

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PARTNERS FOR FRAGILE FAMILIES DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

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June 2007

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This report was produced under the direction of Jennifer Burnszynski and Linda Mellgren, Project Officers, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Office of Human Services Policy, Melissa Pardue, Deputy Assistant Secretary. This report is available online at:
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/07/PFF/imp/>

This report was prepared at the Urban Institute for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The Urban Institute is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization. Karin Martinson and Pamela Holcomb are senior research associates with the Urban Institute. John Trutko is a senior research associate for Capital Research Corporation. Demetra Smith Nightingale and Burt S. Barnow are principal research scientists at the Institute for Policy Studies at Johns Hopkins University. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	iii
Executive Summary	iv
The Partners for Fragile Families Program	1
Low-Income, Noncustodial Fathers: Who Are They and How Are They Faring?	2
Prior Demonstration Projects to Enhance Services for Noncustodial Fathers	4
Overview of the Partners for Fragile Families Demonstration	6
The PFF Evaluation	10
Structure of the Report	12
Program Design and Participant Characteristics	13
Sponsoring Organizations and Key Partners	13
Size, Funding, and Staffing	16
Target Group	17
PFF Management Information Systems	18
Participant Characteristics	19
Summary	22
Recruitment and Enrollment of Program Participants	23
Difficulty Reaching Enrollment Goals	23
PFF Projects' Outreach and Recruitment Methods	24
How Participants Learned About PFF and Why They Participated	29
Enrollment Challenges for PFF Projects	30
Summary	32
PFF Program Services	33
Range of PFF Services	33
Workshops and Peer Support Services	36
Employment-Related Services	39
Parenting and Relationship Services	42
Child Support-Related Services	44
Case Management Services	52
Other Support Services	52
Summary	54

Implementation Challenges and Lessons	57
Start-Up Issues	57
Ongoing Operational Issues	59
Implementation Lessons from the PFF Demonstration	61
References	65
Appendix A: Demographic Characteristics of PFF Participants	A-1
Appendix B: PFF Site Profiles	B-1
Exhibits	
1.1. PFF Demonstration Sites	9
1.2. Economic and Demographic Profile of PFF Sites	11
2.1. Program Design of PFF Projects	14
2.2. Selected Characteristics of PFF Participants at Enrollment	20
3.1. PFF Participation Goals and Levels, and Outreach and Recruitment Methods	25
3.2. How Participants Learned about the PFF Project in Their Locality	29
3.3. Three Main Sources from Which Participants Heard about the PFF Project	30
4.1. Employment, Peer Support, and Parenting Services in the PFF Projects	37
4.2. Participation Rates in Employment, Training, and Parenting Activities (Selected PFF Projects)	42
4.3. Child Support-Related Services Provided Through PFF Projects	46
4.4. Participation Rates in Various Support Services for Selected PFF Projects	53

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The evaluation of the Partners of Fragile Families (PFF) project was conducted by the Urban Institute under contract to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Many individuals assisted in conducting the study and producing this report. The authors gratefully acknowledge the oversight and guidance provided by our project officer, Jennifer Burnszynski and to David Arnaudo of the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) at DHHS for his ongoing commitment to the study. We are also highly indebted to Linda Mellgren of ASPE, who reviewed drafts of the report at several different stages and consistently offered valuable insights, comments, and guidance on how to strengthen its content. The report benefited greatly from the editing skills of Fiona Blackshaw. Finally, the authors are especially grateful to the many people involved with the PFF projects who took time to meet with us and help us learn about their programs. We sincerely thank them for their time and cooperation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The role of noncustodial fathers in the lives of low-income families has received increased attention from policymakers and programs in the past decade. With welfare reform placing time limits on cash benefits, there has been a strong interest in increasing financial support from noncustodial parents as a way to reduce poverty among low-income children. Although child support enforcement efforts have been increasing dramatically in recent years, there is some evidence that many low-income fathers cannot afford to support their children financially without impoverishing themselves or their families. To address these complex issues, a number of initiatives have focused on developing services and options to help low-income fathers become more financially and emotionally involved with their families and to help young, low-income families become stable.

The Partners for Fragile Families (PFF) demonstration program intended to effect systems change, deliver appropriate and effective services, and improve outcomes for both parents and children in low-income families. The goal of the projects was to make lasting changes in the way public agencies (especially child support enforcement agencies) and community- and faith-based organizations work with unmarried families to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for children and parents. The demonstration focused on promoting the voluntary establishment of paternity; connecting young fathers with the child support system and encouraging the payment of child support; improving the parenting and relationship skills of young fathers; helping young fathers secure and retain employment; and strengthening family ties, commitments, and other types of father involvement when parents do not live together.

Sponsored by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Ford Foundation (with several other foundations also making contributions), the PFF demonstration was initially developed in 1996 with planning grants to 16 sites. Thirteen of these projects in nine states moved forward to the demonstration phase, operating from 2000 to 2003 and funded by federal (provided under a federal waiver) and foundation resources. Unlike other program initiatives for noncustodial fathers, PFF targeted young fathers (16 to 25 years old) who had not yet established paternity and did not yet have extensive involvement with the child support enforcement (CSE) system. The underlying theory was that, by targeting new fathers at a point when they had little or no previous involvement with this system and when they still had an opportunity to develop a positive relationship with the mother of their children and the children themselves, the projects could better assist these young parents to become strong financial and emotional resources for their children.

This report, the first of several from the national evaluation of PFF sponsored by HHS, describes the design and implementation of the 13 projects. The report is primarily based on discussions with staff from the program and key partners as well as focus groups with participants at each project. Subsequent reports will include case studies of selected fathers and their families and an analysis of economic and child support outcomes.

The PFF Demonstration Projects

Men's Services Program at the Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development, *Baltimore, MD*

Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers in the Office of Male Initiatives, Baltimore City Department of Social Services, *Baltimore, MD*

Father Friendly Initiative at *Boston Healthy Start*, Boston Public Health Commission, *Boston, MA*

Partners for Fragile Families, Family Services of Greater Boston, *Boston, MA*

Young Fathers Program at Human Services, Inc., *Denver, CO*

Father Resource Program at the Fathers and Families Resource/Research Center (affiliated with Wishard Health Services), *Indianapolis, IN*

The Fatherhood Program, in Bienvenidos Family Services, *Los Angeles, CA*

Role of Men, City of Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services, *Los Angeles, CA*

Truevine Community Outreach Young Fathers Program, *Los Angeles, CA*

The FATHER Project, *Minneapolis, MN*

Fathers Strive for Family at STRIVE/East Harlem Employment Services, *New York, NY*

The Fatherhood Project, Goodwill Industries of Southern Wisconsin and Metropolitan Chicago, *Racine, WI*

Family Matters, Chester County Housing Development Corporation, *West Chester, PA*

Note: Illinois had a PFF project in Chicago but withdrew early in the demonstration; additional projects in Los Angeles and New York City also withdrew early.

Program Design

Established organizations, usually nonprofits, implemented most of the PFF projects. The sponsoring organizations included a housing development corporation, a faith-based program administered by a church, local health departments, a local social service agency, and private service organizations. About half the PFF agencies had previous experience serving noncustodial fathers; the other half started PFF from scratch. Even those with previous experience had not focused on the target group of young fathers with little or no involvement with CSE.

A key goal of the PFF program was to support the formation of viable partnerships between public agencies and community-based organizations to strengthen the involvement of both parents, but particularly fathers, in the lives of their children. To ensure strong partnerships, the demonstration incorporated a planning period, supported by foundation grants, to allow these relationships to be developed in each site. Most of the PFF projects developed collaborations to serve young fathers that included CSE agencies, workforce development agencies, health and social service organizations, and schools, and some involved more partners than others. The state and local CSE agencies were partners in all the projects. Although the CSE agency played a

more significant role in some PFF sites than others, this linkage is notable because it has been difficult for other programs serving low-income fathers to involve this agency in a substantial way.

The PFF projects were generally small by design. The initial goals were to serve between 150 and 300 participants over the course of the demonstration. Primarily because of problems identifying men who met the eligibility requirements, most projects enrolled far fewer participants than planned, ranging from 37 (in New York) to 266 (in Denver). About half the projects enrolled fewer than 100 participants. Several projects, however, served some fathers who did not meet the PFF eligibility criteria through other funding sources.

Although there is variation across the sites, all the projects served a disadvantaged population. The projects, as intended, served young fathers who had limited connections to the child support system. The average age of the participants was 21, and about one-quarter had a child support order in place when they entered the project. Most participants had one child and had never been married. Across the projects, about half the participants did not have high school diplomas or general equivalency diplomas (GED), and only about one-third were working at the time of enrollment. All the projects served a predominantly black population, although some had a significant number of Hispanic participants.

A distinguishing feature of the PFF program design was the public-private partnership among OCSE, the Ford Foundation, local nonprofit organizations, and the National Partnership for Community Leadership (NPCL), a nonprofit organization that provides services and technical assistance to community-based organizations and public agencies serving young fathers and fragile families. The Ford Foundation and OCSE felt it was important to have a coordinated technical assistance and program development strategy and funded NPCL to serve in that capacity.

The nine PFF states received a federal waiver of some provisions in the child support authorizing legislation, allowing OCSE funds to be used for fatherhood and employment services. Through its intermediary, NPCL, the Ford Foundation initially provided planning grants to each PFF site and to the state CSE agencies to match the OCSE federal funds for the operational demonstration phase. This public-private financial arrangement also involved state CSE agencies in PFF, which received and then distributed most of the PFF funds to the local projects in the state to begin operations. Because of this funding arrangement, however, most state CSE agencies were not involved in the PFF programs during the planning phase. Several projects received funding beyond that provided through the waiver. Most of these additional resources came from private foundations, although some sites received other federal or state grants.

Recruiting and Enrolling Participants

Identifying young fathers who met the PFF eligibility criteria was one of the most critical challenges faced by the PFF projects. Above all other factors, the strict initial eligibility criteria posed the most difficulty: new fathers between 16 and 25 years old, without paternity established, and with little or no involvement with the CSE system. Although the programs could often recruit a pool of men interested in the program, many ended up not meeting the eligibility

criteria and, as a result, most PFF programs were unable to meet their enrollment goals. Other responsible fatherhood initiatives have also struggled with maintaining enrollment levels, but the stringent eligibility criteria made enrollment a particularly challenging issue in PFF. As a result, most projects eventually relaxed the criteria, allowing them to serve a broader population of young, noncustodial fathers.

Aside from the stringent PFF eligibility criteria, projects faced several secondary challenges that inhibited recruitment and enrollment, including lack of interest in project services from many potential participants, difficulty acquiring adequate numbers of referrals from other agencies, referred individuals not showing up for PFF intake and assessment, delays in start-up because of the time that it took to secure federal waivers, and (at several sites) funding uncertainties that resulted in a halt in recruitment efforts.

To address the ongoing enrollment challenges, projects used a variety of outreach strategies to reach a greater number of men, including (1) developing arrangements for other agencies (e.g., hospitals/clinics, courts, probation/parole officers, homeless shelters) to make direct referrals to PFF; (2) distributing brochures and flyers and making presentations at other local human service agencies and programs, neighborhood events, and local centers (schools, community centers, housing projects); (3) conducting neighborhood outreach; and (4) placing public service announcements on radio and television and paid advertisements in local media.

One of the most important recruitment sources was reportedly word of mouth. In focus groups, most participants confirmed that they generally heard about PFF from friends and relatives. The most common reason participants gave for wanting to participate was to get a job; the second most common reason was to get help with child visitation issues.

PFF Program Services

In all sites, the project offered a large number of services, with considerable variation across projects in the intensity of services, number of participants who used various services, and whether activities were delivered by PFF directly, by other units of the lead agency, or by outside agencies. Some sites, particularly Minneapolis, were notable for both the range and intensity of services project staff provided directly. The key services the project offered are described below.

Structured workshops and case management. All the PFF projects featured a series of workshops, based at least in part on an NPCL fatherhood curriculum that included instruction on such topics as fatherhood, parenting, job readiness and job search, child support, health and sexuality, anger management, domestic violence, child development, drug and alcohol abuse, and life skills. Some projects scheduled weekly workshops or group meetings over two to four months. Others developed more intensive components, such as sessions that met for several hours a day, albeit for a shorter period (e.g., six weeks). All the projects provided case management, which included meeting with participants at enrollment to conduct an assessment, arranging for them to participate in PFF project activities, making referrals to a range of services from other agencies, and monitoring participation and progress.

Peer support. Peer support groups provided the fathers with an opportunity to discuss their own situations, share experiences, get advice, and think out loud. Based on focus group

discussions, these sessions were popular among many young fathers, and project staff considered the sessions important for addressing the day-to-day issues that arose in participants' lives. Some sites incorporated peer support sessions into part of the workshops, and others had stand-alone peer support sessions.

Employment services. Employment services such as job readiness instruction, job search assistance, job referral and placement, and referrals to education and job training were viewed as critical to eliciting interest in the project and maintaining participant involvement. These services were a core element of many, although not all, PFF projects. Some projects sponsored separate activities on employment issues; others devoted certain workshop sessions to the topic; and some made referrals to other organizations for these services.

Child support services. Administrators and staff from CSE and PFF indicated that the PFF project was very important in opening or expanding the dialogue about the issues facing low-income fathers. In many sites, CSE and PFF staff felt that this new relationship helped the child support system learn more about and acknowledge these issues and begin to change the “deadbeat dad” image. In most sites, there was a designated CSE staff person whom PFF participants and staff could contact directly; in many projects, CSE staff made presentations at workshops to educate participants about their policies and procedures. Child support staff also assisted participants on issues regarding paternity and child support orders and worked to help PFF participants understand and use the flexibility in the system. Sites with CSE staff colocated at the PFF project were especially proactive and engaged with participants, and staff from both agencies reported this arrangement as particularly effective in addressing participants' child support needs. However, very few state-level policies were established to provide more flexible CSE policies for PFF participants.

Parenting and relationship services. Although improving parenting skills was a key goal of the PFF demonstrations, it was not given equal emphasis across sites. Some projects offered more comprehensive services than others, such as regularly scheduled activities devoted to parenting issues. Even though the demonstration was designed to intervene with participants while the connection with the custodial parent was relatively strong, project staff reported that this relationship was sometimes strained or tenuous because of a range of issues, including child support, visitation, and the extent of parental involvement with the children. Most projects made referrals for mediation services as needed, but only a few provided counseling for couples.

Implementation Challenges

The experiences of the PFF projects provide a number of insights into how to develop, structure, and operate interventions for low-income fathers.

Start-up challenges. Some projects ran into more problems than others, and some weathered the challenges better than others. In several sites, start-up was relatively easy, in part because the organizations had operated similar fatherhood programs in the past that could be built upon, and experienced staff were already in place to begin recruiting and serving young fathers. Other sites had to start from scratch, securing PFF grant funds, hiring and training staff, designing their intervention, developing a new curriculum or adopting one from another source, developing recruitment strategies, and taking all other necessary steps to begin operations.

Although several challenges were common to all PFF sites, each project faced different issues from the planning stage to full-scale implementation.

- **Narrow PFF eligibility criteria hampered efforts to initiate the projects.** The problems encountered by many PFF projects in identifying program participants originated from the underlying goal of reaching young fathers. Theoretically, a focus on young men with no connection to the child support system made sense to all involved. However, this targeting substantially narrowed the pool of available disadvantaged fathers from which sites could recruit. In addition, the remaining pool of young fathers was among the most resistant to join such programs and was disconnected from potential referral sources (including the child support system and courts). Because they were not yet engaged with the child support system, many fathers did not fully understand the potential financial burden they could face and did not have strong motivation to enroll.
 - **Changes to the child support system overtook PFF and reduced the enthusiasm of potential organizations to partner with PFF.** Although the concept of PFF was unique when it was developed in 1996, by the time the demonstration was fully implemented, other responsible fatherhood programs had started in many communities nationwide. Independent of PFF, the child support enforcement system was already incorporating more “father-friendly” approaches to service delivery at about the same time PFF was in its developmental stages. The child support system had begun to absorb the lessons learned from earlier fatherhood initiatives (such as the Parents’ Fair Share project and the Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration). By the time PFF was operational, some may have viewed it as less pioneering than when it was conceived several years earlier. In addition, the number of young fathers who had not established paternity for their children decreased in the mid- to late 1990s as a result of the success of in-hospital paternity establishment initiatives across the country that established paternity at the time of a child’s birth. The pool of young fathers without paternity established for their children had diminished in the PFF sites by the time the projects were implemented.
 - **The waiver process was much slower than anticipated.** States with PFF projects received a federal waiver of some provisions in the child support authorizing legislation that allowed federal OCSE funds to be used for fatherhood and employment services. Administrators in virtually all the demonstration sites indicated that the waiver process took much longer than they expected, creating uncertainties about when funding would arrive and making it difficult to determine when to hire staff to start the project. The delay also created a discontinuity between the planning grant phase (when the waiver was not in place) and full-scale PFF implementation (when federal funds through the waiver became available). This loss of momentum was particularly problematic in sites that did not already have a responsible fatherhood program or alternative funding sources to support workshops and other activities.
 - **Ongoing operational issues.** Projects also faced challenges providing services and maintaining interest among partnering organizations and participating fathers.
 - **Identifying eligible participants was difficult in most project sites.** As with many other programs serving noncustodial fathers, identifying eligible participants was
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extremely difficult from the beginning in many sites, and did not become much easier as the demonstration effort unfolded. The PFF programs were generally able to get the word out in the community about the program, but the strict eligibility requirements made it difficult to identify a significant number of men who could enroll in the program, even though these requirements were relaxed over time.

Dropout rates were often high. Project managers in several sites estimated that attrition rates were very high (as much as 70 percent), with many participants dropping out before completing program services. Some participants dropped out for positive reasons, such as finding a job or moving to another locality, but others encountered various personal problems that prevented them from attending project activities (such as an arrest, a substance abuse relapse, a conflict with the child's mother, or a desire to avoid involvement with the child support system). Staff also reported that dropout rates were high in part because many participants were young and immature; as a result, they were often unwilling to commit themselves to attend project activities regularly, were mobile and difficult to track, and were easily distracted by friends and other neighborhood activities. Because participation in PFF projects was voluntary, staff could not sanction PFF participants for failing to attend activities.

- **Roles and responsibilities were not always clear among the various agencies and organizations involved in the PFF demonstration.** From the PFF site perspective, several layers of administration and oversight were involved in the initiative: the local child support program, the state child support agency (which provided PFF funding and, depending upon the site, technical assistance), NPCL and Metis (which provided guidance and technical assistance, including help with data system development), the Ford Foundation (which provided funding), and OCSE at HHS (responsible for overseeing the demonstration). Sometimes sites received mixed signals from the various organizations overseeing their projects, ultimately hampering the operation of their initiatives.
 - **Management information systems were not fully implemented at some PFF sites.** Throughout the demonstration effort, PFF sites struggled with understanding and meeting data reporting requirements. Most had problems fully implementing their client data tracking systems and collecting useful and valid participant data. Although most sites tracked the basic demographic characteristics of participants served fairly successfully, many experienced substantial difficulties tracking the types of services provided to and outcomes for participants.
 - **Uncertainties about PFF funding resulted in a slowdown of recruitment and service delivery for several sites.** Administrators at several sites indicated that they had not received all the funding they had anticipated under the demonstration or reported significant delays in the receipt of funding. Several claimed that uncertainties about receipt of funding affected their ability to meet enrollment goals and maintain their service delivery system.
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Lessons from the PFF Demonstration

The PFF projects provide insights into how to structure and implement programs for low-income, noncustodial fathers. Below are several lessons from the program implementation experiences of the PFF projects.

Careful consideration should be given to the eligibility/targeting criteria in responsible fatherhood initiatives. If targeting is too narrow, programs will struggle to attract sufficient numbers of participants. PFF administrators and staff felt that targeting resources on those most in need was important, but that flexibility was needed to avoid becoming so prescriptive that projects failed to serve many young fathers in real need of services. For example, several administrators remarked that they would recommend increasing the age threshold from 26 to 30 years in a program such as PFF. Several administrators also noted that even noncustodial parents with significant previous involvement with the child support system need parenting education and help resolving child support and visitation issues.

Providing services designed to help low-income fathers understand the child support system is critical. Child support agencies were involved in all the PFF projects. PFF staff and participants reported that having a contact person within the child support system was particularly valuable. In several sites, CSE staff visited the PFF project periodically to disseminate information or lead workshop sessions. Such involvement helped alleviate participants' fears and concerns about becoming involved with the child support system. The projects with the strongest child support links colocated at least one CSE staff member with the PFF project staff. The colocated CSE staff were able to directly answer questions about the system, handle tasks such as establishing or modifying child support orders in a timely manner, and work with participants more consistently and more proactively to resolve issues.

