 for all potential comparison group members) and the independent variables were all the baseline demographic, economic and criminal variables common to both datasets.
2. **Calculate propensity scores.** For the individuals in the pooled dataset (all participants and members from a particular potential comparison group), we calculated the propensity that the individual was similar to a Fathers at Work participant based on their baseline characteristics using the parameters estimated in the first step.
3. **Match each Fathers at Work participant with the “closest” comparison group father.** For each participant, we selected the comparison group father whose propensity score was closest to the participant’s score. Because we wanted to derive a comparison group that was as similar as possible to the Fathers at Work group, each comparison group father could serve as the match for more than one Fathers at Work participant. Thus, comparison group fathers who were matched more than once received a weight in proportion to the number of times they were matched. All impact regressions were conducted using these weights.

### COMPARISON GROUP DATA

We found two datasets of noncustodial fathers that could yield comparison group members. Comparison Group 1 was drawn from the Fragile Families (FF) Study dataset. This study gathered data on a random sample of unmarried parents (living in cities with populations over 200,000) starting in approximately 2000.<sup>1</sup> Baseline information for the FF dataset was gathered at the hospital at the birth of the father's child. Data was then collected 12 and 36 months later. We use the 12-month data as Time 1 for FF (because none of the Fathers at Work participants entered the program at the birth of the child) and the 36-month data as the 2-year follow-up data.

Comparison Group 2 was drawn from noncustodial fathers who were eligible to enroll in a similar fatherhood/employment program, Parents' Fair Share (PFS), but who were randomly assigned to a control group that did not receive services.<sup>2,3</sup> Like Fathers at Work, PFS was a demonstration project that provided employment and training services to low-income noncustodial parents (mostly fathers) with the hope that they would be able to meet their child support obligations. PFS collected data just before the fathers entered the participation lottery and two years after.

### SELECTING THE GROUPS

Recall that Fathers at Work was a program designed to serve young fathers (30 years and younger). Thus, before we started the matching process, we eliminated all the fathers who were older than 30 years from the FF dataset and all who were 30 or older from the PFS dataset.<sup>4</sup> In addition, because FF is a nationally representative sample, a large fraction of the sample was white. Among Fathers at Work participants, less than 2 percent were white. Thus, we eliminated all the white FF fathers from the group of potential comparison group members.

To select Comparison Group 1 fathers from the resulting FF dataset, we split both the FF dataset and the Fathers at Work dataset into two separate categories: those who had been convicted of a crime at baseline and those who had not. We did so because young men with a criminal record may be different from other men in unmeasured ways. By matching convicted Fathers at Work participants with convicted FF fathers and nonconvicted Fathers at Work participants with nonconvicted FF fathers we hoped to create comparison groups that were the best match for Fathers at Work participants on these unmeasured factors. Within each of the resulting four sub-samples, comparison group fathers were chosen using PSM, matching on the 11 variables common to both the Fathers at Work and the FF datasets: African American, Latino, has high school diploma or GED, age of the focal child, whether the father's name is on the focal child's birth certificate, if the father was employed at Time 1, whether the father had been released from jail in the year prior to Time 1, whether he had a child support order at Time 1, whether he provided informal child support at Time 1 and whether he had visited with the child in the month before Time 1. As previously noted, FF fathers could be selected multiple times if they best matched several Fathers at Work participants; thus, 263 FF fathers were selected as matches for 718 of the 754 Fathers at Work participants with complete data on these 11 variables. Fifty-four percent of the FF fathers were uniquely matched to a Fathers at Work participant, while the others served as the comparison for multiple participants. All analyses were weighted to account for repeat selections.

Comparison Group 2 was chosen from individuals who applied to the PFS program but were randomized into a control group that did not receive any employment or fatherhood services. As already described, we also selected those fathers who were under 30. Within this group of PFS controls, we matched on: minority status,<sup>5</sup> has high school diploma or GED, age of the focal child and whether the father's name is on the child's birth certificate. All PFS fathers had a child support order in place (a requirement for applying to PFS). In all, 429 PFS fathers were selected as matches for 598 of 693 Fathers at Work participants who were under 30. (Again, all subsequent analyses were weighted.)

#### COMPARING THE GROUPS

We decided to compare the Fathers at Work participants' outcomes to the outcomes of individuals from both comparison groups because neither group constituted a perfect reference group and each had its unique strengths. We were able to match on many characteristics to select Comparison Group 1. However, these individuals represented typical noncustodial fathers from urban communities, whereas the fathers in the PFS dataset were more actively interested in finding work and possibly becoming more involved in their children's lives, as exemplified by their enrollment in an employment/fatherhood program.

All of the PFS fathers were under- or unemployed and had child support orders in place but were not making regular payments. PFS fathers were generally referred to the program at a child support hearing. Once they were referred, participation was mandatory; but the fact that the fathers appeared at the hearing (rather than skipping it, as half the potential participants did) may indicate greater willingness to be involved with their child or get a job. Thus, in terms of unobservable motivational characteristics, Fathers at Work participants and Comparison Group 2 fathers may be somewhat more similar than Fathers at Work participants and Comparison Group 1 fathers.

Appendix Table 1 shows that the two resulting comparison groups were fairly similar to the Fathers at Work participants in terms of many key characteristics.<sup>6</sup> Comparison Group 1 fathers were primarily black and had low levels of education, and most were not employed at baseline. Many had been convicted of a crime (and/or had been recently released from jail) and had visited their child in the previous month, like the Fathers at Work participants. However, they had younger children and were less likely to be providing informal support.

