

# Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative:

## Lessons from the First Year of the Evaluation

by

Elaine J. Sorensen

Carolyn T. O'Brien

Ronald B. Mincy



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40 North Pearl Street  
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**The Urban Institute  
2100 M Street, NW  
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In June 2006, the New York State Legislature enacted the Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative, which authorizes the implementation of two innovative approaches to help low-income noncustodial parents (nearly all of whom are fathers) to work and pay their child support in full. The first provision of the legislation authorizes funding for pilot programs in five sites to provide intensive employment and other supportive services to low-income noncustodial parents (NY Social Services Law § 335-c). The second provision establishes a state refundable earned income tax credit (EITC) for noncustodial parents with low earnings who pay the full amount of their current child support obligation in a given year and are otherwise eligible for the credit (NY Tax Law § 606 (d-1)). New York is the first state in the country to adopt this two-part strategy to strengthen families. It has since been included in federal legislation introduced by Senator Obama and Senator Bayh in 2007 (S. 1626) and is part of President Obama's agenda for strengthening families.

The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), which has the lead role in administering this initiative, contracted with the Urban Institute to conduct a multiyear process and outcomes evaluation. This is the first of several reports that will be completed by the Urban Institute as part of the evaluation. This report describes the pilot programs and presents lessons from the first year of the evaluation. Given the early nature of this report, much of the information collected for the evaluation is not fully analyzed here. Subsequent reports will present findings from the process evaluation, the Urban Institute's NYDADS database, child support administrative data, and the Urban Institute's survey of pilot participants.

To operate the pilot programs, OTDA contracted with five large, well-established organizations with considerable experience serving low-income adults in general and noncustodial parents in particular. Two of these contracting agencies are the Departments of Social Services (DSS) in Erie and Chautauqua Counties. The pilot programs in these two counties are in Buffalo and Jamestown, New York. Two other contracting agencies are private nonprofit employment service providers in New York City, with service providers in Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. The final contracting agency is a public educational organization in Syracuse, New York.

Because these organizations are well established and have experience serving low-income noncustodial parents, OTDA could enter into only five contracts and still be confident that a relatively large number of noncustodial parents would be served with minimal risk that any one site would fail to meet its goals. Further, even though OTDA did not directly contract with relatively smaller organizations, most of the contracting agencies partnered with smaller organizations. Thus, the innovation that smaller organizations may bring to fatherhood programs is still possible to capture even with larger, more experienced contracting agencies.

As of June 2008, the pilots enrolled 2,118 people, far exceeding the overall enrollment goal of the first contract period. This is a major achievement compared with earlier programmatic efforts to serve unemployed or underemployed noncustodial parents. Recruitment has been a recurring challenge for programs serving low-income noncustodial parents, and these pilot programs successfully addressed this challenge through three distinct strategies. First, receiving court referrals helped some sites meet their enrollment goals. Second, one site is responsible for operating a high-volume one-stop career center and uses this center as a referral source, helping it exceed its enrollment goal. Third, three sites partnered with multiple service providers located in different parts of the community to expand the reach of their programs.

According to data reported by the pilot programs, pilot participants are a disadvantaged population. At program enrollment, 87 percent of the pilot participants are either not employed or working less than 20 hours a week. Sixty percent of the pilot participants have an arrest record, and 79 percent of them have at most a high school education. Eighty percent of the participants are African American or Hispanic. The average age of the participants is 33, and 76 percent of them have never married.

The ultimate aim of the pilot is to increase noncustodial parents' financial and emotional involvement with their children. To reach that aim, all the sites adopted a similar service delivery model, which consists of case management and employment services coupled with other supportive services. Although all sites provide a similar package of services—case management, employment services, parenting services, and child support—related services—the relative emphasis of each component and the specific services provided within each component vary considerably. The employment services vary across the pilot sites, and, in some cases, among the partner organizations associated within each site. In general, most sites provide some job-readiness training, including help with résumé development, interviewing skills, guidance in filling out job applications, and assistance with job leads and referrals. All the sites have access to job developers, either through their own organization or through relationships with workforce development programs in their area, such as a Jobs program or a one-stop career center. Although all the sites provide parenting education in some form, what this education entails varies greatly.