One goal of the PFF initiative was to make lasting systemic changes in the ways public agencies and community organizations work with low-income families, but this goal was difficult to attain. The PFF projects were relatively small-scale, local efforts, and entire systems or organizations did not have to change for the projects' development and implementation. Because the PFF programs remained relatively small, all the sponsoring organizations had the capacity to operate the program. In addition, although state CSE agencies were the conduit for the resources because of the waiver, many of them were not actively involved in the planning or operational process and generally did not make state-level changes as a result of PFF. This lack of involvement may have limited the PFF-related state-level institutional and policy changes on noncustodial fathers. Overall, this type of demonstration, which primarily focuses on developing individual, local programs, does not appear to be an adequate vehicle for enacting more systemic institutional or policy changes.

Identifying organizations with experience serving this type of population and providing appropriate staff training can enhance program operations. As noted, several PFF sites had experience operating programs for noncustodial fathers before PFF, and these sites were able to implement the program more easily. Given the unique needs and circumstances of this population, when experienced staff are not available, it is important to provide adequate training to staff on techniques for best providing services to this population. It may be necessary to develop these training programs, as this is an area where training options are often limited.

Help with resolving visitation issues and legal representation helps attract and retain young fathers in fatherhood programs. In focus groups for this study, several fathers indicated that they came to and remained engaged with PFF because of a desire to resolve visitation issues with their children. Another critical concern was the difficulty of obtaining legal representation and the costs associated with legal services. One PFF project (Minneapolis) that offered legal assistance on-site found that fathers used these services in several areas, including paternity establishment, custody, visitation, and child support. Programs that can assist fathers with resolving visitation issues and providing or arranging for low-cost legal representation will likely find it easier to recruit and hold on to participants.

Sponsorship by or strong ties with local public health departments can help with recruitment and access to much needed health services. Several PFF projects either were operated by public health departments or featured strong links with local public health departments. These projects were able to recruit young fathers through their close connections to the public health system, which already had well-established referral channels in low-income areas. After recruitment, case managers were able to easily refer PFF participants to services offered through the public health system, including health, mental health, dental, and substance abuse services.

- **Providing a comprehensive range of services tailored to the individual needs of each participating young father is important.** At a minimum, the following core components (provided through the program or outside providers) are critical:
 - assessment and employability development planning, ongoing case management, and individual counseling;
 - job search, job development, and job placement services, including workshops, job clubs, help identifying job leads, and job placement assistance;
 - job training services, including basic skills and literacy instruction, occupational skills training, on-the-job training, and other types of work experience, such as internships or fellowships;
 - postplacement follow-up and support services, such as additional job placement services, training after placement, support groups, and mentoring;
 - incentives for participation in program services, particularly flexibility in meeting child support obligations in certain circumstances;
 - strong linkages with the child support system, preferably featuring colocated child support personnel to assist program participants with establishing paternity and child support orders, and resolving child support payment and other issues as they arise
 - other support services provided directly through the project or through referral arrangements with other health and human services organizations, including parenting education; alcohol and other substance abuse assessment and counseling, with referral as appropriate to outpatient or inpatient treatment; child care assistance; transportation assistance; referral for mental health assessment, counseling, and treatment; referral for housing services; and referral to low-cost legal services.
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The experiences of the PFF projects underscore the importance of providing a comprehensive range of services to address the varied problems of young fathers in becoming more involved, both emotionally and financially, in the lives of their children. Their experiences also strongly suggest that this is a difficult undertaking, requiring time to develop and establish the projects as well as a strong commitment by a number of organizations and partners at the community level.

CHAPTER 1

THE PARTNERS FOR FRAGILE FAMILIES PROGRAM

In recent years, policymakers and programs have paid increased attention to the role of noncustodial fathers in the lives of low-income families. With welfare reform placing time limits on cash benefits, there has been a strong interest in increasing financial support from noncustodial parents as a way to reduce poverty among low-income children. Although child support enforcement efforts have been increasing dramatically in recent years, there is some evidence that many low-income fathers cannot afford to support their children financially without impoverishing themselves or their families. To address these complex issues, a number of initiatives have focused on developing services and options to help low-income fathers become more financially and emotionally involved with their families and to help young, low-income families become stable.

Sponsored by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Ford Foundation,¹ the Partners for Fragile Families (PFF) demonstration program intended to effect systems change, deliver appropriate and effective services, and improve outcomes for both parents and children in low-income families. By making lasting changes in the way public agencies and community organizations work with unmarried families, the initiative aimed to increase the capacity of young, economically disadvantaged fathers and mothers to become financial, emotional, and nurturing resources to their children and to reduce poverty and welfare dependence. The PFF demonstration, which built upon lessons from programs and demonstrations that operated over the past two decades, was implemented over a three-year period beginning in 2000 at 13 project sites in nine states.²

The PFF projects sought to help government agencies (especially CSE agencies) and community- and faith-based organizations provide more flexible and responsive programs at the state and local levels to better support the needs of children living in fragile families. The key elements of the PFF projects included

- promoting the voluntary establishment of paternity;
- connecting young fathers with the child support system and encouraging payment of child support;
- improving parenting and relationship skills of young fathers;
- helping young fathers secure and retain employment (so that they can pay child support and otherwise financially support their children); and
- providing other types of services to strengthen family ties, commitments, and father involvement when parents do not live together.

¹ A number of other foundations provided funding for the PFF demonstration programs (often to individual projects), including the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, the Kellogg Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Rose Foundation, the Philadelphia Foundation, the Target Foundation, the Johnson Wax Foundation, and the Racine Community Foundation.

² In addition to the 13 projects, three PFF programs (in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City) were initially funded but closed either before enrolling any participants or soon after enrollment began.

Unlike other program initiatives for noncustodial fathers, PFF targeted young fathers (16 to 25 years old) who had not yet established paternity and did not yet have extensive involvement with the CSE system. The underlying theory was that by targeting new fathers at a point when they had little or no previous involvement with this system and when they still might have a positive relationship with the mother of their children and the children themselves, the projects could better assist these young parents to become strong financial and emotional resources for their children.

HHS contracted with the Urban Institute and its subcontractors, the Johns Hopkins University's Institute for Policy Studies and Capital Research Corporation, to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the PFF demonstration. One of the key goals of this evaluation is to document and assess the implementation of the initiative, by examining the program models, systems change (particularly with respect to the connection of young fathers with the child support system), services provided, client flow, challenges to start-up and ongoing implementation, characteristics of young fathers served, participation levels, and lessons learned from the demonstration. These topics are the main focus of this report. Future reports will address employment and child support outcomes and provide case studies of a limited number of participants.

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the findings from recent studies of low-income noncustodial fathers, who are the main target group for services under the PFF initiative. The next section highlights several of the most important initiatives aimed at enhancing services to and outcomes of noncustodial parents. The chapter then turns to a fuller discussion of the design of the PFF demonstration, including origins of the initiative, principal goals, funding, and site locations. The chapter concludes with additional information about the evaluation and an overview of the structure of this report.

Low-Income, Noncustodial Fathers: Who Are They and How Are They Faring?

Over the past decade, noncustodial parents, particularly those with low incomes, have received increasing attention because of growing concern about low levels of paternity establishment and the large number of fathers who do not meet their full child support payment obligations. In addition to focusing on strategies to increase paternity establishment and improve income, policymakers are also began paying more attention to reducing risky behavior of young fathers and to enhancing fathers' parenting skills. To provide context for better understanding the design and implementation of the PFF projects, this section provides an overview of the target population of young fathers,³ particularly their employment status, issues of child support, and connections with their children.

Employment patterns. Low-income, noncustodial fathers are disproportionately poorly educated minorities with limited job opportunities. Although most low-income, noncustodial fathers have some work experience, many work intermittently and for low wages. Fewer than 10 percent have a full-time, year-round job, and 40 percent typically report being jobless in the past year. Among those who are not working, half indicate that poor health is the main reason, and

³ The vast majority of noncustodial parents are fathers, and nearly all PFF participants were fathers. Some projects did have a few female participants; most served only fathers. Throughout this report, we refer to the PFF participants as fathers and note, as appropriate, services and issues that involved custodial or noncustodial mothers.

among those who work, median annual earnings in 2000 were \$5,000 (Sorensen and Oliver 2002).

Lack of education and job skills contribute to the difficulties low-income, noncustodial parents have finding stable and well-paying employment. Forty-three percent lack a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma (GED), and only 4 percent report having received job-specific training or education (Sorensen and Zibman 2001). In addition, many low-income, noncustodial fathers have criminal records and substantial legal issues that prevent them from securing some types of jobs (Sorensen and Oliver 2002).

Child support issues. The collection of child support is an important factor in reducing poverty among children who live apart from a parent. Custodial mothers who received at least some of the child support that they were due had a lower poverty rate (22 percent) than custodial mothers who were due child support and received nothing (32 percent). (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). However, data from the Urban Institute's National Survey of America's Families indicate that more than 60 percent of poor children who live with their mothers but not their fathers did not receive child support in 2001 (Sorensen 2003).

A study by the HHS Office of the Inspector General found that 60 percent of low-income, noncustodial fathers do not pay child support primarily because they have a limited ability to pay on the basis of their income levels, education levels, high rates of institutionalization, and intermittent employment histories (Office of the Inspector General 2000). The inability to make child support payments has led to a growing recognition among practitioners that efforts to increase child support collections (such as automatic wage withholding, the national parent locator system, and license revocation) may be less effective with noncustodial fathers who have low incomes and are sporadically employed (Pearson, Thoennes, and Price 2000).

The child support system itself also has some unintended disincentives for noncustodial parents to find work and make child support payments. When a child receives cash welfare benefits from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, under federal law, custodial parents on welfare must assign their rights to child support to the state. States establish policies about how to allocate the child support payments to the custodial parent and to the state to offset costs of the welfare benefits. These policies mean that some of the child support payments are used to reimburse the government for welfare costs, rather than the total amount paid going to the family (unless child support payments exceed the size of the welfare grant).⁴ In addition, several factors make it difficult for low-income, noncustodial fathers to meet payment obligations, which frequently result in rapid accumulation of child support debt (or arrearages). These factors include default orders established when a father does not show up for court that often reflect family needs rather than fathers' ability to pay; retroactive orders dating back to the birth of the child; and orders that are not routinely modified when the noncustodial parent becomes unemployed (Sorensen and Oliver 2002; Miller and Knox 2001).

Connections with their children. Despite not keeping up with their child support payments, many low-income, noncustodial fathers have some contact with their children and

⁴ Many states permit welfare recipients to retain the first \$50 of child support per month, and one state (Wisconsin) lets welfare recipients retain all child support.

appear to be involved in their lives in some way. The Urban Institute's National Survey of America's Families asks fathers about contact with their youngest child. The survey has found that approximately 36 percent (excluding incarcerated fathers) of noncustodial fathers indicate that they have seen their youngest child at least once a week in the past 12 months, and at the other extreme, 25 percent said they have not seen their youngest child at all during this time (Sorensen and Oliver 2002). For many of these children, this level of contact may not be sufficient to receive a meaningful amount of emotional support from their fathers (Sorensen and Zibman 2001).

Several studies have found that payment of child support and fathers' access to their children may be related. For example, one study showed that noncustodial parents who owed child support in 2001 were much more likely to have made payments if they had either joint custody or visitation rights (77 percent versus 56 percent—see Grall 2003).

Prior Demonstration Projects to Enhance Services for Noncustodial Fathers

Many low-income men living apart from their children are in need of services but are often operating outside the income maintenance and social support systems in this country (Edin, Lein, and Nelson 1998; Johnson, Levine, and Doolittle 1999). Many services and benefits provided through the social safety net were structured around custodial parents and children, including TANF and Medicaid. Few men without custody of their children are eligible for major public assistance programs, aside from the Food Stamp Program.

To better address the income and support needs of low-income non-custodial fathers, policymakers are increasingly interested in developing and funding services specifically targeting the unique circumstances of low-income, noncustodial fathers, particularly their limited employment skills, lack of connection to the child support system, and varying levels of interaction with their children. Although many of the initiatives over the past decade have operated on a small scale, often as demonstrations, they represent a gradual shift in public policies. The PFF demonstration is an important part of the growing interest in establishing more effective services for this population, and it was intended to build upon the lessons learned from previous initiatives described below.

Parents' Fair Share Demonstration. The Parents' Fair Share (PFS) demonstration program operated in seven sites around the country from 1994 to 1996 and focused on increasing noncustodial parents' employment rates, earnings, and levels of child support provided. Funded by HHS and a number of foundations, this program, evaluated with a random assignment design, provided employment services and enhanced child support enforcement activities for noncustodial parents with children receiving cash welfare. The courts ordered noncustodial parents identified as behind in their child support payments because of unemployment to participate in the program. For the men referred to the program, participation in program services was mandatory. Compared with PFF, the men in PFS were generally older with established child support orders, and many had already accumulated arrearages.

The evaluation showed that PFS had positive but limited impacts (Miller and Knox 2001). Across all sites, a referral to the PFS program increased the percentage of noncustodial parents who paid child support. In two sites, there was also an increase in the average amount of

child support paid. The program was moderately successful at increasing earnings among more disadvantaged fathers, but it had little effect on the earnings of more employable fathers. PFS also encouraged some fathers, particularly those who were least involved with their children, to take a more active parenting role. In the PFS demonstration, some sites fell short of their enrollment goals, which affected the provision of services, particularly those provided in a group setting. Implementing PFS was also a challenge, requiring continuous attention by management to sustain the partnerships of agencies and the new methods of delivering services. In addition, most of the men participated in job search services, but fewer than expected participated in skill-building activities.

OCSE Responsible Father Programs. Beginning in the mid-1990s, the national policy emphasis on the role of fathers increased, as several organizations and foundations, including the National Fatherhood Initiative, the Ford Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the Institute for Responsible Fatherhood, focused public and political attention on fatherhood. The Responsible Fatherhood Programs sponsored and funded by OCSE, operated in eight sites from 1998 to 2000. These programs aimed to increase employment and income, encourage more involved and better parenting, and motivate child support compliance. The programs targeted unemployed and underemployed noncustodial fathers and provided a range of services, including employment services, assistance with child support issues, and parenting instruction. The state-initiated responsible fatherhood programs varied significantly in service delivery systems, mix and content of services, and target population. The target population included both those whom the courts had ordered to participate and those who volunteered to participate.

Using a nonexperimental design, the evaluation of the responsible fatherhood programs found that participants in several sites increased their earnings and child support payments, but there were more limited effects on fathers' access to their children (Pearson et al. 2003). By far the most challenging aspects of the program were recruitment and retention. Identifying low-income, noncustodial fathers and maintaining participation was time consuming and required a more intensive effort than was originally anticipated. In addition, it was difficult to retain participants in the program and many only participated for a short time. Participation in the child support system increased significantly only in the sites with close connections with the CSE agency. This study stressed the importance of developing new ways to educate fathers about child support issues, including the provision of legal information and assistance on child access and visitation. Other lessons were on developing effective strategies for being responsive to fathers' child support situations and financial limitations and the importance of peer support activities in cultivating a sense of dignity (Pearson et al. 2000).

Welfare-to-Work Grants Programs. In 1997, Congress established the Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Grants Program, a five-year initiative that funded programs providing employment-related services to the hardest-to-employ TANF recipients (mainly mothers). Noncustodial parents, mainly fathers, of children who were on welfare were also eligible for grant-funded programs—the first time a federal employment-related program explicitly targeted this population (Sorensen and Zibman 2001). For noncustodial parents, the WtW grant programs emphasized providing employment services, but some also focused on increasing child support payments and improving relationships between parents and their children. The target population varied across local programs. Some programs served those the courts had ordered to participate,

some served volunteers, and some served both groups. Some programs focused specifically on fathers on parole or probation who had children on welfare and limited employment options.

A process study examined the implementation experiences of DOL funded WtW grant initiatives aimed at serving noncustodial parents in 11 sites⁵ and found that, like other initiatives aimed at noncustodial parents, WtW programs experienced difficulties recruiting fathers and retaining enrolled fathers until they had completed services. This study also documented a varied range of services provided and suggested a core set of services that are likely to be needed by the targeted population: job placement, with access to job training coordinated with employment; parenting skills development; and a range of supportive services such as mental health and substance abuse treatment, child care, transportation, legal services, and housing assistance. The study stressed the importance of providing a mix of positive and negative incentives to encourage participation, including employment and case management services, child support payment options, and the threat of incarceration for noncompliance.

A nonexperimental study in one of the DOL funded WtW sites found that it was likely that the program increased employment, earnings, and child support payments, although those who did not participate in the program also experienced gains. The study also documented that establishing child support payments for the low-income target population required substantial effort by program staff, and that many fathers did not respond to court summons (Perez-Johnson, Kauff, and Hershey 2003).

Overview of the Partners for Fragile Families Demonstration

The PFF demonstration was conceptually different from many of the other initiatives for noncustodial parents, although it drew heavily from the lessons of earlier efforts. PFF was based on the premise that early intervention is the key to increasing fathers' involvement in both the financial and the nonfinancial aspects of their children's lives. Before PFF, federal policies primarily focused on preventing at-risk youth from becoming unwed fathers or on increasing child support payments among fathers who had already accumulated arrearages and had little or no relationship with their children. In contrast, PFF was designed to intervene at the point at which young, unmarried males were about to or had recently become fathers. The target population for PFF was not *all* noncustodial parents, but those who were young and new (or expectant) parents. An important goal was to work with these young fathers before they had a chance to accumulate large child support arrearages and when there were still good prospects for connecting these young fathers with their children.

Origins and motivation for PFF. The decision to intervene early in the lives of these families was partly derived from the lessons of earlier federal and foundation initiatives. For example, programs such as Parents' Fair Share, which had only limited success, generally enrolled parents referred by the courts and mandated to participate. These fathers often had substantial child support debts, a negative impression of the child support system, and may have been separated from their children for a number of years. If PFF assisted with paternity establishment, child support arrangements, and employment to men before they became involved

⁵ See Martinson, Trutko, and Strong (2000). A comprehensive nonexperimental evaluation of a larger number of DOL Welfare-to-Work grant-funded programs, which primarily served mothers, examined employment, earnings, welfare outcomes, and program costs and implementation. See also Fraker et al. (2004).

with the child support system, the results might be better, particularly because research shows that fathers are closest to the mothers and their children at the birth of the child. For instance, the separate (but complementary) Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study's survey of unwed parents in 20 cities found that 82 percent of unmarried mothers and fathers were romantically involved at the time of the birth of their child and that among those who were not, half were friends (Bendheim-Thoman Center 2000).

Accumulating research on young men strongly suggests that young black men in particular require early mentoring and support to successfully transition into adulthood (Mincy 1995). At the same time, sociological and economic studies in the 1990s found that as the industrial makeup of the U.S. economy shifted away from manufacturing, especially in urban areas, there were declining economic opportunities for young men who had not attended college. Fewer opportunities contributed to the declining numbers of "marriageable" black men—meaning men with stable jobs and decent incomes (Wilson 2003).

The PFF demonstration, therefore, was designed to simultaneously address a number of these issues, incorporating findings from past research and experience from previous demonstrations. PFF targeted young, never-married fathers who did not have a child support order in place, may not have established paternity for their children, and usually faced obstacles to employment. Nonprofit and public agencies implemented the PFF projects at the community level to provide employment, health, and social services. Through these services, PFF sought to develop new approaches to involve young fathers with their children; help them share in the legal, financial, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood; and provide them mentoring and guidance to pursue education, job training, and employment opportunities.

Federal child support enforcement program waivers and funding. A very important feature of PFF involved the use of the federal government's waiver authority, which allowed state child support agencies to be a key partner in the effort. OCSE granted federal waivers to all of the PFF demonstration states, allowing them to use some of their federal CSE funds for employment-related services and fatherhood initiatives. Without the waivers, federal CSE funds, primarily designated for collection and enforcement, could not have been used for PFF employment and support services. As discussed in greater detail in chapter 2, OCSE supplied 66 percent of the funding for PFF (through participating state child support agencies), and the Ford Foundation (along with several other foundations) provided the remainder to support program operations. The state child support agencies, in turn, distributed most of the funds to the local nonprofit organizations operating PFF projects. OCSE, in collaboration with the Ford Foundation, also played an important role in developing a participant-level management information system (MIS) to maintain data on participant characteristics, services needed, services received, and selected outcomes.

Public-private partnership. A distinguishing feature of the PFF program design was the public-private partnership among OCSE, the Ford Foundation, local nonprofit organizations, and the National Partnership for Community Leadership (NPCL),⁶ with the community-based

⁶ NPCL, formerly known as the National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership, is a nonprofit organization that provides services and technical assistance to community-based organizations and public agencies serving young fathers and fragile families.

partners serving as the lead at the local-site level. The Ford Foundation and OCSE felt it was important to have a coordinated technical assistance and program development strategy and funded NPCL to serve in that capacity.

NPCL provided training and technical assistance to the lead agencies and their child support agency partners at the PFF sites and helped create linkages between the nonprofit organizations and the child support system. NPCL developed a curriculum that PFF projects could use to help structure workshops for program participants and provided ongoing technical assistance to PFF project staff to assist with program design and implementation. In addition, NPCL (with funding from the Ford Foundation) was responsible for the implementation of the MIS system developed by OCSE. NPCL contracted with another organization, Metis, to help with system design and development and to provide ongoing technical assistance to each PFF project to help with the implementation and operation of the MIS. At this time, in addition to activities for PFF, NPCL was involved in disseminating information to states and localities on strategies for serving low-income, noncustodial fathers more broadly through its Peer Learning Colleges.