Similarly, Comparison Group 2 fathers had low levels of education and young children. All were under 30 years old. The Comparison Group 2 fathers differed from the Fathers at Work participants in that 100 percent had formal child support orders in place (a requirement of PFS), compared with only 40 percent of Fathers at Work participants.

**Appendix Table 1**  
**Characteristics of the Fathers at Work Participants and the Fathers in the Two Comparison Groups**

Characteristics at Baseline	Fathers at Work Participants	Fathers at Work Participants Used for Analysis	Comparison Group 1 (chosen from Fragile Families sample)	Comparison Group 2 (chosen from Parents' Fair Share control group)
(Sample size)	N=812	N=754	N=718 <sup>a</sup>	N=598 <sup>a</sup>
Race				
Black	74%	79%	83%	—
Hispanic	18%	19%	13%	—
Other minority	2%	2%	4%	—
or Total minority	94%	100%	100%	94%
30 years old or younger	78% <sup>b</sup>	100%	100%	100%
Father has HS diploma/GED	69%	70%	63%	68%
Focal child age				
Under 2	27%	27%	92%	33%
2-4	37%	36%	8%	44%
Older than 4	36%	37%	0%	23%
Father's name on birth certificate	84%	83%	93%	84%
Father employed at baseline	31%	24%	22%	—
Convicted of a crime prior to baseline	76%	75%	79%	—
Released from jail in year prior to baseline	49%	47%	51%	—
Child support order at baseline	41%	40%	40%	100%
Informal child support at baseline	52%	53%	36%	—
Visit with child in last month	79%	79%	82%	—

*a Because the best individual in the comparison was chosen for each FAW father even if a comparison father had already been previously chosen, the sample size in the table is a weighted sample size. In fact, there are 263 unique FF fathers and 429 unique PFS fathers in these groups.*

*b As noted in Chapter 2, Fathers at Work programs targeted fathers aged 18 to 30. Twelve percent were older than 30; however, all fathers used for our analysis were 30 or under.*

## IMPACT ESTIMATION

The basic approach for estimating impacts was to compare the follow-up outcomes of the Fathers at Work participants with those of the fathers in each comparison group using regression models to adjust for differences in the two groups at Time 1. Outcomes of interest were regressed on whether an individual was a Fathers at Work participant and other explanatory variables. The basic regression model was:

$$(1) Y = a + bFAW + Xc + e$$

where Y is the outcome; FAW is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the sample member is a Fathers at Work participant and 0 otherwise; X is a vector of other variables that affect Y; and “b” is how the outcome Y for the Fathers at Work participants differs from that of the comparison group fathers, adjusting for the differences accounted for by the other variables. Appendix Table 2 lists the explanatory variables included in each of the regressions for the two comparison groups.

**Appendix Table 2**  
**Explanatory Variables Included in the Impact Regressions**

Comparison Group 1	Comparison Group 2
Fathers at Work participation dummy	Fathers at Work participation dummy
Father's age at baseline Father is Latino	Father is minority
Father has high school diploma or GED Father has technical training or some college	Father has high school diploma or GED
Father was employed at baseline Father had full-time work at main job at baseline	Focal child is under 2 years at baseline Father's name is on focal child's birth certificate
Log earnings from the 12 months prior to baseline Log earnings from the 12 months prior to baseline interacted with Fathers at Work dummy (to adjust for the shorter period between Time 1 and 2 for Fathers at Work participants)	Log earnings from the 12 months prior to baseline Log amount of formal child support paid in last 12 months at baseline
Father was convicted of a crime prior to baseline Father was released from jail in 12 months prior to baseline Father had a formal child support order at baseline Father provided informal child support at baseline Father saw focal child in month prior to baseline	

Of the Fathers at Work participants, 633 were under 30 and had complete data on all the regression variables listed above, and 754 were 30 or under and had complete data. All analyses were run 1) including only Fathers at Work participants who had a comparison group match (718 for Comparison Group 1 analyses or 598 for Comparison Group 2 analyses) and 2) including all appropriately aged Fathers at Work participants (754 in Comparison Group 1 analyses and 633 in Comparison Group 2 analyses). The results from the two sets of analyses were very similar; thus, the results of the more inclusive sample (2) are reported in the text.

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## APPENDIX ENDNOTES

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- 1 To learn more about this sample, please visit: [www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/about.asp](http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/about.asp).
- 2 The data used in this report were derived from data files that were graciously made available to P/PV researchers by colleagues at MDRC. The authors of this report remain solely responsible for how the data have been used or interpreted.
- 3 To be eligible for PFS, “fathers had to be under- or unemployed and have child support orders in place but not be making regular payments. In addition, the children for whom they owed support had to be current or past recipients of welfare. In most cases, the men were referred to the program during court hearings or appointments scheduled by child support agencies.... For the men who were referred to the program, participation in the PFS core activities was mandatory, and fathers were expected to participate until they found a job and started paying child support. Those who failed to participate were referred back to the child support agency for follow-up, which sometimes led to an additional court hearing” (Miller, Knox 2001).
- 4 For the FF dataset, we had the age of each individual and could eliminate anyone over 30. Unfortunately, for the PFS dataset, we had to use the follow-up age variable (“under 30 at follow-up”) as the screening variable because the dataset did not include a baseline age variable.
- 5 Our PFS dataset did not specify the minority group with which the father identified himself.
- 6 We ran our analyses both including only Fathers at Work participants that had a match in the relevant comparison group and including all Fathers at Work participants of the appropriate age (30 or under or under 30.) The results differed negligibly, thus we report the results based on the larger sample.





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