Employment outcomes for participants are preliminary since many of them are still receiving services. With that caveat in mind, as of June 2008, 38 percent of participants who were unemployed at enrollment have been placed in a job. However, this figure is heavily influenced by the job placement rate in Buffalo since this site serves a large share of pilot participants. As of June 2008, the Buffalo programs have placed 18 percent of their unemployed participants in jobs. This lower placement rate probably reflects the higher unemployment rate in Buffalo. (Buffalo's unemployment rate was 7.2 percent in June 2008 versus 6.6 percent in Syracuse, 5.8 percent in Jamestown, and 5.3 percent in New York City.) Among unemployed participants who were placed in jobs, 48 percent of them were still employed 90 days later, and 25 percent were employed 180 days later.

Child support outcomes are also preliminary, based on data for June 2008. That month, 42 percent of noncustodial parents with child support orders payable through the New York child support program paid child support for a total of \$229,036. The median amount paid in June 2008 among those who paid was \$219. Ninety percent of the noncustodial parents who had child support orders payable through the New York child support program owed child support arrears, and the median amount owed was \$4,745.

One outcome that the sites are not collecting monthly is changes in parents' involvement with their children who do not live with them. Because it was unclear that the sites could collect this information monthly, a decision was made to collect this information three months after enrollment. This topic is also included in the Urban Institute's telephone survey of program participants at 3 and 12 months after enrollment. After the pilot phase, if OTDA decides to include an outcome measure regarding parental involvement with their children who live elsewhere, it will need to decide how it wants sites to measure this outcome and how often to collect it.





Policymakers are increasing their attention on low-income noncustodial fathers and the need to improve their economic stability so they can contribute more fully to the financial and emotional needs of their children. Welfare reform has successfully reduced the dependency of custodial families on welfare and substantially increased the employment rates of single mothers, yet the poverty rate among children living with single mothers is still high. These custodial families could benefit from more economic and social support from noncustodial parents (usually fathers).

On June 23, 2006, the New York State Legislature enacted the Strengthening Families through Stronger Fathers Initiative. This legislation authorizes two innovative approaches to help low-income noncustodial parents meet their child support obligations (S. 8470/A. 12044). The first provision of the legislation authorizes funding for pilot programs in five sites to provide intensive employment and other supportive services to low-income noncustodial parents (NY Social Services Law § 335-c). These pilot programs aim to help low-income noncustodial parents contribute more to the economic and social well-being of their children. The second provision establishes a state refundable tax credit for noncustodial parents with low earnings who pay the full amount of their current child support obligation in a given year (NY Tax Law § 606 (d-1)). The goal of this policy is to provide financial assistance for low-income noncustodial parents who are supporting their children in accordance with their current support orders and to encourage others to do the same. This tax credit is part of the state's earned income tax credit (EITC) and is referred to as an enhanced EITC for noncustodial parents. More recently, a third component has been added to the initiative that focuses on related outreach and capacity-building activities. The aim of this new component is to increase public awareness about low-income fathers and improve the capacity of service providers in New York to serve them. The lead agency administering this initiative is the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA).

In July 2007, OTDA contracted with the Urban Institute to conduct a multiyear process and outcomes evaluation of this initiative. This report is the first of several reports that the Urban Institute will prepare. This report describes the pilot programs and presents lessons from the first year of the evaluation. Subsequent evaluation reports will present cross-site findings from the process evaluation, findings from the NYDADS database and child support administrative data, and findings from a telephone survey of program participants.

In fall 2006, five pilot sites were selected to provide employment and other supportive services to noncustodial parents across the state. All these sites are now contracted to operate through September 2009. All pilot sites have the same ultimate aim: to increase noncustodial parents' financial and emotional involvement with their children. All the contracting agencies responsible for operating the pilot programs are relatively large, well-established organizations with considerable experience serving low-income adults

in general and noncustodial parents in particular. In addition, all the service providers have adopted a case management model to serve this population. Thus, the pilot sites have a great deal in common. However, beneath this layer of commonality, many differences distinguish each pilot program.