PFF time frames, site locations, and site characteristics. Building upon previous research and program development for fragile families, the Ford Foundation provided a series of planning grants in 1996 to local nonprofit organizations interested in expanding their employment and child support services to young, noncustodial fathers (and expectant fathers). The planning phase was designed to give sites time and resources to develop partnerships, plan their service delivery strategy, and hire staff. The federal waiver application and review process took slightly more than two years, and the projects became operational (and began enrolling participants) in 2000. The federal waivers expired at the end of 2003, although some projects ceased operations sooner, and a few continued after that time with other resources.

The original intent was that the planning phase, funded primarily by foundation grants, would occur over one year, after which the project would be ready to enroll individuals the PFF programs. The operational phase was to be funded by a combination of foundation grants and the states' child support funding, allowed under the federal waivers. As discussed in subsequent chapters, from the perspective of the local operators, the timing of the foundation grants and the approval of the federal waivers resulted in an unexpected and frustrating delay in moving to the operational phase. Although the amount of time required for the federal waiver process was actually quite typical, there was some miscalculation during the planning phase in coordinating the timing of the foundation grant awards and the timing of the federal waiver approvals, both of which were needed before operations could begin.

As shown in exhibit 1.1, the PFF demonstration became fully operational in 2000 in 13 sites located in nine states. Three states had multiple project sites: California (with three sites in Los Angeles), Maryland (with two sites in Baltimore), and Massachusetts (with two sites in Boston). Several other PFF project sites dropped out of the demonstration before they became

Exhibit 1.1.
PFF Demonstration Sites

Program location	Project description
Men's Services Program Baltimore, MD	Operated by the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development, a nonprofit organization. Weekly workshops and peer support sessions. Some participants enrolled in the CFWD/STRIVE program for employment services.
Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Baltimore, MD	Operated by Baltimore City Department of Social Services. Six-month program, with workshops 3 times per week. Employment services provided by the Urban League.
Father Friendly Initiative at Healthy Start Boston, MA	Operated by the City of Boston's Health Department. Weekly workshops lasting 16 weeks.
Family Services of Greater Boston Boston, MA	Operated by the nonprofit Family Services of Greater Boston. Weekly workshops lasting 13 weeks.
Young Fathers Program Denver, CO	Operated by Human Services, Inc., a nonprofit organization. Month-long workshops, meeting 16 hours per week, with strong emphasis on employment and parenting. CSE staff on-site.
Father Resource Program Indianapolis, IN	Operated by Fathers and Families Resource/Research Center, a nonprofit organization. Month-long workshops, meeting 20 hours per week, with strong emphasis on employment. Separate peer support sessions. CSE staff on-site. Co-parenting class.
Bienvenidos Los Angeles, CA	Operated by the nonprofit organization Bienvenidos. Focus on serving Hispanic population. Weekly workshops lasting 16 weeks.
Role of Men Los Angeles, CA	Operated by the local Department of Health and Human Services. Eight-week sessions meeting 2–3 times per week.
Truevine Community Outreach Los Angeles, CA	Operated by local faith-based organization affiliated with a church. Three-week workshops meeting 3 days per week. Separate peer support sessions.
FATHER Project Minneapolis, MN	Operated as a stand-alone program in an organization created for PFF. Two-week workshops meeting three days per week focused on employment issues. Separate weekly peer support sessions and parenting sessions. Contract with Urban League for employment services. On-site CSE staff, legal staff, GED instructor, and social worker.
Fathers Strive for Family New York, NY	Operated by STRIVE/East Harlem, a nonprofit employment organization. Weekly workshops lasting 8 weeks. Referred to separate STRIVE workshops for employment services.
Children Upfront Racine, WI	Operated by Goodwill Industries, a nonprofit organization. Workshops covering 25 modules over about 3 months. Pre-apprenticeship programs.
Family Matters West Chester, PA	Operated by the local housing authority. One-week workshops (20 hours) focused on employment services. Separate peer support sessions and parenting classes. Apprenticeship programs.

Note: Illinois had a PFF project in Chicago but withdrew early in the demonstration; additional projects in Los Angeles and New York City also withdrew early.

fully operational: Illinois had a PFF project in Chicago but withdrew early in the demonstration project; additional projects in Los Angeles and New York City also withdrew early. One site withdrew from PFF because of shifting priorities in the local organization; another withdrew because their population of interest did not coincide with the PFF target group; and the third had difficulty identifying an appropriate community-based partner to operate their PFF project.

The cities in which PFF operated vary in their socioeconomic characteristics, but for the most part their median household incomes and educational levels are below the national average (exhibit 1.2). Some, such as Baltimore, Los Angeles, and New York, have a significant portion of families living below the poverty level. The cities also tend to have substantial minority populations, some with relatively more blacks (Baltimore, Boston, Indianapolis, New York) and others with more Hispanics (Denver, Los Angeles, New York).

During the course of the demonstration, economic conditions in the study sites generally worsened, following the national economy. The unemployment rate in Denver increased from 2.8 percent in 1999 to 7.0 percent in 2003. The unemployment rate was more than 6 percent in 2003 in several cities involved in the project—Baltimore, Denver, Los Angeles, New York, and Racine, Wisconsin. Racine had the highest unemployment rate (11.8 percent), and Minneapolis had the lowest (4.5 percent).⁷ The employment rate among black men was relatively low in many of the sites, ranging from 49 percent in Racine to almost 70 percent in Boston.

Within the cities, the PFF projects primarily operated in low-income, minority neighborhoods and focused on serving participants within that immediate neighborhood. Many of the cities and neighborhoods in which the projects operated had relatively poor economies, and participants often had to seek jobs outside of their immediate neighborhoods because of the lack of local job opportunities.

The PFF Evaluation

The PFF evaluation, sponsored by the HHS, is a multi-component study employing a range of research strategies and data sources. The evaluation includes an implementation study, case studies of participants, and a study of participant child support payment and employment outcomes.

This report focuses on the implementation component of the overall study, documenting the design and operation of the 13 PFF projects. We held discussions with representatives of the key partners of each project, including nonprofit organizations, child support enforcement agencies, and other organizations. We spoke with both managers and line staff from the key partners in the project, covering such topics as program goals, implementation process and challenges, outreach and recruitment, intake and assessment, employment services, connections with the child support agency, parenting skills instruction, and staffing and funding. Finally, we held focus group discussions with PFF participants in each of the sites.

⁷ These type of unemployment rates do not accurately reflect the level of unemployment, because to be included in the denominator an individual must be actively seeking employment. Individuals who are not seeking work are not considered part of the labor force.

Exhibit 1.2.
Economic and Demographic Profile of PFF Sites

	United States	Baltimore, MD	Boston, MA	Denver, CO	Indianapolis, IN	Los Angeles, CA	Minneapolis, MN	New York, NY	Racine, WI
Population									
Total population	281,421,906	651,154	589,141	554,636	782,414	3,694,834	382,452	8,008,278	81,827
Percent white	69	31	49	52	68	30	63	35	64
Percent black	12	64	24	11	25	11	17	24	20
Percent Asian	4	2	7	3	1	10	6	10	1
Percent Hispanic or Latino	13	2	14	32	4	47	8	27	14
Percent foreign-born	11	5	26	17	5	41	15	36	6
Male education level (%)									
No diploma	21	32	20	24	21	34	16	28	26
High school graduate	28	20	28	28	18	18	28	23	24
Some college	22	19	20	20	21	19	25	17	23
College graduate	29	21	37	36	30	29	38	31	19
Median income, 1999									
Household	\$41,994	\$30,078	\$39,629	\$39,500	\$40,051	\$36,687	\$37,974	\$38,293	\$37,164
Family	\$50,046	\$35,438	\$44,151	\$48,195	\$48,755	\$39,942	\$48,602	\$41,887	\$45,150
Single-mother households below poverty level, 1999 (%)	34	38	37	33	31	42	34	44	36
Unemployment rate^a (%)									
December 1999	4.0	6.7	2.9	2.8	3.1	6.0	2.4	6.7	7.0
December 2003	5.7	7.8	5.2	7.0	5.4	7.0	4.5	8.4	11.8
Employment rate for black men, 2002 (%)	61.1	53.4	69.6	64.1	58.2	58.2	69.0	55.7	48.6
Unmarried births as percentage of all births, 1999^d (%)	33.0	34.9	26.5	25.4	34.5	32.9	25.9	36.6	29.2

Sources: U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 3. Unemployment data: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey. Employment data: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment. Childbirth data: Centers for Disease Control, National Vital Statistics Reports.

^a Unemployment rates are not seasonally adjusted.

^b Unemployment data for West Chester are from Chester County.

^c Employment rates for Indianapolis, Racine, and West Chester are state rates.

^d Unmarried birth statistics are for the state.

Information for this report was collected primarily during site visits conducted between April and November 2003. In addition, we consulted key staff from organizations playing a leadership role in developing and maintaining the initiative, including HHS, the Ford Foundation, and NPCL. This report also summarizes data from participant-level administrative reporting systems maintained by the sites throughout the demonstration.⁸

Structure of the Report

The chapters that follow describe the implementation and operational experiences of the PFF projects. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the basic design and structure of the projects, including types of sponsoring agencies and partners, project size and funding sources, target populations, demographic characteristics of participants, and program goals. Chapter 3 discusses issues regarding the recruitment and enrollment of participants, a key challenge in all of the sites. Chapter 4 describes the range of services available to participants, including employment, parenting, child support, case management, and other services. Finally, chapter 5 discusses key challenges and lessons learned about assisting noncustodial fathers to secure employment, pay child support, and improve their parenting. Appendix A provides the demographic characteristics of the PFF participants in each site, and summary profiles of each of the projects are in appendix B.

⁸ This evaluation will also issue reports that provide: (1) employment and child support outcomes for project participants with administrative data from the state child support office and Unemployment Insurance quarterly earnings records and (2) provide ethnographic case studies of a small number of PFF participants.

CHAPTER 2: PROGRAM DESIGN AND PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

The PFF projects operated in diverse localities and involved a broad range of organizations in their efforts to improve the financial and emotional connection of young fathers to their children. This chapter provides an overview of the local projects, their organizational context, and the clientele served. Exhibit 2.1 presents a cross-site comparison of the key dimensions discussed in this chapter.

Sponsoring Organizations and Key Partners

A key goal of the PFF program was to support the formation of viable partnerships between public agencies and nonprofit organizations to strengthen the involvement of both parents, but particularly fathers, in the lives of their children. In addition, PFF was established to encourage systems change on policies and activities for noncustodial parents, particularly in the child support enforcement (CSE) system. For example, it was expected that the new partnerships between the child support agencies and sponsoring community organizations could help initiate strategies or adapt procedures in the child support system that might encourage more fathers to engage with the child support system before they accumulated arrearages. To ensure strong partnerships, the demonstration incorporated a planning period, supported by foundation grants, to allow these relationships to be developed in each site.

As shown in exhibit 2.1, most of the PFF demonstration projects were implemented by well-established community organizations, most of which were nonprofit entities. In addition to nonprofit organizations, the range of organizations included a housing authority (West Chester), city health departments (Boston Healthy Start and Los Angeles Role of Men), and a city social services agency (Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers). A church-run faith-based organization operated one of the projects (Truevine in Los Angeles). Some of the PFF projects were implemented by organizations with a strong employment orientation, including projects in Baltimore (the Men's Services Program), New York (STRIVE), and Racine (Children Upfront). PFF projects generally operated within preexisting organizations, but most of the projects were implemented by separate staff within the lead organizations' offices. The one exception was the FATHER Project in Minneapolis, which was a stand-alone program with its own facility and no direct administrative affiliation with any other organization.

More than half the projects—the Baltimore Men's Services Program, Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers, Boston Healthy Start, Indianapolis, two of the Los Angeles projects (Bienvenidos and Role of Men), and Racine's FATHER Project—had experience operating programs for noncustodial fathers before PFF, although generally they had not focused on participants as young as those PFF targeted. For example, the Boston Healthy Start program started about three years before PFF as part of OCSE's responsible fatherhood programs initiative; and the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development in Baltimore started in 1993 as the Men's Services component of a Healthy Start program. Several agency directors reported that their previous experience with responsible fatherhood initiatives greatly facilitated the start-up of their PFF projects. At the same time, the focus on young fathers brought new challenges, particularly in recruitment (chapter 3).

**Exhibit 2.1.
Program Design of PFF Projects**

Program site	Baltimore, MD Men's Services Program	Baltimore, MD Young Fathers/ Responsible Fathers	Boston, MA Father Friendly Initiative at Boston Healthy Start	Boston, MA Family Services of Greater Boston	Denver, CO The Young Fathers Program	Indianapolis, IN Father Resource Program
Lead agency	Center for Work, Families and Workforce Development	Baltimore City Department of Social Services	Boston Health Department	Family Services of Greater Boston	Human Services, Inc.	Fathers and Families Resource/ Research Center
Key partners	MD Department of Human Resources/ Community Initiatives and Child Support Divisions: STRIVE; Maximus (local child support contractor)	MD Department of Human Resources/ Community Initiatives and Child Support Divisions; Urban League; Maximus (local child support contractor)	MA Department of Revenue/CSE Division	MA Department of Revenue/CSE Division	CO State CSE, Denver Public Schools	Wishard Health Services; Marion County Prosecutors Office/Child Support Division
Father program before PFF	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Serves non-PFF participants	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Project service area	City of Baltimore	City of Baltimore	Boston metropolitan area	City of Boston	Denver metropolitan area	City of Indianapolis/ Marion County
Target group	Fathers age 16–25 with no existing child support order and a child between age 0 and 3. Allowed 30 percent to already have paternity established.	Fathers or expectant fathers age 14–25 and not involved in child support system. At least 80 percent must be without a child support order at time of enrollment.	Fathers or expectant fathers age 25 and younger. Paternity could not be established more than six months before entry. Focus on those without paternity but also allowed those who had paternity.	Fathers or expectant fathers age 16–25. Focus on those without paternity but also allowed those who had paternity.	Fathers or expectant fathers age 14–26 who have at least one child not covered by a child support order.	Fathers or expectant fathers age 16–24 who have at least one child not covered by a child support order.
Funding source(s)	OCSE, Ford Foundation	OCSE, Ford Foundation	OCSE, Ford Foundation, CDC violence prevention project, and HRSA	OCSE, Ford Foundation	OCSE; Ford, Rose, and Mott Foundations; the United Way	OCSE; Lilly Endowment; Kellogg and Casey Foundations; Wishard Hospital
Number of PFF participants	57	201	180–190	110	266	107
Primary project staff (does not include clerical)	Project director 6 case managers	Project director 2 case managers Urban League: 1 coordinator 1 case manager	Project director 3 case managers 2 clinicians 1 clinical coordinator	Project director 2 case managers	Program director 1 program manager 1 employment specialist 1 job placement specialist 1 case manager 1 fatherhood specialist 2 school-based coordinators	Project director 3 case managers

**Exhibit 2.1.
Program Design of PFF Projects**

Program site	Los Angeles, CA Bienvenidos	Los Angeles, CA Role of Men	Los Angeles, CA Truevine	Minneapolis, MN FATHER Project	New York, NY Fathers Strive for Family	Racine, WI Fatherhood Project	West Chester, PA Family Matters
Lead agency	Bienvenidos Family Services	Long Beach Department of Health & Human Services	Truevine Community Outreach	Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board	STRIVE	Goodwill Industries	Chester County Housing Development Corp.
Key partners	Los Angeles Child Support Services Department	Los Angeles Child Support Services Department	Los Angeles Child Support Services Department	Urban League, City of Minneapolis E&T Program, Youth Coordinating Board, Minneapolis Neighborhood Employment. Network, Hennepin Co. CSE Agency	New York City OCSE	Racine Bureau of Support (CSE agency), W-2 Program, Workforce Center	Chester County Housing Authority, Chester County Domestic Relations Office (CSE agency)
Father program before PFF	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Serves non-PFF participants	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Project service area	Primarily East Los Angeles	Primarily Long Beach	LA County, primarily Lynwood	Hennepin County	Five boroughs of New York City	Racine County	West Chester, Phoenixville, and Coatesville, PA
Target group	Fathers or expectant fathers up to age 25. Allowed 30 percent to have already established paternity or have an existing child support order. Focus on Hispanic fathers.	Fathers or expectant fathers age 17–25, preferably with no more than one child and limited exposure to the child support system	Primarily black fathers age 16–25. Children must be age 3 or younger. No paternity established or child support involvement	Fathers and expectant fathers age 16–25, primarily with no paternity established and no child support case. Allowed some with paternity established over time	Fathers or expectant fathers age 16–25 with one or two children and no child support order. Had to establish paternity within 72 hours of enrollment. Over time, allowed 40 percent with paternity established	Fathers or expectant fathers age 16–26 who have not established paternity	Fathers age 16–25, never married with no more than two children, age 0–3. Focus on those who they have not established paternity or CS orders, but allowed others over time
Funding source(s)	OCSE, Ford Foundation	OCSE, Ford Foundation	OCSE, Ford Foundation	OCSE, Ford Foundation, DOL Welfare-to-Work grant, Mott and Target Foundation	OCSE, Ford Foundation	OCSE, Ford Foundation, Johnson Wax, Racine Community Foundation, U.S. DOL grant	OCSE, Ford and Philadelphia Foundations
Number of PFF participants	67	48	35	183	36	61	120
Primary project staff (does not include clerical)	Program coordinator 1 case manager 1 peer mentor	Program director 2 case managers	Program director 2 case managers	Program director 4 advocates 1 part-time GED instructor 1 attorney Urban League: 1 supervisor 2 case managers	Project director 3 case managers	Project director 1.5 case managers	Program director 4 case managers 2 job developers

Most of the PFF operating organizations developed collaborations to serve young fathers, with some initiatives involving a greater number of institutional partners than others. The state and local CSE agencies were, by design, partners in all the projects. The funding arrangement through the federal waiver required an institutional as well as financial connection with the state CSE agency and helped facilitate the role of CSE in the local projects. Although the CSE agency played a more significant role in some projects than others (chapter 4), all the PFF operating organizations reported they were able to form some level of coordination with CSE. This is notable because previous programs serving low-income fathers reportedly had difficulty developing this partnership (Martinson et al. 2000). However, most state CSE agencies were not involved in the PFF programs during the planning phase before the waivers were granted.

The PFF projects varied in the extent to which they involved organizations beyond the operating organization and the CSE agency. In several projects, such as those in Minneapolis and Racine, the local workforce development agency was a key partner. Some projects also involved organizations that had special expertise considered important to the program. For example, the Minneapolis and Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers projects contracted with the Urban League to provide employment services, and the local public school system was a partner in the Denver project. A few projects involved organizations in their initial planning phase, but in the end did not use the services some organizations provided. For example, in Los Angeles, Brazile Metals (an organization providing training, primarily for occupations within the construction industry) was initially a PFF partner, to which the three Los Angeles projects could refer PFF participants for training and job placement services. However, because the three projects made very few referrals to the Brazile Metals training program, the partnership gradually became inactive.

Project Size, Funding, and Staffing

The PFF projects were small by design and intended to serve relatively few young fathers. As discussed further in chapter 3, the original participation goal for each PFF locality was to enroll 300 young, noncustodial fathers into PFF services. In the three local areas where there were multiple projects, the overall goal of 300 PFF enrollments was evenly divided among the two or three project sites. Hence, enrollment goals for the 13 individual PFF projects ranged from 100 to 300 participants.

Because of a number of challenges involved in recruiting young fathers (also discussed in chapter 3), most projects ultimately enrolled and served fewer participants than originally planned. As shown in exhibit 2.1, PFF project enrollment ranged from 37 in New York (STRIVE) to 266 in the Young Fathers Program in Denver. Nearly half the PFF projects enrolled fewer than 100 participants. However, as shown, most programs used other funding sources to also serve fathers who did not meet the PFF eligibility criteria, primarily because the fathers were older, had paternity established, or had child support orders. Thus, most programs were larger than the number of PFF enrollments indicates. Because the PFF programs remained relatively small, all the sponsoring organizations had the capacity to operate the program.

All the state-level CSE agencies in PFF project states received a base amount of \$999,999 from OCSE and \$500,000 in matching foundation funds (usually from the Ford

Foundation) to operate three-year projects.⁹ The state agency then allocated most or all of those funds to the local projects. In states with multiple PFF projects—two in Maryland, two in Massachusetts, and three in California—the funds were divided among the projects in that state. Several projects—Boston’s Father Friendly Initiative and those in Denver, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, Racine, and West Chester—received additional funding beyond that provided through the waiver. Most of these resources came from private foundations, although some sites received other federal or state grants. For example, the Minneapolis project received funding through the U.S. Department of Labor’s Welfare-to-Work Grants program.

Most PFF projects had few staff, generally a project director and several case managers. In most places, PFF case managers were generalists responsible for providing a comprehensive set of services to participants. Some projects had staff that specialized in certain programmatic areas. For example, Denver’s Young Fathers Program had separate staff for case management, employment, fatherhood issues, and education and training. The Boston Healthy Start project employed clinicians that specialized in assessment, barrier identification, and issues of mental health and substance abuse. Some organizations had staff from previous fatherhood programs on the PFF program, whereas others had to bring on new staff.

Target Group

The underlying premise of the PFF initiative is that early intervention—while the couple is still in a relationship and before child support orders are initiated and arrearages begin to accumulate—will enhance a father’s connection with his children and thereby increase the likelihood that he will financially and emotionally support his children. In its original conception, PFF was intended to target young or expectant fathers between the ages of 16 and 25 with no paternity established who were low skilled and low income, unemployed or underemployed, and never married. However, as part of the waiver process, each state’s child support agency could further refine the eligibility criteria.

During the planning stage, according to discussions with key administrators and staff at the state and local levels, there was some confusion about the specific PFF eligibility criteria. Some of this confusion stemmed from the various layers through which funding entities communicated the eligibility criteria for enrollment in PFF to the field. HHS was the primary communication channel to the state CSE agencies; NPCL was the primary contact for the organizations operating the local projects; the Ford Foundation and NPCL set the initial general parameters and specific criteria; and state CSE agencies, through the authority they held for the CSE program and the federal waiver, could alter or add criteria applicable to demonstrations in their state.

As a result, as shown above in exhibit 2.1, although most projects followed the general targeting guidelines, there was some variation across sites in the types of fathers eligible for PFF. Most sites initially focused on fathers without paternity established and with no involvement in the child support system. The narrowest eligibility criteria were in New York STRIVE’s project, which limited enrollment to fathers without paternity established who were willing to establish

⁹ Organizations developing PFF projects received planning grants from the Ford Foundation. The planning grants totaled \$95,000 for most of the PFF sites.

paternity within 72 hours of enrollment in PFF. A few other projects added criteria, such as allowing fathers with some previous involvement with the child support system, and a few established residency criteria (e.g., living in a certain city or area of the city). All the projects placed priority on fathers with little or no income who were unemployed or working with very low earnings.

When attempting to apply the eligibility criteria, many administrators in the sites reported that they experienced significant difficulty meeting their enrollment goals (chapter 3). As a result, projects relaxed PFF eligibility definitions over time. Some projects established that a certain proportion of enrollees (rather than all) must be without paternity establishment and without formal child support orders, and others expanded the eligibility criteria more informally rather than setting a fixed proportion that must not have paternity established.

- **New York STRIVE.** The project relaxed the strict eligibility criterion related to paternity establishment so that at least 60 percent of participants could *not* have paternity established before enrollment, but these participants still had to establish paternity within 72 hours of enrollment (a state CSE agency requirement). Up to 40 percent of participants could have already established paternity before entry into PFF, but they could *not* have a child support order established.
- **Los Angeles Bienvenidos.** This project relaxed the requirement to allow 30 percent of the enrollments to already have paternity established.
- **Denver and Indianapolis.** These projects changed the criteria to allow fathers with multiple children to participate if at least one child did not have a child support order.
- **Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers.** In this project, at least 80 percent of participants must not have a child support order at the time of enrollment.

Overall, although the sites did loosen their eligibility criteria over time, there remained a clear focus in all the projects on serving young fathers who either were not already involved with child support or had been involved with child support for a relatively short time.

PFF Management Information Systems

As part of the demonstration project, each site was required to implement the official PFF management information systems (MIS) designed to collect information about services PFF participants received. The aim was to implement the PFF MIS to collect data that could be used for both project management and evaluation. NPCL had primary responsibility for implementing the MIS, and its subcontractor Metis was responsible for providing sites with some technical assistance and training on the development of participant-level data systems.

In spite of these efforts, PFF administrators and staff experienced many difficulties with implementing and using the MIS. Most sites were fairly successful in tracking basic demographic characteristics of participants served, but they experienced substantial difficulties in tracking the types of services participants received and their employment and child support outcomes. It appears that the level of technical assistance and training was not sufficient to

ensure that program staff used and updated the system on a regular basis or that the programs were not staffed appropriately to ensure the completion of this task. As a result, data on participant characteristics are available for all the sites (see below), but only four sites (Indianapolis, Minneapolis, Racine, and West Chester) implemented the MIS fully enough to include an analysis of the type of services received (chapter 4).

Participant Characteristics

This section describes the demographic characteristics of the PFF participants across the 13 sites at the time of enrollment in each project on the basis of site MIS data. Exhibit 2.2 provides selected demographic characteristics of the program participants.¹⁰ Although there is variation, all the projects served a very disadvantaged population in terms of education and work history. The projects also targeted young fathers who had very limited connections to the child support system.

Age and race. Across all the sites, the average age of participants was 21 years, with the youngest average age in Denver (19 years) and oldest in the Boston Family Services project (22 years). All projects served a predominately black population except Denver, Los Angeles (the Bienvenidos project), and New York, where significant portions of PFF participants were Hispanic/Latino. Indianapolis and Racine served a larger white population than the other sites, though the majority of the participants in these two sites were black. Minneapolis served a significant proportion (15 percent) of participants who identified their race or ethnicity as “other”; these participants were primarily Native American/American Indians.

Education and employment history. On average, more than half the PFF participants across all the sites, and more than 60 percent in many sites, did not have a high school diploma or GED. Except in Los Angeles Truevine, virtually none of the PFF participants had technical or college degrees. Across all the sites, participants had completed only tenth grade on average. Perhaps not surprisingly given their age, about one-quarter of the participants were in school when they enrolled in PFF, ranging from 5 percent in West Chester to 36 percent in two Los Angeles projects, Truevine and Role of Men (not shown).

About one-third of the PFF participants were working when they enrolled in PFF, averaging 34 hours of work per week at a wage rate of \$8.48 per hour (not shown). The percentage employed at the time of enrollment in PFF ranged from 19 percent in Minneapolis to 53 percent in Indianapolis. Across all the sites, 29 percent of the participants reported that they had not worked in the past 12 months (ranging from 15 percent in Indianapolis to almost 50 percent in Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers), and 45 percent reported they had worked full-time (ranging from 27 percent in Boston Family Services to more than 60 percent in West Chester).

¹⁰See appendix A for a complete list of demographic characteristics of participants in each project.

Exhibit 2.2.
Selected Demographic Characteristics of PFF Participants at Enrollment

PFF Participant Characteristics	All 13 sites	Baltimore, MD		Boston, MA		Denver, CO	Indianapolis, IN
		Center for Work, Families, and Workforce Development	Young Fathers/ Responsible Fathers	Father Friendly Initiative at Boston Healthy Start	Family Services of Greater Boston	The Young Fathers Program	Father Resource Program
Average Age (years)^a	21	22	21	21	22	19	21
Race/Ethnicity (%)							
White non-Hispanic	7.6	0.0	1.7	10.5	1.8	6.9	16.7
Black non-Hispanic	67.3	97.6	95.8	67.9	77.3	31.3	78.7
Hispanic/Latino	19.0	2.4	0.0	15.8	17.3	56.3	1.9
Other	6.1	0.0	2.5	5.8	3.6	5.6	2.8
Education: Highest Degree Earned (%)							
None	54.7	56.9	64.5	41.9	42.9	72.4	53.8
GED	15.7	9.8	9.4	18.9	18.8	16.0	16.0
High school diploma	27.1	33.3	25.2	32.5	34.8	11.5	29.3
Technical/AA, college degree, or higher	2.6	0.0	0.9	6.8	3.6	0.0	0.9
Employment Status in Past 12 Months (%)							
Employed full-time	44.6	74.1	36.0	42.1	26.4		56.7
Employed part-time	14.0	7.4	5.0	14.6	13.9	N/A	25.0
Temporarily or occasionally employed	13.4	0.0	10.0	23.0	31.9		3.3
Did not work	27.9	18.5	49.0	20.2	27.8		15.0
Marital Status (%)							
Never married	94.3	96.0	94.0	90.7	87.8	94.4	97.2
Married and living with spouse	2.8	4.0	1.7	6.2	4.3	2.5	0.0
Separated	2.1	0.0	3.4	1.5	5.2	3.1	2.8
Divorced	0.6	0.0	0.9	0.5	1.7	0.0	0.0
Widowed	0.2	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.9	0.0	0.0
Number of Children under 18 (5)							
No children	10.6	23.3	19.1	14.0	7.4	19.0	2.3
1 child	63.5	60.0	61.7	55.5	69.1	72.8	77.9
2 children	18.7	16.7	17.0	19.5	17.6	5.4	16.3
3 children	7.1	0.0	2.1	11.0	5.9	2.7	3.5
Current Child Support Order (%)	24.9	15.4	15.4	38.4	17.3	7.3	17.1
Sample size	1,334	55	132	199	117	169	110

PFF Participant Characteristics	Los Angeles, CA			Minneapolis, MN	New York, NY	Racine, WI	West Chester, PA
	Bienvenidos Family Services	Role of Men	Truevine	FATHER Project	Fathers Strive for Family	Children Upfront	Family Matters
Average Age	21	22	21	22	21	22	21
Race/Ethnicity (%)							
White non-Hispanic	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.0	0.0	27.9	12.0
Black non-Hispanic	0.0	95.5	71.9	77.1	43.3	49.2	74.4
Hispanic/Latino	96.2	2.3	25.0	0.6	53.3	19.7	6.0
Other	3.9	2.3	3.1	16.4	3.3	3.3	7.7
Education: Highest Degree Earned (%)							
None	60.4	75.0	66.7	54.0		63.9	40.4
GED	7.6	21.9	3.7	20.7		9.8	12.8
High school diploma	32.1	0.0	22.2	21.3	N/A	26.2	45.0
Technical/AA, college degree, or higher	0.0	3.1	7.4	4.0		0.0	1.8
Employment Status in Past 12 Months (%)							
Employed full-time	62.8			42.9	40.0	40.4	61.3
Employed part-time	7.0	N/A	N/A	12.9	20.0	10.5	13.8
Temporarily or occasionally employed	4.7			4.7	30.0	24.6	6.3
Did not work	25.6			39.4	10.0	24.6	18.8
Marital Status (%)							
Never married	93.1	100.0	100.0	96.1	100.0	91.8	97.5
Married and living with spouse	6.9	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	4.9	1.7
Separated	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.8	0.0	1.6	0.0
Divorced	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	1.6	0.8
Widowed	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Number of Children under 18 (%)							
No children	1.7	2.4		2.9	0.0	19.7	11.9
1 child	74.6	73.2	N/A	53.5	87.1	44.3	57.1
2 children	22.0	19.5		28.5	12.9	23.0	22.6
3 children	1.7	4.9		15.1	0.0	13.1	8.3
Current Child Support Orders (%)	25.0	16.7	43.8	28.7	29.6	39.7	37.8
Sample size	65	48	35	186	36	61	121

Source: Urban Institute tabulations of MIS data.

Note: The small sample sizes limit the extent to which data can be divided into categories. In this exhibit, data are not reported unless there is at least an average of five people in each category. For example, in Truevine, CA 16 of 35 total participants report that they have 0, 1, 2, or 3 children; there would need to be 20 participants reporting this information for Truevine for it to be reported here. Sample sizes may vary due to missing data. Except some items in Denver and New York, missing data comprised a small percentage of the responses.

a Participant's age is calculated using the date of birth and the date of enrollment or the date of the first monthly report (whichever comes first). When enrollment date and the date of the first monthly report are both missing, the midpoint between the program start date and the program end date is used to calculate age.

Family status. More than 90 percent of PFF participants at the time of enrollment had never been married. Most projects served young fathers with one child (59 to 82 percent of PFF participants in the Baltimore Men’s Services Program and Los Angeles Truevine, respectively). Most sites served small numbers of expectant fathers, but several projects enrolled in excess of 15 percent of participants who were expectant fathers. Across all sites, most children lived with their mothers (70 percent), although about 20 percent of fathers had one or more of their children living with them (not shown).

Child support issues. More than one-quarter of the PFF participants had a child support order when they enrolled. In most sites, this appears to reflect the flexibility of eligibility criteria that occurred later in the program. In addition, it may reflect that some fathers had child support orders covering children they may have had earlier with another partner. Denver had the fewest without a child support order (7 percent), and Los Angeles Truevine had the most (44 percent). In Boston Healthy Start, West Chester, and Racine, 30 percent or more of the participants had a child support order at enrollment. A significant portion of the fathers reported they had provided some type of support to their child in the past six months, most commonly giving money outside of child support directly to the other parent or child (40 percent), purchasing major items (42 percent), and purchasing diapers (39 percent).

Summary

A range of organizations implemented the PFF demonstrations in each community, including social services agencies, health departments, and nonprofit organizations. Some had experience operating programs for noncustodial parents before PFF, although others had to implement programs from scratch, which required a range of activities including hiring and training staff. Several projects received additional funding beyond those provided through the waiver. Most of these additional resources came from private foundations, although some sites received other federal or state grants. Most sites had difficulty implementing the MIS designed for the project, particularly for tracking participation in program services.

Most PFF projects developed collaborations to serve young fathers, some involving more partners than others. The state and local CSE agencies were critical partners in all the projects. Although the CSE agency played a more significant role in some projects than others, this linkage is notable because it has proven difficult in other initiatives for serving low-income fathers. Although state CSE agencies were the conduit for the resources because of the waiver during the operational phase of the program, many of them were not actively involved in the planning process.

Following guidance from HHS and NPCL, projects initially focused on fathers younger than 26 without paternity established and with little or no involvement in the child support system. Many projects experienced extreme difficulty meeting their enrollment goals with these criteria. As a result, projects over time relaxed the eligibility definitions, and several projects served some young men with paternity established and some connection to the child support system. In addition, many programs used other funding sources to serve fathers who did not meet the PFF eligibility criteria. Although there is variation across the sites, all projects served a population disadvantaged in its education and work history. Reflecting PFF’s targeting criteria, most participants were young, never-married fathers with limited connections to the child support system.

CHAPTER 3: RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

A key aspect of the PFF program involved recruiting potentially interested and eligible young men and enrolling them in the program. For nearly all PFF sites, recruiting and enrolling young fathers who met the PFF eligibility criteria proved to be one of the most critical and difficult challenges to project administrators and staff. The experiences of PFF sites with enrolling young fathers were not unlike those of earlier responsible fatherhood programs—namely, that the young, low-income fathers proved to be very difficult to engage in program services.

Difficulties in meeting enrollment goals stemmed both from the relatively stringent eligibility criteria developed for the PFF demonstrations and from the general challenge of bringing young men into the PFF projects. Several PFF sites did recruit a number of young fathers, but many did not meet PFF eligibility requirements and were subsequently either referred to other agencies/programs in the locality or served by the PFF organization but under a different funding source. In some cases, however, the men were not interested in the PFF services. This chapter examines the relative success of projects in recruiting and enrolling young fathers in PFF, the various outreach methods and referral arrangements the projects relied upon to recruit eligible young fathers, the principal reasons that young fathers decided to enroll in the PFF program, and key enrollment implementation challenges.

Difficulty Reaching Enrollment Goals

In its original conception, PFF was for young or expectant fathers between the ages of 16 and 25 with no paternity established who were low skilled and low income, unemployed or underemployed, and never married. In the end, most PFF projects were not able to attract enough young eligible fathers and several projects fell far below original enrollment goals. The inability of many projects to attract a steady and sufficient flow of participants also increased per-participant costs. Most sites struggled from the start, changing and fine-tuning their recruitment methods, as well as relaxing eligibility requirements to broaden the pool of eligible young men. It is important to note that PFF sites were not alone in experiencing difficulties identifying a sufficient number of enrollees; other responsible fatherhood initiatives serving low-income fathers have also struggled with this issue (Pearson 2003, Martinson 2000).

Exhibit 3.1 provides an overview of the extent to which projects were able to meet enrollment goals and the principal recruitment and outreach strategies each site employed. Enrollment goals ranged from 100 to 300 eligible fathers, depending upon the number of projects operating within a site. Sites with a single project had goals of serving 300 young fathers, whereas those sites with multiple projects divided the goal of serving 300 evenly across projects. That is, each of the three projects in Los Angeles had a goal of serving 100 young men, and each of the two projects in Boston and Baltimore aimed to serve 150 men.

As shown in exhibit 3.1, only 2 of the 13 PFF projects (Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers and Boston Healthy Start) achieved their PFF enrollment goals. When participation levels for multiple projects operating within a site (Boston, Baltimore, and Los Angeles) are summed, only one of the nine PFF sites (Boston) achieved its enrollment goal.

Overall, the 13 PFF projects were able to enroll just slightly more than half (55 percent) of the young men they originally intended to serve. Reflective of the recruiting difficulties, 7 of the 13 projects enrolled fewer than half the expected number of PFF participants.

Many programs were able to recruit men who did not meet the PFF eligibility criteria. The services these fathers received varied. Some programs, such as Minneapolis and Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers, provided the same set of services to these fathers (but with other funding sources) as they did to the target fathers. Other programs, such as those in Los Angeles and New York, referred non-PFF fathers to other programs they offered. The remainder of this chapter discusses some main recruitment techniques of the projects and the principal reasons why they had so much difficulty achieving their enrollment goals.

PFF Projects' Outreach and Recruitment Methods

PFF projects used a broad array of approaches to target young men and encourage their enrollment in the program. Because the projects encountered significant difficulties meeting their enrollment goals, most experimented with a variety of outreach methods to reach a broad pool of men. Although projects generally made use of many of the same methods, no two projects used the same mix of methods even within the same locality (such as Los Angeles, where there were three PFF projects). Below, we highlight some principal methods by which PFF projects reached out to and recruited eligible fathers.

Direct referrals from other agencies. With the exception of two projects in Los Angeles (Role of Men and Truevine), PFF relied mainly on referrals from other community agencies. Projects looked to those agencies that interacted with or served large numbers of young men, including family and criminal courts, probation and parole officers (and the correctional system), public health clinics/hospitals, substance abuse programs, and homeless shelters. Referral arrangements were set up to have a direct flow of young men from these agencies. In addition, several of the agencies administering PFF were large agencies operating other initiatives (that could be potential referral sources) with other funding sources. For example, some sponsoring agencies operated other programs that served custodial parents (Denver), provided health care services in the community (Boston Healthy Start and Los Angeles Role of Men), operated employment services programs (New York), or operated other responsible fatherhood projects (Baltimore's Men's Services Program).

Initially, each project had to determine which types of agencies in their community could be viable sources of referrals. This was not an easy task because of several factors. First, the restrictive PFF eligibility criteria narrowed the pool of potentially eligible fathers. In addition, young men have traditionally not accessed social service programs and many do not routinely turn to public or private nonprofit organizations for help. Furthermore, other agencies serving fathers were not always eager to refer to PFF or did not follow up on pledges to refer individuals.