This report describes some of these differences across the pilot sites. It is organized into 11 sections. The next section discusses the data used in this report. The following section summarizes previous fatherhood programs. The next two sections describe the structure of the pilot programs. Subsequent sections discuss service delivery and the role of the local child support agencies and the Family Courts in the pilot sites. Participant characteristics are presented, followed by initial program outcomes. Final sections discuss program funding and lessons from the first year of the evaluation.

During the first year of the evaluation, the Urban Institute put into place all elements of the pilot site evaluation. First, the evaluation staff developed a web-based management information system for the sites called the NYDADS database. The database is helping pilot staff meet their monthly reporting requirements to OTDA and ensuring that the Urban Institute receives consistent participant-level data across sites for the evaluation. Site visits were conducted to train pilot staff on how to use the database. E-mail and telephone support are also available to help staff use the database. Second, as part of the process study, brief telephone interviews were conducted with key pilot staff in all pilot sites in spring 2007. In addition, site visits were conducted in June–August 2008 that included interviews with pilot staff and key partners and observations of program activities in all pilot sites. Finally, the Urban Institute has contracted with a survey firm to field a telephone survey of program participants. This survey asks pilot participants about their experiences with the fatherhood program, their employment situation, and their relationship with their children and the mother(s) of their children.

Given the early nature of this report, much of the information that we have collected is not fully analyzed here. In this report, we present data from the monthly reports generated by the NYDADS database, but we have not yet conducted further analyses of the pilot participant-level data in the NYDADS database. While this report provides some preliminary impressions from the recently completed site visits, it is not based on a comprehensive analysis of findings from this component of the process evaluation. Results from the telephone survey are also not yet available to discuss here.

Apart from section III of this report, which presents key findings from previous fatherhood programs and is based on a literature review, this report is based on the following sources of information:

1. site proposals and contracts;
2. web searches;
3. monthly narrative reports from the sites;
4. monthly data reports from the NYDADS database;
5. telephone interviews conducted in spring 2007 designed to collect information about the sites and their program operations at that time;
6. telephone conversations and e-mail exchanges with OTDA and pilot staff since the development and implementation of the NYDADS database;
7. site visits conducted in spring 2008 to train pilot staff on the NYDADS database; and
8. site visits and follow-up telephone interviews conducted in summer and fall 2008 to collect information for the process evaluation (preliminary findings only).



Fatherhood programs have a long history and are designed to meet various goals, including preventing teenage pregnancy, increasing equity in the judicial system during custody and visitation proceedings, and promoting marriage. This section focuses on a narrow band of fatherhood programs, referred to as responsible fatherhood programs, that provides lessons for the New York Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative. These programs have focused on providing employment services to increase noncustodial parents' compliance with their child support obligations. Some of these programs also aimed to help noncustodial parents better connect emotionally with their children and improve their relationships with custodial mothers. The 6 multisite responsible fatherhood programs that are reviewed here are The Teen Fathers Collaboration (TFC: 1983–85); The Young Unwed Fathers Project (YUF: 1991–93); Parents Fair Share (PFS: 1994–96); Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) Responsible Fatherhood Programs (RFP: 1998–2000), Welfare-to-Work Grant Programs (WtW: 1998–2000), and the Partners for Fragile Families Demonstration Project (PFF: 2000–2003). Other reviews provide more comprehensive accounts of fatherhood programs and their history (Gavanas 2002; Mincy and Pouncy 2002; Sylvester and Reich 2002).

The earliest and most recent (TFC, YUF, and PFF) programs were initiated by private donors. They tended to involve younger, unmarried, and more disadvantaged fathers with young children and included a focus on paternity establishment. The other three programs (PFS, RFP, and WtW) were government initiated and tended to focus on child support compliance. Thus, divorced, separated, and never-married fathers participated in these programs, and children were of any age. Some of these programs imposed significant restrictions on the types of clients that could be served, which severely hampered recruitment. At least three programs (PFF, PFS, and WtW) had to substantially relax their eligibility criteria to meet their enrollment goals.