Exhibit 3.1
PFF Participation Goals and Levels, and Outreach and Recruitment Methods

Program characteristic	Baltimore, MD Men’s Services Program	Baltimore, MD Young Fathers/ Responsible Fathers	Boston, MA Father Friendly Initiative (FFI) at Healthy Start	Boston, MA Family Services of Greater Boston (FSGB)	Denver, CO The Young Fathers Program	Indianapolis, IN Father Resource Program
Participation goal	150	150	150	150	300	300
Number of participants (percent of goal)	57 (38)	201 (134)	180–190 (123)	110 (73)	266 (89)	107 (36)
Most important sources of referrals	Established fatherhood program before PFF, so already had developed a strong reputation. Many came to project as a result of word of mouth	Significant referrals from juvenile detention center and courts (including CSE agency, child protection services, and parole and probation). Word of mouth important because of strong pre-PFF fatherhood program	Staff estimated half of PFF participants were walk-ins; other half were referrals from other agencies, including courts, public health clinics/hospitals, and agencies to which FFI refers fathers for services	Staff estimated half of PFF participants were walk-ins; other half were referrals from agencies, including CSE agency, family/criminal courts, other social service providers. Word of mouth important	Staff estimated 80% of referrals from walk-ins, word of mouth, and referrals by former participants. Referrals received from other HSI programs, child support agency, and other human service agencies	Staff estimated half of PFF participants were walk-ins and about half were referrals from other agencies (especially CSE agency), but also referrals from Healthy Families Initiative, probation and parole officers, Wishard Hospital
Overview of outreach methods	Strong street and community outreach effort used, including distribution of brochures at malls, subways, basketball courts, schools, and WIC clinics	Periodic staff appearances on local radio talk show; staff presentations and distribution of brochures at schools, churches, police stations, and welfare agencies	Before PFF, FFI had conducted extensive outreach campaign that laid groundwork for PFF recruitment. Outreach included radio PSAs, bus/train ads, staff presentations at barbershops, human service agencies, and Healthy Start and other community events	PFF staff made presentations to other organizations serving disadvantaged youth, including Head Start, Dept. of Youth Services, and Dept. of Social Services. FSGB also recruited at local high school	Flyers distributed in targeted neighborhoods (though few responses generated); staff attended street fairs and neighborhood BBQs; a few PSAs on radio (no paid advertisement)	Paid radio advertisements on stations serving black community; staff presentations and distribution of brochure at barbershops, probation offices, hospitals, churches, One-Stops, and other human service agencies
Direct referrals from other agencies	●	●	●	●	●	●
Distribution of brochures/flyers	●	●	●	●	●	●
Presentations at other agencies	●	●	●	●	●	●
Use of local media—PSAs and ads on TV/radio and in newspapers		●	●		● (PSAs only)	●
Reliance on word-of-mouth and walk-ins	●	●	●	●	●	●
Street outreach/ neighborhood	●	●	●		●	●

Program characteristic recruiting	Baltimore, MD Men's Services Program	Baltimore, MD Young Fathers/ Responsible Fathers	Boston, MA Father Friendly Initiative (FFI) at Healthy Start	Boston, MA Family Services of Greater Boston (FSGB)	Denver, CO The Young Fathers Program	Indianapolis, IN Father Resource Program
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Program characteristic	Los Angeles, CA Bienvenidos	Los Angeles, CA Role of Men	Los Angeles, CA Truevine	Minneapolis, MN FATHER Project	New York, NY Fathers Strive for Family	Racine, WI Fatherhood Project	West Chester, PA Family Matters
Participation goal	100	100	100	300	300	300	300
Number of participants (percent of goal)	67 (67)	48 (48)	35 (35)	183 (61)	36 (12)	61 (20)	120 (40)
Most important sources of referrals	Staff estimated 25–30% from walk-ins and word of mouth; some referrals from alternative schools and pregnancy programs for minors	No direct referrals except a few from probation officers; project did not receive walk-ins—all participants brought in through outreach	Not many direct referrals except a few referrals from probation officers, Role of Men, and Brazile Metals; limited number of walk-ins	A few referrals from child support agency; word of mouth became increasingly important as project went along	Word-of-mouth (STRIVE is well known in the neighborhood) referrals were most common. Some CSE agency, parole and probation, and hospitals	Word of mouth was important; also referrals from CSE agency and through compliance with child support or court order	Referrals received from probation and parole, welfare agency, CSE agency, and drug and alcohol services; word of mouth important
Overview of outreach methods	Staff made presentations and distributed flyers at public agencies, WIC clinics, high schools, probation and parole agencies, and hospitals; advertising about program in free local paper; several radio PSAs and two favorable TV news reports about the program	Compensation provided to recruiters who recruited in barbershops, hospitals and maternity wards, teen centers, NAACP, churches, community forums, youth gang programs, and one-stops. Recruiters also spoke to groups of men standing on the street	Staff distributed brochures about program at churches, parks, housing projects, and anywhere young men hung out. Two recruiters conducted street outreach, visited locations where men congregated and provided information about the program	Staff went to job fairs, resource fairs, hospitals, and community groups to make presentations and distribute flyers about program; posters put up at bus stops and various community organizations; PSAs on local hip-hop radio station; word of mouth	Outreach specialist visited and handed out flyers at social service agencies, schools, correctional facilities, community centers, shelters, and housing projects. Flyers about STRIVE and fatherhood program put up on walls and under doors at public housing projects	Staff made presentations at churches, barbeques, other community events	Staff put up flyers (in English and Spanish) at grocery stores, pharmacies, and juvenile justice programs; staff attended community picnics, barbeques, schools; general canvassing
Direct referrals from other agencies	●			●	●	●	●
Distribution of brochures/flyers	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Presentations at other agencies	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Use of local media—PSAs and ads on TV/radio and in newspapers	●			●			
Reliance on word of mouth and walk-ins	●		●	●	●	●	●
Street outreach/ neighborhood recruiting	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Maintain waiting list	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

PSAs = public service announcements; WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

Once projects identified potential referral agencies, PFF staff met with their administrators and staff to inform them about eligibility requirements, the range of services available, and the methods for referring individuals to the project. PFF administrators reported that setting up such arrangements sometimes proved more difficult than expected, in part because seemingly natural partner agencies that served large numbers of men did not always refer fathers to the project. And even when other agencies made referrals, those referred often failed to show up at the PFF project or were found to be ineligible during the intake/assessment process. PFF staff had to carefully monitor and refine referral arrangements between agencies. Several projects established procedures to notify the PFF agency of the referral, which meant PFF staff could follow up with the referring agency if the individual did not show up. PFF projects devoted considerable time to continually encourage partnering agencies to refer eligible fathers. Several illustrations of referral arrangements are displayed in box 3.1.

Distribution of brochures and flyers and presentations. PFF projects sought to identify eligible fathers either by making staff at other agencies knowledgeable about service offerings or by placing program literature where targeted individuals would see it. One important strategy involved visiting other agencies that served young fathers and briefing staff, individually or as a group, about PFF services, eligibility, and procedures for referrals. PFF literature, such as brochures, was provided, which could be handed out to young men or displayed on bulletin boards in referral agencies' offices.

Box 3.1.

Examples of PFF Project Referral Arrangements with Other Organizations

Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers. Administrators estimated that more than half of PFF participants were referred from the Thomas O'Farrell Youth Center, a juvenile detention center in Baltimore County that serves at-risk youth from Maryland. This facility was able to refer many fathers under the age of 18 who were appropriate for PFF services. The project also received referrals of abuse and neglect cases from child protective services (located in the same building and part of the same agency as Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers), the Reporter's Program (which is connected to child support), and parole and probation agents.

Boston Healthy Start. Staff estimated that about half of PFF participants were walk-ins and the other half were referrals from other agencies. Referrals came from the child support agency and family courts, probation and parole agents, area health clinics and hospitals (operated by the Department of Public Health), a range of other community organizations (e.g., housing agencies), and the Mayor's Hotline.

West Chester. This PFF project had a number of institutional partners who made some referrals to the project, including Adult Probation and Parole, Juvenile Probation and Parole, the TANF (welfare) agency, the child support agency, and Chester County Drug and Alcohol services. PFF staff made regular presentations at these organizations to educate staff about PFF and the eligibility criteria. These agencies also referred individuals they thought would be appropriate.

Another strategy was to place brochures in places where young parents were likely to frequent, such as other social service programs, grocery stores, churches, local schools and training institutions, recreational facilities and playgrounds, public housing projects, probation and parole agencies, and child support agencies and courts. In some places, PFF staff presented

at sessions attended by young men or women, such as orientations held at prerelease centers for offenders. Some projects set up booths at street fairs, neighborhood barbeques, and other community events to distribute PFF literature and speak one-on-one with potential recruits.

Street/neighborhood recruiting. Several PFF projects sent individual staff and case management teams into neighborhoods where potential recruits congregated. Staff distributed information about services and conducted one-on-one discussions with potential recruits. Such street outreach, though labor intensive, helped raise awareness for many young men who would otherwise be unlikely to hear about the initiative. Several examples of projects with fairly aggressive street outreach efforts are shown in box 3.2.

Reliance on word of mouth. PFF projects relied considerably on word of mouth, particularly through former participants, friends, family members, and community leaders. Because projects often targeted a specific community, this was one of the most effective ways of distributing information about the program and encouraging participation. Hearing from a local church leader, friend, or relative that a project provided useful services (such as helping to secure a job, resolving child support issues, or improving visitation with children) was perhaps the most certain way of drawing interest from young men. Several administrators and staff indicated that as the project became more established and young men successfully completed services, the number of word-of-mouth referrals (especially resulting from former participants) greatly increased.

Box 3.2.

Examples of PFF Sites Employing Street Outreach as a Recruitment Method

Baltimore Men's Services Program. This program used a strong street and community outreach effort to recruit young men into their PFF initiative. The STRIVE affiliation helped with recruitment, because STRIVE was well recognized by young men and others within the targeted neighborhoods. The program used the STRIVE brochure with contact information about the fatherhood initiative. Program staff handed out brochures and talked one-on-one with potential recruits at malls, subways, basketball courts, schools, and other neighborhood locations where young men congregated.

Los Angeles Role of Men. The staff at Role of Men used a "No Drive-By" policy whereby a staff person would stop and talk, no matter when or where, to an individual or groups of young men congregating in a targeted neighborhood who might benefit from participation in PFF. Staff often stopped just to talk, and if it seemed appropriate, would discuss the program, available services, and how to enroll in the PFF. Program administrators felt that this strategy presented both an opportunity to inform young men about program services and to get positive male role models for younger men out into the community.

Denver. Project staff attended street fairs and neighborhood barbeques in parks to distribute brochures about the program and talk with young men about the how they might benefit from the PFF-sponsored program and the steps involved in enrolling in PFF program services.

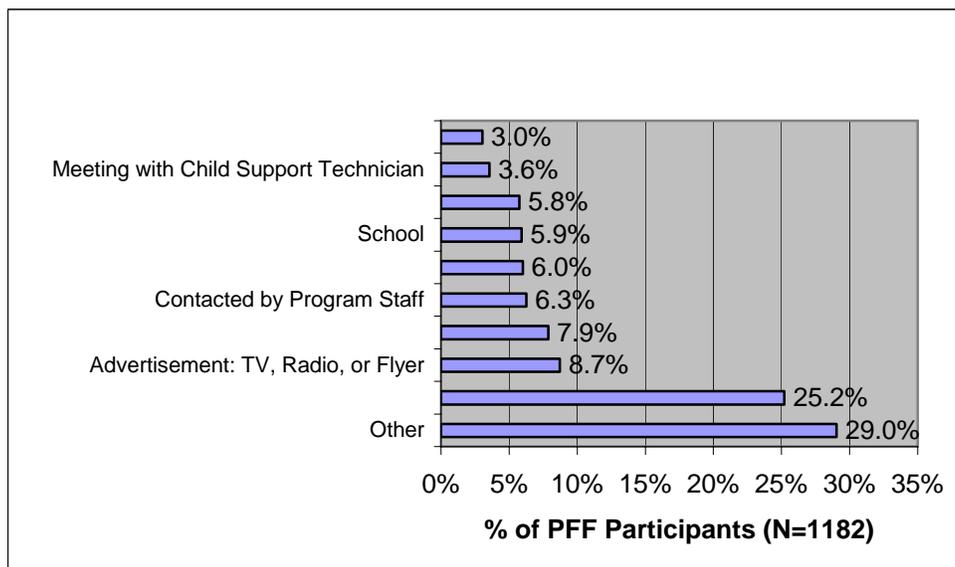
Use of public service announcements. Some PFF projects sought out opportunities for free radio public service announcements about their project. Local site administrators and staff

also gave interviews to local television, radio, and newspaper reporters. These outreach methods provided an opportunity to inform a wider audience of young men, as well as custodial parents, other agencies, and other interested individuals, about available services. For example, Los Angeles Bienvenidos developed several public service announcements profiling its fatherhood services that ran on a local radio station. In addition, two feature news reports appeared on television about the program, one on the local PBS station and a second on a local network affiliate. These reports provided favorable coverage of fatherhood services available at Bienvenidos. Administrators in Baltimore’s Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers made periodic appearances on a weekly radio call-in show. After each appearance, the project experienced a surge in the number of telephone inquiries from young fathers and custodial parents about available services. Finally, several projects paid for advertisements on local radio stations and in local newspapers; for example, the Indianapolis project paid for advertisements on radio stations serving the black community.

How PFF Participants Learned about the Project and Why They Participated

During the enrollment process, staff asked applicants how they heard about the PFF project. In addition, in focus groups for our study, we asked participants how they initially learned about PFF and why they decided to enroll. As shown in exhibit 3.2, about one-quarter of PFF participants (in the nine projects for which management information data were available) indicated that they had heard about PFF from a friend. Other leading sources cited by 5 percent or more of participants were TV/radio advertisements or a flyer, another community organization, direct contact by a PFF staff person, a school, or the court.

Exhibit 3.2
How Participants Learned about the PFF Project in their Locality



Note: From the MIS data systems of nine PFF sites. (Data are missing for New York and three Los Angeles sites.) Several other choices were possible, all of which were reported by less than 2 percent of participants: therapist; health professional/clinic; child protective agency professional; welfare/TANF technician; church-/faith-based organization; letter from child support agency; and attorney.

As might be expected, there were some differences across sites in how participants learned about PFF (exhibit 3.3). In seven of the nine projects, the primary way in which participants heard about the initiative was through a friend. In the two other sites, the leading sources were a community organization (the Baltimore Men’s Services Program) and TV/radio advertisement or flyer (in Minneapolis). The second and third leading sources were more varied across sites and included referral by the Department of Corrections or courts, another community organization, a child support technician, school, and friend. In addition, some participants indicated they had heard about the project through direct contact with PFF staff.

Exhibit 3.3.
Three Main Sources from Which Participants Heard about the PFF Project

Site	Source 1	Source 2	Source 3
Baltimore—Men’s Services	Community organization	Contact with project staff	Friend
Baltimore—Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers	Friend	Department of Corrections	Court
Boston—Father Friendly Initiative	Friend	Community organization	Court
Boston—Family Services of Greater Boston	Friend	Community organization	Court and Department of Corrections (tied)
Denver	Friend	School	Department of Corrections
Indianapolis	Friend	Meeting with child support technician	Advertisement: TV/radio, flyer
Minneapolis	Advertisement: TV/radio, flyer	Friend	Court
Racine	Friend	Contact with project staff	Meeting with child support technician
West Chester	Friend	Contact with project staff	Department of Corrections

Note: Data are not available for other sites. “Other” was excluded from this table, but was cited by participants as the leading reason in Denver, Boston’s Father Friendly Initiative, and Chester County; the second leading reason in Indianapolis, Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers; and the third leading reason in Boston’s Family Services of Greater Boston and Minneapolis.

We asked focus group participants why they decided to enroll in the PFF. The most common response was for help finding a job, in some cases so they could keep up with their child support payments. The other leading reason participants cited was interest in obtaining help with resolving visitation issues and conflicts with the custodial parent, so they might see their children more often. Several indicated that they hoped to learn more about parenting skills and how to relate to and be more patient with their children. Some indicated they joined the project because they wanted help resolving child support issues or to better understand the child support system. (Because PFF was aimed at those with little or no previous involvement with the child support system, child support reasons were not as frequent as employment and parenting reasons.)

Enrollment Challenges for PFF Projects

Several factors affected the ability of the PFF sites in meeting their enrollment targets:

Strict PFF eligibility criteria. Above all other factors, virtually all PFF project administrators pointed to one factor that complicated recruitment efforts: the stringent eligibility requirements that narrowed the pool of fathers from which they could recruit. As discussed in chapter 2, the eligibility criteria varied somewhat across sites, but recruitment efforts essentially targeted a narrow band of fathers, those age 25 or younger with little or no involvement with the child support system. Eligibility definitions were gradually relaxed because most administrators indicated that it was difficult to find fathers in their communities who met the original requirements.

Lack of awareness or interest. Even when it was possible to find eligible individuals, it was sometimes difficult to enroll them in program services. Unlike their female counterparts, young fathers have not been the focus of many social service programs, so most were reportedly not aware that programs existed for them. Many young men contacted by project staff had never been enrolled in a social service program. Some potential recruits were difficult to reach and, when contacted, were either uninterested or averse to participating. For example, some young fathers were concerned that their involvement in any program might lead to difficulties with child support agencies and the courts, or that it might result in the establishment of a payment order that they could not afford. Some young fathers did not want to reconnect with the custodial parent or dependent children. Other young fathers were too busy with family, friends or acquaintances, work, or street life activities and did not feel they had the available time to commit to PFF.

Referral difficulties. Because young men did not typically participate in other human services programs, it was often difficult to find other agencies that might provide large numbers of referrals. Even the PFF projects able to identify other agencies that served large numbers of young fathers (such as the court system, child support agencies, local youth programs, and the correctional system) learned that these agencies were not always eager to partner with them or that the young men had neither the time nor the interest to participate in PFF.

Program delays. Several PFF administrators indicated that the lengthy period to obtain final approval of waivers for federal child support enforcement provisions interrupted their recruitment efforts. The waiver process extended over a two-year period, much longer than any of the sites anticipated. By the time sites received their federal waivers, signed contractual agreements, and received approval to start recruitment, much of the momentum that had gathered during the planning grant phase—when sites designed their intervention strategies and began to assemble staff and identify participants—had ground to a halt. Some PFF projects had to hire new staff and basically restart their projects from scratch (as if the planning phase had not existed). As discussed in greater detail in chapter 2, as a result of the lengthy waiver process, the PFF projects did not hit the ground running on outreach and enrollment as they had planned. In some cases, commitments from potential referral agencies had to be reinitiated, and some agencies that had made commitments to help and send referrals no longer had young fathers in need of services or had made other arrangements in the interim to obtain services for these fathers.

Funding uncertainties. Several PFF administrators noted that they had experienced periods of financial uncertainty at various points during the demonstration effort. This uncertain flow of funding caused several sites—notably, the three PFF programs in Los Angeles—to

temporarily suspend recruitment several times until funding issues could be resolved. At two or three points during the demonstration effort, because of uncertainties about funding expected from NPCL, the Los Angeles child support agency directed the three PFF program sites to temporarily halt new enrollments until funding issues could be resolved with NPCL. According to child support administrators and site staff, these stops and starts were one of the contributing factors to why the three projects in Los Angeles fell short of their enrollment goals.

Summary

For nearly all PFF sites, enrolling fathers who met the PFF eligibility criteria proved one of the critical and most difficult challenges. Most sites struggled with meeting enrollment goals from the start, changing and fine-tuning their recruitment methods and relaxing eligibility requirements to broaden the pool of eligible men. Most PFF administrators and staff indicated that the pool of low-income fathers in need of assistance with child support, parenting, and other responsible fatherhood concerns was substantial in their communities, but many fathers did not meet the criteria for enrollment or did not enroll for other reasons. Some programs used other funding sources to serve fathers who did not meet the PFF eligibility criteria.

PFF projects used a broad array of approaches to get the word out about their projects and to encourage enrollment. Although the PFF sites used many of the same recruitment methods, no two sites used the same mix of methods. Common methods included direct referrals from other agencies, distribution of flyers and presentations at other local agencies, street and neighborhood recruiting, public service announcements, and word of mouth. Aside from the stringent PFF eligibility criteria, projects faced several other challenges that inhibited recruitment, including lack of interest in project services from many potential participants; difficulties getting adequate numbers of referrals from other agencies; problems of referred individuals not showing up for PFF intake and assessment; delays in start-up because of the time that it took to secure federal waivers; and (at several sites) funding uncertainties that resulted in a halt in recruitment efforts.

CHAPTER 4: PFF PROGRAM SERVICES

The PFF projects assisted participants in a range of areas, including employment, parenting and fatherhood, and child support, with some projects emphasizing certain topics more strongly than others. There were some similarities across the sites in the way they provided services; the core activities were typically structured around group workshops or other group sessions. Sites also varied widely on content, duration, and intensity of services provided. Some projects were more comprehensive than others, offering specialized assistance in a number of areas, and others provided a more limited set of services.

Using project reports, interviews with program staff, program observations, focus group discussions with participants, and MIS data for those projects with adequate data systems, we describe the main types of services PFF projects offered. Similarities and differences in the types of services offered across projects are highlighted, focusing especially on strategies adopted to meet special challenges and needs of young fathers and their children. An overview of the services provided in each of the 13 projects is provided in appendix B.

Range of PFF Services

The PFF demonstrations were designed to provide a range of services and assistance that young fathers might need to be successful as parents and workers and to meet their child support responsibilities. There was variation in intensity and the specific details of the activities, including whether each activity was offered on site by PFF staff, elsewhere in the agency, or through another program in the community (through a referral or a subcontract), and whether PFF paid for the service or not. In all the sites, the projects offered the following types of services:

- Employment services, including education or job training
- Parenting skills training
- Child support-related services, including assistance with paternity establishment and child support order modification
- Information and peer discussions on specific topics such as manhood, healthy lifestyles, sexuality, HIV prevention and reducing sexual risks, co-parenting, relationship skills, parental skills, domestic violence, and anger management
- Substance abuse treatment, mental health services, and partner abuse services
- Support services, including housing assistance, transportation assistance, child care assistance, and work-related expenses (e.g., clothes, tools)
- Mediation services
- Legal assistance and services for child support, custody, visitation, or other issues

As part of its technical assistance activities, NPCL had previously developed an extensive fatherhood curriculum, which they expanded specifically for PFF. The NPCL curriculum was made available (in a thick notebook) to all PFF sites. NPCL also provided training on the curriculum at workshops during PFF conferences and made individualized training and technical assistance on the curriculum available to PFF projects. Projects used the NPCL curriculum to

varying degrees. Several projects used it as the core for their fatherhood/peer support curriculum, sometimes supplemented with other material. Most projects developed their own curriculum from a variety of sources (including NPCL materials). The NPCL curriculum consisted of five modules—personal development, life skills, responsible fatherhood, relationships, and health and sexuality—and 25 topical sessions (box 4.1).¹¹

Box 4.1.
NPCL Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum

Module 1: Personal Development

- Introduction to fatherhood development
- Values
- Manhood
- Stereotypes and manhood
- Becoming self-sufficient

Module 2: Life Skills

- Communication
- Decision-making
- Dealing with stress
- Coping with discrimination

Module 3: Responsible Fatherhood

- Fatherhood today
- Understanding the child support system
- Understanding children’s needs
- A father’s influence on his children
- Coping as a single father
- Building your child’s self-esteem
- Helping children learn

Module 4: Relationships

- What do you want?
- Conflict resolution/anger management
- Getting help from your support network
- Male–female relationships

Module 5: Health and Sexuality

- Men’s health
 - Substance abuse
 - Sexuality
 - Reducing sexual risks
 - Putting it all together
-

The PFF projects in Minneapolis, Boston, and Indianapolis were among the most comprehensive in the range of services and activities offered on site. For example, the Indianapolis project included a four-week fatherhood development workshop that met five hours a day, five days a week; an on-site GED course; a co-parenting class; and an on-site child support staff person (outstationed three to four days a week at the site’s office) to work individually with PFF participants. Box 4.2 provides an overview of the wide range services available at the Minneapolis FATHER project.

¹¹ See Wilson and Johnson (1995).

Box 4.2.
Minneapolis PFF Program Provided Comprehensive Services

Most services were available on site at the FATHER project office, provided by PFF staff, staff paid by other sources (e.g., an attorney), or staff from partnering agencies (e.g., two designated child support enforcement agency case workers assigned full-time to the PFF site). The FATHER project was the only occupant in a small building in a residential and commercial neighborhood. Key program components included the following:

- *Three-day program orientation.* Staff made presentations describing the services available and led discussions about male responsibility and empowerment.
- *Employment services.* The Urban League was under contract to provide employment services to participants. A two-week employment preparation workshop covered job applications, resumes, grooming, and interviewing. Counselors worked one-on-one with participants to help them locate job leads.
- *Peer support sessions.* Weekly sessions (usually at night) covered a range of issues. Project staff and consultants led the sessions.
- *Parenting.* Weekly separate support groups were dedicated to parenting issues. The sessions were operated by a nonprofit organization with experience in parenting issues. Monthly father and child activities were also sponsored.
- *Child support.* Two CSE staff were located on site full-time for four days a week. One focused on paternity and child support order establishment, the other on issues for participants with orders. There were some flexible CSE policies for PFF, including suspending or reducing orders for PFF participants, halting drivers' license revocations and tax intercepts while participating in PFF, and delaying child support orders when participants became employed (required to pay 50 percent after one month and 100 percent after 90 days).
- *GED program.* There was an on-site GED instructor several hours each week (a retired school teacher) and a computer lab.
- *Legal services.* There was an on-site staff attorney (not funded by PFF). She provided participants with legal assistance on paternity, custody and visitation, child support issues, criminal expungement, and child protection.
- *Social services.* A social worker came on-site once a week to address mental health and mediation issues.
- *Coordination.* Key staff met twice a month to discuss individual cases.

Most PFF projects added a young fathers/PFF component into an organization that provided other services, some or all of which were available to PFF participants. For example, the New York PFF project operated within the large STRIVE organization. For many years before receiving PFF funding, STRIVE had operated several workforce development programs, including a four-week job search and job readiness workshop. PFF participants could engage in various activities at STRIVE in addition to the PFF-specific services built around the NPCL fatherhood curriculum. As another example, in the Los Angeles Role of Men project, PFF services were offered as a reward to eligible fathers who successfully completed another program the organization offered.

Workshops and Peer Support Groups

Centerpieces of the PFF projects were structured group sessions on responsible fatherhood and parenting and peer support. The structured workshops provided instruction in selected areas with an established curriculum. The peer support sessions were intended to encourage peer interaction in selected areas to reinforce the material covered in the workshops and provide support to individuals as they proceeded with their own plans for employment and interaction with their children. Peer support sessions were an important and popular component of past fatherhood initiatives, particularly in the Parents' Fair Share project (Knox and Redcross 2000).

Responsible fatherhood workshops. As shown in exhibit 4.1, all the PFF projects operated a workshop for participants that included instructional topics such as fatherhood, parenting, job readiness and job search, child support, health and sexuality, anger management, domestic conflict resolution, child development, drugs and alcohol issues, and life skills. Some projects designed these workshops around curricula they had developed on their own, with some material or exercises coming from the NPCL curriculum; other PFF projects used the NPCL curriculum as the basis for these workshops, though they generally supplemented the NPCL curriculum with their own materials and did not cover all the sessions or exercises from the voluminous NPCL curriculum.

As a result of these different curricula, sites varied extensively in what the workshops covered and emphasized. No two projects offered the same workshop curriculum, and often there was variation within sites from one workshop session to the next, depending on the instructor and the participants' needs. For example, some workshops (Minneapolis, West Chester, Indianapolis) focused on employment issues (see discussion below), some (Denver and Los Angeles Role of Men) emphasized parenting, and others covered a range of topics more broadly.

Some projects closely followed a guidebook or curriculum manual and operated highly structured workshops with regularly scheduled topics and sessions. For example, Boston's Family Services of Greater Boston divided its workshop into five main modules that closely followed the NPCL curriculum shown in box 4.1. Similarly, the Los Angeles Role of Men workshop consisted of four basic components: parent training, personal legal issues, educational issues, and employment and vocational training. Other projects such as Boston Healthy Start, New York, and Racine varied the curriculum regularly, often adapting it to the needs and interests of the participants.

As shown in exhibit 4.1, the PFF projects also varied greatly in their intensity and workshop schedules. Some workshops were relatively intensive, meeting for several days a week for several weeks. For example, the Indianapolis and Denver projects met daily

Exhibit 4.1.
Employment, Peer Support, and Parenting Services in the PFF Projects

Program activity	Baltimore, MD Men’s Services Program	Baltimore, MD Young Fathers/ Responsible Fathers	Boston, MA Father Friendly Initiative at Healthy Start	Boston, MA Family Services of Greater Boston	Denver, CO The Young Fathers Program	Indianapolis, IN Father Resource Program
Responsible fatherhood/parenting workshop	Weekly 90-minute workshops	Met 3 times a week (2 hours per session) over a 6-month period	Weekly 2-hour workshop lasting 16 weeks	Two 2-hour sessions a week (participants attend only one session a week) for 13 weeks	Workshop lasting 4 weeks—4 hours a day, 4 days a week. Project also operated semester-long fatherhood program at several public high schools	Workshop lasting 4 weeks—5 hours a day; 5 days a week
Employment services	Referred to STRIVE for a four-week job search workshop. Received one-on-one assistance with job search from case manager	Two-hour weekly job readiness/search workshops; Urban League staff provided all employment services, including job search help	Referrals to one-stop centers for job search assistance and referrals	Referrals to one-stop centers for job search assistance and referrals	Primary topic in workshop	Final week of workshop focuses on job readiness and job search
Peer support services	Weekly sessions lasting 90 minutes	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Monthly 2-hour meetings
Education and training	Referrals made as needed	Referrals to local community college for GED classes	Referrals made as needed	Referrals to GED programs and other training providers	On-site computers for use in preparing for GED test. Referrals to GED and training programs	On-site GED program met daily for 2 hours before workshop
Parenting services	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop. Some father/child events	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Major focus of workshop	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop. Co-parenting workshop (both parents attend) offered once a week for 6 weeks (2-hour classes)

Exhibit 4.1.
Employment, Peer Support, and Parenting Services in the PFF Projects

Program activity	Los Angeles, CA Bienvenidos	Los Angeles, CA Role of Men	Los Angeles, CA Truevine	Minneapolis, MN FATHER Project	New York, NY Fathers Strive for Family	Racine, WI Fatherhood Project	West Chester, PA Family Matters
Responsible fatherhood/parenting workshop	Weekly workshop for 4 months—2 hours a week.	Eight-week session meeting 2–3 times a week for 2 hours per session (20 sessions)	Three-week workshop (3 days a week, 3 hours a day)	Two-week workshop (3 days a week) focused on employment issues	Weekly workshop for 8 weeks (2 hours per session)	Workshop meets 1–2 times a week for 3 months	One-week workshop (5 days a week, 4 hours a day) dedicated to job readiness and job search
Employment services	Provided as needed, but most participants were working or could obtain jobs on their own	Job preparation assistance was primary topic in workshop, with graduation ceremony. Referrals to one-stop centers	Job readiness addressed as part of workshop	Contracted with the Urban League to provide employment services. Workshop dedicated to employment issues	Encouraged to attend 4-week STRIVE job readiness course	Job readiness addressed as part of workshop	Workshop dedicated to employment issues. Individual-level job placement assistance provided by project staff after class ends
Peer support services	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Weekly sessions	Weekly sessions	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Bimonthly sessions
Education and training	Referrals made as needed	Part of workshop focused on encouraging education and training. Referrals to GED and training programs	Referrals to job training, primarily to Truevine construction, computer operation, and repair courses	On-site GED program with instructor (10 hours a week)	Referrals made as needed	Goodwill pre-apprenticeship programs; referrals to GED programs and training as needed	Utilized several apprenticeship 4- to 6-week programs (in construction). Stipend provided to bring wage to \$10/hour if needed
Parenting services	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Key topic in workshop curriculum	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop. Option of participating in one-week parenting class provided through public schools	Weekly support group focused on parenting, provided organization with expertise in parenting. Monthly father/child activities	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop	Incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshop. At some points, provided workshop for mothers	Provided 20-hour parenting class (met weekly)

(four days a week in Denver) for a four-week period, and the Indianapolis project had separate peer support sessions as well. The longest workshop component was at the Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers project, where the group met three times a week for six months. However, several of their project workshops were much less intensive, typically meeting weekly or bimonthly over two to four months. The workshops in the Baltimore Men's Services Program, both Boston projects, Los Angeles Bienvenidos, and New York all met weekly for approximately two hours for 8 to 12 weeks, depending on the site.

Peer support sessions. Peer support was a critical aspect of PFF. The peer sessions appealed to many young fathers, and project staff thought they were very effective at handling the day-to-day issues in participants' lives. Whereas the formal staff-directed workshops tended to follow a curriculum and specifically focus on imparting knowledge and skills, the peer support sessions and discussions were helpful in expanding on those issues and providing the fathers an opportunity to discuss their own situations, share experiences, get advice, and think out loud.

The most common peer support approach, used in eight projects, was to integrate peer activities and discussions into the structured responsible fatherhood workshops. Projects using this approach generally scheduled part of the workshop for instruction and reserved the remainder of the time for discussion among participants. The other five projects scheduled separate peer support sessions, but they still complemented the structured workshop sessions. The projects offering stand-alone peer support groups were Indianapolis, Los Angeles Truevine, West Chester, Minneapolis, and the Baltimore Men's Services projects. Regardless of whether peer support groups were incorporated into responsible fatherhood workshops or were held as stand-alone workshops, a PFF staff member (usually a case manager) served as the facilitator to engage all fathers in discussions of topics of intense interest to the men. Often peer group discussions centered on relationship problems with the custodial parent or a new partner, difficulties resolving child support or visitation issues, and problems in the workplace.

In the focus groups conducted as part of this evaluation, PFF participants spoke very highly of the peer support sessions. Participants across all sites consistently spoke of the value they gained from interacting with men in circumstances that were similar to their own. A flavor of the general reaction of participants to the sessions is evident in comments such as "it helped get stuff off your chest," "lots of stress builds up all week, we can fall back on ourselves," "if I don't have an answer, someone will give me advice," and "everyone gives their points of view; we learn from each other." It is also clear that these sessions helped participants with the more intangible issues of emotional well-being and self-esteem. Participants commented that the sessions helped them "become more open-minded," be "more truthful and happy with themselves," be "more positive and able to handle different situations," and "become a better man."

Employment-Related Services

Services to help fathers find and keep jobs were a core element of many, though not all, PFF projects. Staff and participants (in focus groups) stated that, employment was many participants' top priority. Staff and participants thought employment services, such as job readiness instruction, job search assistance, job referral and placement, and job training, were critical to eliciting interest in the project and maintaining participant involvement.

Job readiness and job search services. The PFF projects adopted three basic approaches to integrating job search services into the project:

- ***Workshop dedicated to job search and placement.*** In two sites, the PFF project held a multi-session workshop dedicated exclusively to job search and placement. The West Chester project provided a one-week class entirely on job readiness and job search skills (box 4.3). The FATHER project in Minneapolis had a two-week class, which met three days per week, covering similar issues.
- ***Job search issues integrated into workshops primarily dedicated to other topics, such as parenting.*** Several projects devoted a segment of workshop time to employment issues. For example, the Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers project devoted two hours a week during the six-week workshop to job placement assistance. In Denver and Los Angeles Role of Men, one to two weeks of the multi-week workshops were dedicated to job readiness and job search issues. Similarly, in Indianapolis, about half of each workshop session was devoted to employment issues. In contrast, project staff at Los Angeles Bienvenidos indicated that they devoted relatively little time in workshops to job search and employment-related services because most of their participants came to the project employed or were able to find jobs on their own. Staff in the Boston Healthy Start project indicated that employment was not as high a priority as other issues designed to improve mental and physical health and parenting skills.
- ***Referrals to employment services.*** In several sites, PFF staff referred participants to job search workshops and services operated by other programs but did not provide them directly through PFF. In the Baltimore Men’s Services program and the New York project, staff made referrals to a highly structured and intensive job search workshop operated by STRIVE. The STRIVE workshop lasts four weeks (40 hours a week) and uses a “tough love” approach. Some PFF staff described STRIVE as having a boot camp atmosphere. Other PFF projects, including Boston Healthy Start, Boston’s Family Services of Greater Boston, and the Racine project, referred participants who needed help finding a job to the local one-stop career center.

Box 4.3.
Employment Services in the West Chester PFF Project

The West Chester Family Matters PFF program had a strong emphasis on employment. All participants began the program by attending a one-week job readiness class that covered resumes, job application, mock interviews, teamwork, drugs and the workplace, and employment goals. Participants received \$10 per day plus lunch for attending. After the workshop, many participants received placements in jobs or on-the-job-training positions. Staff developed a number of on-the-job-training positions in fences, steel framing, and general contract work for PFF participants. Lasting four to six weeks, the employer sometimes hired those who completed the training. The program provided a stipend if the on-the-job-training position paid less than \$10 an hour (to bring the wage up to this level). Two job developers operated the job search class, worked closely with participants to help them find jobs, and recruited local employers to hire PFF participants. Program staff drove participants to the workshop and jobs if necessary, as public transportation was limited.

In addition to these workshops and referrals, in some sites, PFF staff provided job search assistance one-on-one. Projects that used this approach included Indianapolis, Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers, Minneapolis, and Denver. As noted, only two PFF projects (Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers and Minneapolis) contracted with an organization—in both cases, the Urban League—to provide employment services to PFF participants. In other sites, PFF staff provided one-on-one job search and employment assistance.

Education and training services. Most PFF projects did not focus on or directly provide education or training services. However, staff in most projects did encourage this option and referred fathers who were interested to appropriate programs.

A few projects provided direct access to GED services for PFF participants. Minneapolis had an on-site GED course that fathers could attend on a drop-in basis and also held SAT practice sessions for those interested in college. In Indianapolis, an on-site GED class met daily for two hours before the core fatherhood workshop, and the GED instructor was also available throughout the day for individual instruction. In Denver, computers were available on site to help participants prepare for the GED.

Some projects developed specific training options for PFF participants. As detailed in box 4.3, the West Chester project developed some on-the-job-training positions for PFF participants. In Racine, project participants could and were encouraged to enroll in the sponsoring agency's (Goodwill Industries) pre-apprenticeship training programs.

Participation rates in employment services. Employment-related services were a primary activity for most PFF projects. Exhibit 4.2 displays data on the percentage of PFF enrollees participating in employment services, training, and parenting activities for four demonstration projects (Indianapolis, Minneapolis, West Chester, and Racine). As discussed in chapter 2, because of problems implementing the PFF MIS, only these four sites had data of sufficient quality to include in the report.¹²

Perhaps reflecting its more comprehensive approach and strong employment focus, the Minneapolis project had the highest level of participation in most of the employment-related services, including job club/job search, job readiness, GED classes, and postsecondary education. Racine and West Chester, with strong on-the-job-training components, had about one-fifth of participants involved in this activity.

¹² We included a PFF project in the MIS data analysis of service receipt using MIS data if it had at least one monthly record of participation for 90 percent of the program participants. Differences across sites may be somewhat misleading because they may reflect site differences in reporting procedures.

Exhibit 4.2.
Enrollee Participation Rates for Employment, Training, and Parenting Activities
for Selected PFF Projects (percent, except where noted)

Activity	Indianapolis	Minneapolis	Racine	West Chester
Job club/job search	22	50	18	26
Job readiness/life skills	25	46	48	23
Job referrals	59	69	23	40
GED preparation	21	32	17	2
Basic skills/pre-GED	6	19	18	4
Job skills training	7	22	18	14
On-the-job training	0	4	20	19
Postsecondary education	15	10	5	0
Total number of PFF participants	109	186	60	93

Focus group participant perspectives on employment services offered by PFF projects. As might be expected, some participants felt that they benefited more from the PFF employment-related services than others. The overall reaction to employment services provided through the PFF project was very positive, but several participants stated that they were able to secure employment without the assistance of the project. However, others clearly found the services useful. As one participant explained, “The project helped me to understand that proper attire was needed for job interviews...you can’t just walk into an interview dressed like you might at home.” Another explained how a PFF staff member “did a lot for me. He took me to a shop and I got top-of-the-line shoes, suit, cologne, a haircut, and everything. He even took me to work to make sure I got there on time.” Another noted that involvement in the project had helped him to realize that “your attitude at work is important...to keep your mouth shut or you’ll lose your job. No work, no eat.”

Others commented on how the project got them interested and involved in education and training, which they were unlikely to have done on their own. According to one focus group participant, “the program helped get you working on your education...you start to want the picture they create for you.” Another explained how the project gave him the “courage and strength” to get a GED. Others commented that the project was able to connect them with training programs they might not have otherwise known about.

Parenting and Relationship Services

Parenting workshops and services. One key goal of PFF was to increase fathers’ involvement in the lives of their children. However, although improving parenting was a key overall goal of the PFF demonstrations, it was not given equal emphasis across the sites. Some programs offered more comprehensive services in this area than others and dedicated more time and resources toward improving parenting skills. For example, two projects developed regular activities exclusively devoted to parenting. The Minneapolis project operated a weekly support group dedicated to parenting issues. A contracted organization with expertise on these issues facilitated the groups. The Indianapolis project provided co-parenting workshops that involved both the PFF participant and the custodial parent (box 4.4). In addition, a substantial segment of the workshops was dedicated to these activities in Los Angeles Role of Men (one week of the eight-week workshop) and Denver (half of the four-week workshop). In the other sites, parenting was

addressed as part of a broader curriculum in their workshops or in peer support groups, typically with one or two sessions to this topic.

Box 4.4.
Co-Parenting Services in the Indianapolis PFF Project

The co-parenting workshop in Indianapolis was designed for couples to improve communication, reduce conflict, and improve parenting skills. Classes lasted six weeks and were held two hours a week in the evening. Four to six couples (participants were required to attend as couples) attended each session. The PFF project paid stipends of \$75 to each person in the couple if they attended four of the six workshops (\$150 per couple) to offset transportation and other costs of attending the workshops. Two paid consultants with graduate degrees in social work, a man and a woman, facilitated each session, which used a co-parenting curriculum. Those successfully completing the workshop attended a recognition ceremony and received a certificate of completion.

During the focus group discussions, participants consistently reported that the range of parenting skills they learned in the workshops were one of the most valuable aspects of the program. One commented, “They teach you how to talk to your children and what kids are thinking and how to react.” Another explained, “Mothers say you just know how to do it [parenting], but you need help and this program helps.” Others cited more specific advice they found useful, such as information on “bottles and food,” “cradle death,” “dangers to the child at home,” and “nutrition and hygiene.” Several commented that their own fathers had not been very involved in their lives, so they did not have good male role models. They reported that involvement in the PFF project had helped them become better fathers and to overcome the fact that they did not have role models on which to base their own skills as fathers.

Although reactions to the parenting services were favorable across all the projects, the co-parenting component in Indianapolis drew particularly positive reviews in the focus group. One Indianapolis participant explained that he had “learned about staying up all night with his child and about patience....I got all my knowledge about parenting from the workshop classes...as parents, we needed to be as one to raise kids...the program helped us in reaching agreement on how to raise kids....The program taught you to be patient with your kid and how to discipline your kid.”

Services addressing the relationship with custodial parent. Strengthening the relationship between the father and custodial parent was an important goal in PFF, but attention to this issue varied across the sites. Even though the demonstration was designed to intervene with participants while the connection with the custodial parent was relatively strong, project staff reported that this relationship was sometimes strained or tenuous, for a range of issues including child support, visitation, and the extent of parental involvement with the children.

For participants who appeared interested and could potentially benefit, project staff could make referrals for mediation services, although participation levels in mediation services were generally low (exhibit 4.4). A few sites dedicated more resources to this issue and directly provided counseling for couples. In the Boston Healthy Start program, clinicians could bring

couples together for counseling. The New York project attempted to contact all custodial parents when appropriate to provide referrals for needed services (such as child care) and provided informal mediation services. In Minneapolis, the on-site social worker could provide mediation services and counseling to couples, although staff reported couples did not use such services extensively. At various times, the Racine project offered a motherhood workshop for those women who were interested. This component ended in Racine when a female caseworker who facilitated the sessions left the agency.