PFS is the only program that included a random assignment evaluation. It used a court-ordered model that ordered noncustodial parents who were not in compliance with their child support obligations to participate in employment and training services or face possible incarceration. With this credible threat, the court-ordered model allowed PFS to “smoke out” parents who could meet their child support obligations, leaving the less skilled, less resourceful, and most barrier-ridden, who became the focus of PFS’s services (Miller and Knox 2001).

Across all six multisite programs, recruitment was challenging and depended upon convincing potential clients that programs could help them find jobs, maintain contact with their children, and address problems with child support enforcement (Doolittle et al. 1998; Martinson, Trutko, and Strong 2000; Pearson et al. 2003). Recruitment was somewhat easier in court-ordered programs because of the potential threat of incarceration for the nonpayment of child support. However, even these programs often suffered from recruitment challenges (Doolittle et al 1998; Martinson and Nightingale 2008).

### III. Key Findings from Previous Responsible Fatherhood Programs, continued

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All these programs found that many fathers who participated faced significant barriers to employment. This was first revealed by the first multisite program (TFC), which showed that like the mothers of children born to unwed parents, who were long-term welfare recipients, unmarried fathers tended to be young, poorly educated minorities who were unemployed or underemployed (Sander 1993). More recent programs (PFS, RFP, WtW, and PFF) have noted additional employment barriers, including criminal backgrounds, physical and mental illness, substance abuse problems, and multiple-partner fertility, which can result in multiple child support orders and increased arrears, reducing an individual's incentive to work (Johnson, Levine, and Doolittle 1999; Martinson et al. 2000; Pearson et al. 2003).

The previous programs also have shown that fatherhood initiatives have at best modestly improved employment and earnings of noncustodial fathers (Doolittle et al. 1998; Martinson and Nightingale 2008; Martinson et al. 2007; Miller and Knox 2001; Pearson et al. 2003). In part this reflects employment service providers' poor track record working with disadvantaged men (Bloom et al. 1992; LaLonde 1995). In several programs, it was difficult to fill training slots because providers did not want to serve a group this disadvantaged, which could have affected their performance measures and relationships with employers (Miller and Knox 2001). Many programs, including PFF and WtW, found that the fathers felt tremendous pressure to find employment immediately, in large part to meet their child support obligations, which minimized their interest in longer-term training options (Martinson and Nightingale 2008).

The experiences of responsible fatherhood programs provide several lessons. The court-ordered model is popular among publicly funded responsible fatherhood programs because it tends to reduce recruitment problems, affects compliance immediately, and screens "deadbeat" from "dead broke" dads so services can focus on the latter. Second, providers may need specialized services (e.g., substance abuse, mental health, child-support intermediation, and transitional employment for those with criminal backgrounds) to respond to the severe employment barriers that many clients in responsible fatherhood programs face. Third, responsible fatherhood programs face a tough balancing act. They must often choose between the immediate goals of employment and child support compliance and the longer-term goals of higher earnings and higher child support payments that could be achieved through increased education or job training. Finally, because recruiting fathers is so difficult, even well-conceived restrictions on the types of clients that programs can serve can severely hamper programs' abilities to achieve their recruitment and service goals.

This section briefly describes the contracting agencies OTDA selected for the overall contractual and fiscal management of the pilot sites. It also describes their previous experiences working with noncustodial parents or fatherhood initiatives. Finally, this section discusses some of the benefits and drawbacks of choosing these particular organizations as contracting agencies.

### A. Who Are the Contracting Agencies?

OTDA selected two county departments of Social Services (DSS), one public educational organization, and two nonprofit agencies that specialize in providing employment services to low-income adults as the contracting agencies for the pilot sites. Each agency is described below.

#### *Chautauqua County DSS*

OTDA selected the Chautauqua County Department of Social Services as the contracting agency for the pilot site in Jamestown, New York. This organization, like other DSS agencies throughout the state, administers a wide range of publicly funded social services and cash assistance programs, including the local child support enforcement program. Before being selected as a pilot site, staff at the Chautauqua County DSS worked to raise awareness within its organization and in the community about the circumstances of noncustodial parents. It held fathering summits, conducted trainings for staff, and helped organize community events around Father's Day.