According to focus group participants, the relationship of the PFF participant with his child's mother was a frequently discussed topic in the workshops and peer support sessions. Although many of these relationships were difficult, a few participants reported that PFF had been useful in addressing participants' issues with the custodial parent. Some reported learning to be more respectful of women and better at anger management, which helped in their interactions with the child's other parent. In several instances, participants said the project helped by providing direct mediation services that involved the custodial parent. Although the topic of marriage was sometimes discussed in workshops or peer support sessions, the PFF projects generally did not actively promote marriage for participants. Some PFF staff reported that they stressed the advantages of marriage but not as an appropriate option for everyone.

Child Support–Related Services

The PFF projects sought to bring more young fathers into the child support system to improve the well-being of low-income children and strengthen the connections between fathers and their children. The projects worked to establish paternity, set child support orders, and help increase the ability and willingness of young fathers to make child support payments on a regular basis. This was a relatively large undertaking, as most PFF organizations initially did not have well-established connections with the child support system. In addition, some participants were not aware of the need to be involved with the child support system, whereas others had already developed negative perceptions of the system and were hesitant to become involved.

As discussed in chapter 2, the CSE agency was a partner in all the PFF projects and generally provided some referrals to the project. Beyond this, the role of the CSE agency in providing child support–related services to participants varied across sites. Exhibit 4.3 summarizes some key aspects of the child support agency's role in PFF and the types of child support–related services participants received.

Overall, PFF staff reported that the program was important for opening or expanding dialogue between their own organization and the CSE agency. In many sites, PFF staff and CSE staff felt that this new relationship helped the child support system learn more about and acknowledge the issues facing low-income fathers and change the “deadbeat dad” image. For example, in Denver, state regulations on minimum orders were relaxed while the PFF program was operating, and some credited PFF with playing a role in precipitating this change. In Minneapolis, which had one of the strongest links between PFF and CSE, project administrators explained that PFF resulted in a “culture change” at the CSE office, infusing a much stronger CSE staff understanding of the issues facing low-income fathers. Staff focused less on punitive enforcement, and they learned they could “still get results” in payments.

Despite these gains, PFF generally did not result in systemic change in how child support agencies serve noncustodial parents, particularly at the state level. As noted above, state child support agencies were generally not involved in the planning process for the program and played a larger role during the operational phase when the federal waiver was enacted. This may have limited the state-level institutional and policy changes on child support for low-income, noncustodial fathers that resulted from PFF.

CSE staff designated for PFF. The CSE agencies received some funding to cover PFF-related costs, and, as shown in exhibit 4.3, in all but two projects, the CSE agency used some of these funds for designated staff within the CSE agency to work with PFF staff and participants on child support issues. The designated CSE staff were typically available to provide guidance and support on a range of child support–related issues.

In three sites (Denver, Indianapolis, Minneapolis), one or more CSE staff were colocated on site at the PFF projects, at least part-time. When colocated at the PFF project, CSE staff tended to take the lead role in addressing child support issues with participants. At projects with no on-site CSE staff presence, PFF staff played a critical role in understanding the individuals’ child support situations (usually as part of their case management activities) and connecting participants with the designated staff at the CSE agency as needed.

Regardless of whether CSE staff were colocated at PFF, PFF project staff consistently reported that having a single point of contact within the child support system for PFF staff or participants to contact about a particular child support case or issue was extremely beneficial. CSE-assigned staff were able to provide insightful and nuanced information about the child support system in response to participant or staff questions, offer knowledgeable views on how the participant should deal with particular child support requirements or conditions, and help with “cleaning up” their cases (particularly with arrearages). One staff person described the relationship as “a shortcut through the system” for the father. Another advantage was that participants worked with the same person familiar with their case every time, rather than bringing a new staff person up to speed each time a question or issue arose. In general, CSE staff assisted PFF participants on a range of issues:

- ***Educating participants about CSE policies.*** Across the sites, the most common role of CSE staff was to educate participants about CSE policies and procedures. For example, as shown in exhibit 4.3, in several sites a staff person from CSE made a presentation about the child support enforcement system as part of a PFF workshop or other group activity. Staff uniformly reported that these presentations were very helpful and enlightening for project participants. Many participants said that it was the first time they had had the system explained and the first time they were able to secure knowledgeable responses to questions they had about child support.

Exhibit 4.3.
Child Support–Related Services Provided through PFF Projects

Program service	Baltimore, MD Men’s Services Program	Baltimore, MD Young Fathers/ Responsible Fathers	Boston, MA Father Friendly Initiative at Healthy Start	Boston, MA Family Services of Greater Boston	Denver, CO The Young Fathers Program	Indianapolis, IN Father Resource Program
CSE designated staff	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes—one CSE worker	Yes—one full-time CSE worker, one part-time supervisor, and one part-time attorney
On-site CSE staff	No	No	No	No	CSE worker colocated 2 days a week	CSE worker colocated full-time
Information on CSE presented at workshop	Yes	Yes—presentation made by CSE staff	Yes	Yes	Yes—presentation made by CSE staff	Yes—presentation made by CSE staff
Services for paternity establishment	CSE staff available upon request for advice and information.	PFF provides list of those without paternity to CSE. CSE staff set up paternity establishment test for PFF participants who need it.	Responded to requests from PFF staff for information as needed.	CSE staff available upon request for advice and information.	Participants met with colocated CSE staff to establish paternity, if needed	Participants met with colocated CSE staff to establish paternity, if needed. Free genetic testing
Services for child support order establishment and modification	CSE staff available upon request for advice and information.	At enrollment, PFF staff checked CSE system to see if order was established and set up meeting with CSE staff if needed. If participant became employed, PFF staff contacted CSE to set up order.	Upon request of PFF staff, CSE staff provided information and guidance about support order establishment and modification and administrative review of cases.	CSE staff available upon request for advice and information.	Colocated CSE worker provided modification of child support orders for those with existing orders and/or establish orders as needed.	Colocated CSE staff met with every individual to assess situation. As needed, schedule court dates; assist with pleadings; set appropriate CS order amounts
Flexible CSE policies for participants	No	No	No	No	Deferred current CS obligations; reduced minimum orders; reinstated drivers’ licenses.	No
Other	PFF staff accompanied participants to court and meetings with CSE staff.	PFF staff accompanied participants to court. Requested audit of CSE file to ensure no errors	PFF staff accompanied participants to court and meetings with CSE staff.	PFF staff accompanied participants to court hearings on CSE issues.	PFF staff accompanied participants to court hearings on CSE issues.	No

Exhibit 4.3.
Child Support–Related Services Provided through PFF Projects

Program service	Los Angeles, CA Bienvenidos	Los Angeles, CA Role of Men	Los Angeles, CA Truevine	Minneapolis, MN FATHER Project	New York, NY Fathers Strive for Family	Racine, WI Fatherhood Project	West Chester, PA Family Matters
CSE designated staff	CSE staff served all three LA PFF projects (all part-time): 1 attorney, 3 CSE workers	CSE staff served all three LA PFF projects (all part-time): 1 attorney, 3 CSE workers	CSE staff served all three LA PFF projects (all part-time): 1 attorney, 3 CSE workers	Yes—two CSE workers	Yes	Yes—one CSE worker	Yes—one CSE worker
On-site CSE staff	No	No	No	Two CSE staff on site a total of four days a week	No	No	No
Information on CSE presented at workshop	Yes—provided by CSE staff	Yes—provided by CSE staff	Yes—provided by CSE staff	Yes—provided at orientation by CSE staff	Yes—provided by CSE at job readiness class	Yes—provided by CSE staff	Yes—provided by CSE staff.
Services for paternity establishment	CSE staff assisted with establishing paternity as needed	CSE staff assisted with establishing paternity as needed.	CSE staff assisted in establishing paternity as needed. Free genetic testing	One CSE staff responsible for working with NCP immediately on establishing paternity. Covered birthing costs and genetic testing. On-site attorney for legal issues	PFF staff worked to establish paternity within 72 hours (an eligibility requirement). CSE staff available upon request for advice and information	CSE staff available upon request for advice and information	CSE staff available upon request for advice and information
Services for child support order establishment and modification	CSE staff assisted with modifying CS orders, preparing to go to court, addressing arrearages	CSE staff assisted with establishing and modifying orders, reinstating licenses, responding to CS summons	CSE staff assisted with establishing or modifying orders. Assistance with court appearances and reinstating driver’s license	Suspended or reduced order if unemployed at enrollment; orders set when employment starts. On-site attorney for child support–related legal issues	CS staff available upon request for advice and information	CSE staff available upon request for advice and information	CSE staff available upon request for advice and information

Exhibit 4.3.
Child Support–Related Services Provided through PFF Projects

Program service	Los Angeles, CA Bienvenidos	Los Angeles, CA Role of Men	Los Angeles, CA Truevine	Minneapolis, MN FATHER Project	New York, NY Fathers Strive for Family	Racine, WI Fatherhood Project	West Chester, PA Family Matters
Flexible CSE policies for participants	No	No	No	Suspended or reduced order if unemployed. If became employed, provided a delay of child support orders (50% after one month, 100% after 90 days). Stopped driver’s license revocation and tax intercept while participating	No	PFF participants with arrears or who owe child support could not be arrested while in the program	No
Other	PFF staff helped participants prepare for and accompanied them to court	PFF staff helped participants prepare for and accompanied them to court	PFF staff helped participants prepare for and accompanied them to court	For part of the demonstration, had an arrears forgiveness program		PFF staff accompanied participants to court and meetings with CSE staff as needed	

Part of the rationale behind involving CSE staff in the PFF initiatives was to help fathers better understand the system, reducing the adversarial nature of the relationship with the father and thereby increasing the prospects for fathers to actively engage with the system and regularly pay their child support. Staff reported that in some instances they were able to better engage fathers they served by promoting a more “father-friendly” face for the child support system. During workshops with fathers, CSE officials also encouraged young fathers not to delay becoming involved with the CSE system because the system would eventually catch up with them, and in the mean time, they would likely accrue arrearages, which they would have to pay off in the future. They emphasized that getting involved in the CSE system early—with increased understanding of the system and ongoing assistance of PFF and CSE staff—was preferable to letting things go and eventually having the system catch up with the father.

- *Paternal establishment.* As the eligibility criteria were relaxed over time, the projects enrolled some participants who had already established paternity. In most study sites, paternity establishment levels had already been rising for the entire population, meaning fewer fathers were in need of those services.¹³ For example, in Racine, more than 98 percent of all children born in 2004 reportedly had paternity established at the time of birth. In several sites, PFF or CSE staff were available as needed to assist participants with paternity establishment. PFF staff discussed paternity establishment with participants during the initial intake and assessment process and, to the extent possible, sought to convince young fathers to immediately establish paternity (if they had not already done so). In all sites, the CSE agency was available to assist with the process of paternity establishment if PFF staff or fathers requested such assistance.

Some young fathers were reluctant, at least initially, to undergo paternity establishment testing for fear of becoming engaged with the CSE system and being required to make child support payments. PFF and CSE project staff, through one-on-one discussions, peer support group discussions, and the curriculum presented at responsible fatherhood workshops, were able to promote better understanding of the paternity establishment process and child support system and succeeded in getting fathers to submit to paternity testing. In PFF sites such as Denver, Indianapolis, and Minneapolis, CSE program staff played a proactive role and systematically addressed the issue of paternity establishment by meeting with most participants one-on-one to discuss their situation and appropriate steps for establishing paternity. A few projects emphasized the importance of genetic testing (Indianapolis, Los Angeles Truevine, and Minneapolis) and covered the cost of this service. As a result of genetic testing for paternity establishment, some PFF participants (particularly in the Indianapolis project) discovered they were not the biological father of the children in question.

- *Establishing and modifying child support orders.* Another important role of CSE staff was to work with participants on a range of issues about child support orders, including establishing orders, modifying orders to reflect current income, and understanding arrearages. As with paternity establishment, in some sites CSE staff were proactive in assisting participants on these matters, whereas in others, the CSE staff were available

¹³ Except perhaps in New York, because the PFF policy was to serve only men without paternity established.

more on an as-needed basis. For example, the Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers project, which was operated by the same local agency as the child support system, could access participants' child support records immediately and assess what type of assistance would be needed. Projects with colocated CSE staff (Denver, Indianapolis, and Minneapolis) also played a more proactive role in this area. In the other projects, PFF staff were involved in issues of child support orders and typically contacted or ensured that the participant contacted CSE when they became employed so an order could be established or modified. PFF staff also accompanied individuals to court hearings on child support issues.

- *Child custody and visitation.* The PFF projects varied in how they addressed issues involving child custody and visitation. Projects with on-site legal staff or well-established relationships with organizations providing free or low-cost legal services addressed custody and visitation fairly systematically, particularly in Indianapolis and Minneapolis. In the Minneapolis project, an on-site attorney helped participants negotiate custody issues before court appearances and in the courts.

Flexible CSE policies for PFF participants. Most states with PFF projects provided additional information on child support to participants and afforded easier access to CSE staff, but they did not make substantive changes in their CSE policies specifically for PFF participants. There were, however, two exceptions—Minneapolis and Denver. CSE flexibility for PFF participants was particularly evident in Minneapolis, where CSE suspended or reduced child support orders at enrollment (for those who had orders); stopped driver's license revocation and tax intercept while men participated; and temporarily adjusted child support orders when participants became employed, requiring them to pay 50 percent after one month and 100 percent after 90 days. The CSE agency in Minneapolis also offered an arrearage forgiveness program, which ended midway through the PFF program and had relatively few participants. Denver also provided special treatment for PFF participants, including deferring current orders (although arrearages would accumulate), allowing minimum orders as low as \$1, and reinstating driver's licenses revoked for failure to pay child support.

In Racine, evolving state and county CSE policies on noncustodial fathers affected PFF. The CSE program was aggressive in its pursuit of fathers with past-due payments, and the state also had a special program for noncustodial fathers similar to PFF that targeted fathers of all ages (Wisconsin's Children First program). The county had policies requiring some unemployed fathers to participate in an approved program such as PFF or Goodwill's Children UPFRONT or risk jail time. There were also policies for modifying or reducing orders and adjusting arrearages, especially while fathers were unemployed and participating in an approved program. These CSE policies applied to PFF participants as well as fathers in Children First. In other PFF sites, no special CSE policy changes were made beyond having designated CSE workers for PFF staff and participants to contact for information and help with resolving child support issues or problems as they arose.

Data were not available consistently from the PFF projects' MIS systems on the number of persons who received assistance with child support issues. Among the sites, Indianapolis and Minneapolis staff indicated that the on-site CSE staff aided many participants. The higher level

of child support assistance in Minneapolis is also likely explained by having an on-site attorney who provided direct assistance in these areas (see next section).

Focus group participants' views about child support services provided by PFF projects.

Based on discussion in the focus groups, participant reaction to the child support services varied, in part because there were differences in the intensity of services provided and in the extent to which participants needed assistance with different child support issues. Overall, across most projects, participants consistently felt that they learned much more about the child support system through their involvement in PFF. Many explained that the project had helped them better understand the child support system and addressed some of the difficulties they had experienced.

Participants in some sites were especially positive about specific child support–related services they received through PFF. A few participants stated that they had their orders dramatically reduced because of their participation in the project. Others had their licenses reinstated, which greatly improved their employment prospects. Some indicated they received help with filing necessary court papers and that project staff went with them to court. A few stated that the project helped them gain or improve visitation rights to their children or obtain custody, a development that would not have occurred without this assistance. These comments were more common in sites like Minneapolis and Indianapolis, which had on-site child support staff (box 4.5).

Box 4.5.

Focus Group Comments Concerning Help with Child Support Issues

Minneapolis. A focus group participant at the Minneapolis PFF project observed, “For three years, I never talked to a child support caseworker—I was leaving messages. Here, I talk face-to-face, I don’t have to deal with people downtown. It’s very comfortable here—they welcome you. They said they’re here to help, that’s what they did. And I’m trying to get custody. My license got suspended, but they are taking care of it.”

Indianapolis. Several focus group participants noted the project helped change the dynamic with the custodial parent on child support, noting that the availability of the child support counselor at the PFF project created more of a level playing field for the noncustodial parent with respect to negotiating child support orders and visitation. For example, one focus group participant observed, “this program gave information about the child support system...there is someone here to explain state guidelines...The program helped me to modify my order...The staff explained how I could get extra visits (with my child)...and I was able to lower my child support order.”

Though participants were generally positive about the PFF child support services, many remained bitter about the child support system. Some focus group participants felt the system was skewed in favor of the custodial parent, with orders set too high and limited access and visitation to their children allowed. In spite of PFF, some participants still found that CSE staff and policies were unresponsive to their needs and usually seemed to side with the custodial parent. Because of the perceived unfairness, some participants questioned whether there was any benefit in engaging with the child support system as PFF encouraged them to do. Overall,

although some participants felt the PFF project helped level the playing field for their interactions with CSE, this feeling was far from universal.

Case Management Services

The term *case management* refers to how participants were individually supervised, directed, or counseled by the PFF project staff. A PFF case manager was typically responsible for assessing and monitoring the participant, including meeting with participants at enrollment to conduct an assessment, arranging for them to participate in PFF project activities, making referrals to a range of services provided by other agencies, and monitoring participation and progress. In most sites, case managers had weekly contact with participants, particularly during the period when the individual was involved in workshops. However, contact often depended on the level of engagement by the participant.

The PFF projects used two basic approaches for providing case management services. Several PFF projects provided all case management services through a single staff person. In these projects, one staff person was responsible for intake and assessment, the provision of job search services, and all follow-up and monitoring activities. This approach offered the advantage of having all the service needs of the participant addressed through a single point of contact. Other projects used a team approach with multiple staff, each of whom had responsibility and expertise in different areas. For example, responsibilities were sometimes divided between a staff member who focused on employment and another who focused on personal or family issues.

Because case managers were responsible for connecting participants to services and determining the appropriate set of services for each individual, developing a strong relationship between program staff and participants was critical. Many (but not all) case managers were men, some of whom had shared characteristics or backgrounds with the participants such as being a minority, noncustodial father or growing up in a disadvantaged neighborhood. Staff reported that these shared experiences helped to establish a bond with the participants. Although there was some turnover among staff, case managers were generally very committed and supportive of the initiative, and some stayed for the duration of the program. Given the unique needs and circumstances of this population, several programs found that it was important to provide adequate training to staff on techniques for best providing services to this population.

Based on the focus group discussions, participants highly valued the case management services provided by project staff, with many commenting on the staff accessibility and ability to assist with a range of issues. One participant commented, “Staff treats you like family...they make you feel comfortable...they make you feel at home...these guys listen and they don’t scold.” The focus group discussions indicated that many participants established close, personal relationships with their case managers and viewed this as an important aspect of services they received.

Other Support Services

As shown in exhibit 4.4, PFF projects also provided a range of other support services (either directly or through arrangements with other service providers) tailored to meet the individual

needs of PFF participants, including transportation assistance, housing assistance, legal services, and substance abuse and mental health counseling or treatment.

A few projects employed specialized staff that could assist participants with certain issues. For example, in the Boston Healthy Start program, participants met with one of two licensed social worker clinicians who determined whether individuals were ready for the group workshop, particularly on mental health and substance abuse issues. These same clinicians also provided ongoing counseling for participants in need of services, typically in one-hour weekly sessions held individually with participants. Minneapolis had an on-site social worker one day a week to address mental health issues.

Some PFF projects had strong links to specialized programs, particularly in the area of mental health and substance abuse that operated within their own agencies. For example, Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers, which the city’s social services agency operated, made direct referrals to a substance abuse recovery program in the same building. Boston Healthy Start, operated within the city’s health department, had strong links to mental health and medical services provided by the same department.

Transportation was among the most common support services provided (exhibit 4.4). Most projects provided bus tokens (or reimbursement for mileage expense) for participants to attend workshops and other project services. Other PFF projects went further. For example, West Chester, which operated in an area with limited public transportation, provided van service to both the workshop and jobs if needed. The Baltimore Men’s Services Program provided two-week bus passes for individuals who found a job, and passes were available monthly as long as participants were working. The Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers project provided a special van service to several participants who found jobs at a distribution facility more than an hour away from the project office.

Exhibit 4.4.
Enrollee Participation Rates in Various Support Services for Selected PFF Projects
(percent, except where noted)

Activity	Indianapolis	Minneapolis	Racine	West Chester
Substance abuse assistance	2	9	3	2
Mental health assistance	2	9	7	2
Partner abuse counseling	1	1	3	0
Housing assistance	22	17	15	7
Transportation assistance	14	52	38	23
Child care assistance	4	3	8	7
Clothing/work equipment	0	15	8	2
Legal assistance	8	20	7	5
Mediation	3	3	7	1
Total number of PFF participants	109	186	60	93

As also shown in exhibit 4.4, housing assistance was another important service need of PFF participants, reflecting the unstable living arrangements and lives of PFF participants. PFF projects also provided work clothing and equipment for those in need and could also assist with child care as needed, although participants used these services relatively infrequently.

For the most part, the PFF projects did not provide direct legal services. The projects generally made referrals for legal services, sometimes to a reduced-fee attorney, for participants who requested or appeared to need legal services. As shown in box 4.6, several projects were exceptions and did provide direct legal services for PFF participants.

Box 4.6.
Examples of Direct Legal Services Offered by PFF Projects

Minneapolis. This project offered comprehensive legal services for PFF participants through an on-site attorney, and as shown in exhibit 4.2, almost 20 percent of participants took advantage of this service. This attorney position was not funded by PFF, but through a foundation grant. The attorney's services were unique among the PFF sites and included assistance with voluntary and adjudicated paternity, assistance with filing for visitation, representation on custody cases, assistance with criminal expungement, assistance with child support orders, representation in court proceedings, and, at times, child protection services. Project staff reported custody issues as the most complex and time-consuming to work on.

Los Angeles Role of Men. This project dedicated one week of the four-week workshop to teaching participants their legal rights and responsibilities as well as problem-solving strategies. An attorney provided information on a range of legal issues, including paternity, child support, visitation, ways to respond to a summons, and methods to file certain forms.

Based on the focus group discussions we conducted for this study, some participants felt they needed legal services to address the range of issues in their lives. Particularly in the focus group in Denver, the lack of legal representation was a major topic of discussion. In this group, participants felt at a disadvantage to custodial parents because the custodial parent often had state-appointed legal representation in court hearings, but the young fathers did not receive representation and they could not afford it on their own.

Summary

PFF projects devised a fairly broad and varied set of services to help young fathers meet important goals under the demonstration effort. The key goals that projects sought to promote were to (1) facilitate paternity establishment and long-term engagement of young fathers in the child support system, (2) assist young fathers in finding employment so they could better meet their child support responsibilities, (3) where appropriate, help young fathers engage with their children and become a more caring and effective parent, and (4) reduce conflict with the custodial parent.

Although PFF services to participants varied significantly across sites, all the PFF projects featured a responsible fatherhood workshop, generally based at least in part on the NPCL curriculum. All projects also incorporated peer support activities and case management as the core services. Some projects also included strong employment and parenting components developed specifically for PFF participants. The projects varied in their intensity and the time commitment expected of participants. Some scheduled a weekly meeting over two to four months. Others developed more intensive components, meeting for several hours a day, albeit

over a shorter period. Some PFF projects had separate activities for employment, parenting, and peer support, whereas others had one weekly scheduled activity that covered a range of issues that might differ from week to week.

To better engage fathers with the child support system, all PFF projects developed and maintained links with the child support system, although the nature of this relationship also varied. In most sites, the linked CSE agency designated a CSE staff person whom PFF participants and staff could contact directly for information and to resolve child support problems and issues. CSE staff also played an important role in helping participants learn more about the child support system through involvement in the PFF workshops. In sites with CSE staff colocated at the PFF project, staff from both agencies reported this arrangement as particularly effective in addressing participants' child support needs.

Very few states established more flexible CSE policies for project participants, and PFF generally did not result in systemic change in how child support agencies serve noncustodial parents, particularly at the state level. State child support agencies were generally not involved in the planning process but became more involved during the operational phase when the federal waiver was enacted. This lack of involvement may have limited the institutional and policy changes on child support for low-income, noncustodial fathers that resulted from PFF. Nevertheless, CSE staff in every site worked to help PFF participants understand and use what flexibility existed within the current system (e.g., in the schedule for repayment of arrearages). Overall, administrators and staff from CSE and PFF indicated that the PFF program was important in opening or expanding dialogue between the two organizations and helping to begin to engage some young fathers with the child support enforcement system.

Across the sites, case managers were responsible for connecting participants to services and determining the appropriate set of services for each individual. Many (but not all) case managers were men, some of whom had common characteristics or backgrounds with the participants such as being a minority, noncustodial father or starting out in a disadvantaged neighborhood. Staff reported that these shared experiences helped to establish a bond with the participants. Given the unique needs and circumstances of this population, several programs found that it was important to provide adequate training to staff on techniques for best providing services to this population.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND LESSONS

The experiences of the PFF projects provide insights into how to develop, structure, and operate programs for low-income fathers. This chapter discusses some key challenges PFF projects faced. It focuses first on issues associated with launching the initiative and then discusses ongoing implementation challenges. The chapter concludes with lessons that policymakers and program administrators might wish to consider as they develop new initiatives responding to the employment, parenting, child support, and other needs of young, disadvantaged fathers.

Start-Up Issues

The early experiences of PFF were important because they helped shape the demonstrations and contributed over the long term to the relative success of each project. These early experiences can help other organizations contemplating replication of responsible fatherhood initiatives anticipate some challenges that might arise in launching similar programs.

While several challenges were common to all PFF sites, each project faced a different blend of issues from the planning stage to full-scale implementation. Some projects encountered many more problems than others, and some weathered the challenges better than others. In several sites, start-up was relatively easy. This was, in part, because the host organizations could build on similar responsible fatherhood programs they had operated in the past, and staff were already in place to begin recruiting and serving young fathers and had some expertise in serving this population. For these projects—Baltimore’s Men’s Services Program and Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers, Boston Healthy Start, Indianapolis, and Los Angeles’ Bienvenidos and Role of Men—PFF represented an additional funding stream to supplement other resources that were already used for similar purposes. Other sites, such as Los Angeles Truevine, Family Services of Greater Boston, and Minneapolis, had to create the foundations for their entire programs. They secured PFF grant funds first, then hired staff, designed interventions for young fathers, developed a new curriculum or adopted one from another source, developed recruitment strategies, and took all the necessary steps to begin operations.

This section discusses three issues that affected start-up in all PFF sites: (1) overly optimistic assumptions about when states would complete and receive their federal waivers, which in turn delayed receipt of federal funding needed before projects could begin enrolling PFF participants; (2) tightly targeted eligibility criteria that narrowed the pool of young fathers who could be enrolled; and (3) several relatively recent “father-friendly” approaches in child support agencies that PFF also advanced, which ironically diminished some enthusiasm for PFF among CSE agencies.

The federal waiver process took longer than originally anticipated by the local PFF project administrators, which created a gap between the planning grant phase and full-scale PFF implementation. Administrators in virtually all the demonstration sites indicated that the waiver process took much longer than they initially expected, creating uncertainties about when funding would arrive and making it difficult to anticipate when staff could be hired or trained to start the project.

Through the early stages of the waiver process, PFF site administrators were under the impression that it could be completed quickly, perhaps in a matter of months. Some thought the waiver request was close to completion, which heightened others' expectations that approval was imminent. When the federal waivers were approved after slightly more than two years,¹⁴ some administrators reported that their projects had lost much of the momentum that they had gathered during the PFF planning grant phase. This loss of momentum was particularly problematic in some sites that did not already have a responsible fatherhood program or alternative funding sources to support responsible fatherhood workshops and other activities. During the two-year period between waiver submissions and approval, some sites lost staff who had been brought on during the planning grant (with an anticipation that they would stay on to quickly get the PFF project up and running). These sites had to hire and train new staff before they could initiate their PFF-funded projects.

Narrow PFF eligibility criteria hampered efforts of PFF sites to initiate the projects. The recruitment problems encountered by many PFF projects originated from an underlying concept and goal of PFF, reaching young fathers while they still had an opportunity to develop a strong and meaningful relationship with the mothers of their children and the children themselves and before they were significantly involved in the child support system and already accumulating serious arrearages. Theoretically, these concepts made sense to all involved, including the local PFF administrators, state and local child support agency administrators, federal officials, NPCL, the Ford Foundation, and the young fathers (and custodial parents and children) who were the focus of the PFF initiative.

However, targeting PFF on individuals younger than 26 years old who did not have significant involvement with the child support system substantially narrowed the pool of available disadvantaged fathers from which sites could recruit. In addition, those specific young fathers were among the most resistant to join such programs and they tended to be disconnected from potential referral sources, including the child support system and courts. Because these fathers were not (for the most part) yet engaged with the child support system, many did not fully understand the potential financial burden they could face in the future and did not have strong motivation to enroll in the program.

Overall, the narrow targeting of PFF on young fathers with little or no involvement in the child support system was a major impediment to getting most sites up and running with a steady flow of new recruits. Some projects continued to struggle with recruitment throughout the initiative (with only 3 of 13 project sites achieving their initial enrollment goals). Problems and confusion over the targeting and eligibility of fathers for PFF services also persisted over the course of much of the demonstration period.

One implication of the tight eligibility rules and smaller-than-anticipated pool of young and expectant fathers was that some PFF projects had to spend more staff time and resources than expected on establishing and maintaining referral arrangements with other organizations. Some projects also had to mount extensive outreach efforts to interest new recruits and maintain

¹⁴ The waiver grant announcement was posted in December 1998, and the waivers were approved two years after the grants were selected in April 2002.

these outreach efforts throughout the demonstration.¹⁵ Over time, when it became apparent that many projects were struggling with enrollment, the eligibility criteria were gradually relaxed, allowing projects to include young fathers who already were involved with the child support system.

Changes to the child support system overtook PFF and reduced the enthusiasm of potential organizations to partner with PFF. Though the concept of PFF was unique in 1996, by the time the demonstration was fully implemented, other responsible fatherhood programs had started in many communities across the nation. Independent of PFF, the child support enforcement system had begun to absorb the lessons learned from earlier fatherhood initiatives (such as the Parents' Fair Share project and the Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration) and was already incorporating more father-friendly approaches to service delivery at about the same time that PFF was in its developmental stages. For example, the child support system was increasingly aware of the differences between "deadbeat" and "dead broke" fathers, as well as problems faced by low-income fathers on imputing child support orders and accrual of arrearages. Information on strategies for serving low-income, noncustodial fathers was disseminated to states and localities through NPCL's Peer Learning Colleges and a range of other activities. Hence, by the time PFF became operational, some providers viewed it as somewhat less innovative than when it was first conceived.

In addition, the number of young fathers who had not established paternity for their children had decreased throughout the 1990s as a result of the success of in-hospital paternity establishment programs mandated by the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, which required that all states establish a simple procedure for unmarried fathers to voluntarily acknowledge paternity in birthing facilities and other locations. Thus, the pool of young fathers without established paternity for their children and with no involvement with the child support system had diminished in the PFF sites by the time the projects were implemented.

Ongoing Operational Issues

Once the PFF projects launched, administrators faced a number of challenges providing services and maintaining interest among partnering organizations and among participating fathers.

Enrollment of PFF participants proved difficult throughout the demonstration in most sites. Like many other programs serving noncustodial fathers, identifying participants who met the eligibility requirements was extremely difficult from the start in many sites, and it did not become much easier as the demonstration effort unfolded. The PFF programs were generally able to get the word out in the community about the program and identify a pool of fathers who could potentially benefit from the services, but the strict eligibility requirements made it difficult to identify a significant number of men who could enroll in the program, even though these requirements were relaxed over time. Other factors that plagued projects in their efforts to achieve their enrollment goals included a general lack of awareness and interest in responsible fatherhood services and government-funded programs among eligible men; fear of and lack of

¹⁵ The insufficient number of enrollments at some sites also had other consequences for project administrators. For example, some sites had to adjust their program models and how they delivered services (e.g., substitute one-on-one counseling for workshops). In addition, added expenditures for recruitment and lower numbers of PFF participants also drove up per-participant costs in many sites.

knowledge about becoming engaged with the child support enforcement system; and lack of potential referral sources within the community (particularly agencies that served young men).

Dropout rates were often high. Project managers at several sites estimated that attrition rates were very high, and many participants dropped out before completing core services. Some participants dropped out for positive reasons, such as finding a job or moving to another locality. Others encountered various personal problems that prevented them from attending project activities, such as an arrest, a substance abuse relapse, a desire not to become involved with their children or the children's mother, or a desire to avoid involvement with the child support system. Staff also reported that dropout rates were high in part because many participants were young and immature and often unwilling to commit themselves to attend project activities on a regular basis; were mobile and difficult to track; and were easily distracted by friends and other street life activities. Because participation was typically voluntary, staff had little or no ability to sanction PFF participants for failing to attend program services.

Roles and responsibilities were not always clear among the various agencies and organizations involved in PFF. From the local PFF project perspective, several layers of administration and oversight were involved in the initiative. The local child support program was heavily involved locally. The state child support agency provided funding to the local PFF project and, depending upon the site, also provided some technical assistance and guidance. NPCL and Metis were responsible for providing guidance and technical assistance to all the PFF projects, including helping develop the data system. The Ford Foundation provided funding to the local projects and to NPCL. Finally, DHHS's OCSE was responsible for processing the waiver request and overseeing the demonstration effort, and its Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation was responsible for overseeing the Urban Institute's evaluation. Local administrators reported that they sometimes received mixed signals from the various organizations involved with PFF, which ultimately hampered their initiatives. For example, some local PFF administrators said they received conflicting guidance on the extent to which they could be flexible on eligibility requirements.

Some PFF sites did not fully implement the management information system. Throughout the demonstration, PFF projects struggled with understanding and meeting data reporting requirements and fully implementing their client data tracking systems and collecting useful and valid participant data. Although most sites were fairly successful in tracking basic demographic characteristics of participants served, they experienced substantial difficulties tracking the services participants received, employment outcomes, and child support payments. One lesson from the demonstration is that if site-level data systems are to provide valid and reliable data, there needs to be a strong focus on sufficient, ongoing training of program staff and on the importance of data collection both for evaluation purposes and to support program operations and management. In addition, substantial early and ongoing technical assistance at the site level is needed to ensure that systems are fully and properly implemented.

Uncertainties about PFF funding resulted in a slowdown of recruitment and service delivery for several sites. Administrators at some sites indicated that they had not received all the funding they had anticipated under the demonstration effort or reported significant delays in the receipt of funding. Some also said the uncertainties about receipt of funding affected their ability to meet enrollment goals and maintain their service delivery system. One administrator indicated

that enrolling new fathers into the program was suspended on several occasions because of uncertainties over funding. Programs with sources of funding other than the waiver were not as affected by these funding delays.

Implementation Lessons from the PFF Demonstration

The experiences of developing and operating the PFF projects provide a number of insights into how to structure and implement programs for low-income, noncustodial fathers. Subsequent reports from this evaluation will provide information on participants' employment and child support outcomes, and those analyses will be important for providing a more in-depth understanding the programs' effects. Meanwhile, there are several lessons from the experiences of the PFF sites.

Give careful consideration to the eligibility and targeting criteria in responsible fatherhood and parenting initiatives. Make sure that targeting is not so narrow that projects must struggle to attract sufficient numbers of eligible participants. As discussed earlier, the underlying design of the PFF initiative, and a driving force for the establishment of the program, was a desire to attract and serve young fathers before they accumulated arrearages and while there was still a good chance for the father to forge meaningful relationships with his children and, if possible, the custodial parent. As a result, the eligibility criteria PFF sites used were quite restrictive, targeting fathers or expectant fathers 25 years old or younger, who had one or two children and little if any involvement in the child support system.

Site administrators and staff felt that targeting resources on those most in need was important, but that flexibility was needed to avoid becoming so prescriptive that projects failed to serve many young fathers in real need of services. For example, several administrators remarked that they would recommend increasing the age threshold from 26 to 30 in a program such as PFF. Several administrators also noted that even noncustodial parents with significant previous involvement with the child support system need parenting education and help resolving child support and visitation issues.

Enrolling young men into programs is extremely difficult, but fatherhood programs can appeal to young fathers with various outreach and service strategies. Several PFF projects structured recruitment methods and tailored their curricula to appeal to specific subpopulations of interest. For example, the Baltimore Men's Services Program and the Los Angeles Role of Men targeted black men, and the Los Angeles Bienvenidos targeted Hispanic fathers. Bienvenidos hired a consultant to tailor its curriculum to be culturally relevant to the largely Hispanic and Latino population it served. Other sites did not formally focus recruitment or their curricula on particular ethnic groups, even though they primarily served a single ethnic group (e.g., Truevine, which served a largely black population). The Boston Healthy Start program was interested in serving fathers from all backgrounds, and staff found that they were able to increase their enrollment of Hispanics when they moved their site from a predominantly black neighborhood to a more ethnically diverse area near the public hospital.

The goal of the PFF initiative to make lasting systemic changes in the ways public agencies and community organizations work with low-income families was difficult to attain. The PFF projects were relatively small-scale, local efforts, and their development and

implementation did not require wide-scale change by entire systems or organizations. Because the PFF programs remained relatively small, all the sponsoring organizations had the capacity to operate the program. In addition, although state CSE agencies were the conduit for the resources because of the waiver, many of them were not actively involved in the planning or operational process and generally did not make state-level changes because of PFF. This lack of involvement may have limited the PFF-related state-level institutional and policy changes on noncustodial fathers. This type of demonstration, which primarily focuses on developing individual, local programs, may not be an adequate vehicle for enacting more systemic institutional or policy changes.

Identifying organizations with experience serving this type of population and providing appropriate staff training can enhance program operations. As noted, several PFF sites had experience operating programs for noncustodial fathers before PFF, and these sites were able to implement the program more easily. One advantage these programs had was a staff that had experience and expertise working with noncustodial fathers and that did not require extensive training. When experienced staff are not available, given the unique needs and circumstances of this population, it is important to provide adequate training to staff on techniques for best providing services to this population. It may be necessary to develop these training programs, as this is an area where limited training options may be available.

Providing services designed to help low-income fathers understand the child support system is critical. Though child support agencies were involved in all the PFF projects, the nature of their involvement varied substantially. At a minimum, projects had a designated child support staff member whom case managers or participants could contact to obtain general information about the child support system or information about a specific child support case. PFF staff and participants reported that having a contact person within the child support system was extremely valuable. In some instances, CSE staff made periodic visits to the PFF project to disseminate information or lead workshop sessions. Such involvement helped alleviate participants' fears and concerns about becoming involved with the child support system. The projects with the strongest child support links, such as in Indianapolis and Minneapolis, had one or more CSE staff colocated at the PFF project office. This staff member brought a tangible and easily accessible child support resource to PFF project case managers and participants to directly answer questions about the system and handle tasks such as establishing or modifying child support orders in a timely manner. When child support staff were colocated at the PFF project, child support staff worked with participants directly and proactively to resolve issues that arose.

Assistance with resolving visitation issues and obtaining legal representation can attract and retain some young fathers in fatherhood programs. During focus group sessions, several fathers indicated that they came to and remained engaged with PFF projects because of a desire to resolve child visitation issues. Although concerned about child support payment amounts and growing arrearages, many fathers' paramount concerns focused on how they could gain or increase visitation with their children. Another critical concern of some focus group participants was the difficulty they had obtaining legal representation or affording the costs associated with legal services. One PFF project (Minneapolis) that offered legal assistance on-site found that fathers used these services in a number of areas, including paternity establishment, custody, visitation, and child support issues. Projects that can assist fathers with visitation and other legal issues are likely to find it easier to recruit and retain participants.

Sponsorship by or strong linkages with local public health departments can help with recruitment and access to much needed health services. Some PFF projects operated through public health departments or featured strong connections with local public health departments. These projects, such as the PFF sites in Boston Healthy Start, and Baltimore Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers, were able to recruit young fathers through their close connections to the public health system, which already had well-established referral channels in low-income neighborhoods. After recruitment, PFF case managers were easily able to refer participants to services offered through the public health system, including health, mental health, and dental care as well as substance abuse services.

The PFF demonstration underscored the importance of providing a comprehensive range of services tailored to the individual needs of each participating young father. The informal discussions with participants and interviews with PFF staff indicate that young fathers are a diverse group and have a wide range of unmet needs. The implementation experiences of PFF projects suggest that responsible programs serving young fathers should be structured to provide the following services either directly or through collaborative arrangements with other local service providers:

- Assessment and employability development planning, ongoing case management, and individual counseling
 - Job search, job development, and job placement services, including workshops, job clubs, help identifying job leads, and job placement assistance
 - Job training services, including basic skills and literacy instruction, occupational skills training, on-the-job training, and other types of work experience, such as internships/fellowships
 - Post-placement follow-up and support services, such as additional job placement services, training after placement, support groups, and mentoring
 - Incentives for participation in program services, particularly flexibility in meeting child support obligations in certain circumstances
 - Strong linkages with the child support system, preferably featuring colocated child support personnel to assist program participants with establishing paternity and child support orders, and resolving child support payment and other issues as they arise
 - Other support services provided directly through the project or through referral arrangements with other health and human services organizations, including parenting education; alcohol and other substance abuse assessment and counseling, with referral as appropriate to outpatient or inpatient treatment; child care assistance; transportation assistance; referral for mental health assessment, counseling, and treatment; referral for housing services; and referral to low-cost legal services
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Thus, the experiences from the implementation of the PFF projects underscore the importance of providing a comprehensive range of services to address young fathers' various challenges to becoming more involved emotionally and financially in the lives of their children.

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Appendix A
Demographic Characteristics of PFF Participants