#### *Erie County DSS*

The Erie County Department of Social Services, which also administers a wide range of social services and cash assistance programs, was selected as the contracting agency for the pilot site in Buffalo, New York. Although Erie County DSS was not directly responsible for administering any fatherhood initiatives before this pilot initiative, the agency had other longstanding relationships with OTDA for the provision of services. Erie County DSS developed subcontracts with two local organizations in Buffalo (described below) to provide direct services to noncustodial parents under the OTDA contract, both of which have prior experience serving noncustodial parents.

#### *Syracuse—OCM-BOCES*

OTDA selected the Onondaga-Cortland-Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services (OCM-BOCES) as the contracting agency for a pilot site in Syracuse. OCM-BOCES operates similarly to a school district but provides a wide range of educational, vocational, and employment services (<http://www.ocmboces.org>). OCM-BOCES was the contracting agency for a Welfare-to-Work competitive grant awarded in 1999 for \$3.9 million. Under this grant, OCM-BOCES operated a voluntary employment

## IV. Contracting Agencies for the Pilot, continued

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program for low-income noncustodial parents called the Parent Success Initiative, using 11 different subcontractors to provide direct services.

### *New York City—Seedco*

OTDA selected Seedco, a nonprofit organization with locations in several cities throughout the country, as the contracting agency for one pilot site in New York City. Operating as a workforce intermediary, Seedco oversees a network of community-based organizations that provide employment and other support services to low-income adults, called the EarnFair Alliance (<http://www.seedco.org>). It has also operated the Upper Manhattan Workforce1 Career Center (UMOS) since 2004. Many of Seedco's partners also provide employment services to noncustodial parents through the Support Through Employment Program (STEP), which is operated by New York City's Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) within the Human Resource Administration.

### *New York City—STRIVE*

OTDA selected STRIVE, a nonprofit organization with affiliates throughout the country, as the contracting agency for a second pilot site in New York City (<http://www.strivenewyork.org>). It has a network of nonprofit organizations within New York City that use the STRIVE model. STRIVE has worked with noncustodial parents since 1999, when it was selected as a site for the Partnership for Fragile Families (PFF) demonstration. Participation in this demonstration led to a multiyear grant from the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development to operate a fatherhood program, which is currently ongoing.

## **B. What Are the Benefits and Drawbacks of Contracting with These Agencies?**

OTDA established contracts with relatively large, well-established public and private nonprofit organizations that have considerable experience providing employment services to low-income adults in general and noncustodial parents in particular. The benefits of contracting with these particular agencies are twofold. First, because these organizations have the capacity to serve many individuals in the target population, OTDA could enter into only five contracts but be assured of reaching and serving a relatively significant number of noncustodial parents. Second, because these are all well-established and respected agencies that have demonstrated prior success serving low-income noncustodial parents, OTDA reduces the risk of any one site failing to meet its goals. Further, even though OTDA did not directly contract with relatively smaller or for-profit organizations, most of the pilot sites work with partner organizations with at least one of these characteristics. Thus, the innovation that smaller or for-profit organizations may bring to the fatherhood programs is still possible to capture even with larger, more experienced agencies as the contracting agencies.



Contracting with a county DSS agency may provide additional benefits for OTDA. First, it may be easier for OTDA to contract with a county DSS since it already has relationships and mechanisms in place with these agencies. Second, the county DSS can provide oversight for the project, reducing the need for OTDA to provide this function. Third, contracting with DSS has potential to involve all DSS services in fatherhood activities.

However, contracting with a county DSS has possible downsides. For example, this arrangement requires the service providers to obtain approval from the county DSS for expenditures, which may slow down the flow of money to the service providers. Second, if the county DSS does not provide sufficient oversight for the program, it can be more difficult for OTDA to do so because it does not have a direct contractual relationship with the service providers. One possible way to increase the likelihood that a county DSS will provide sufficient oversight for the program and process funding requests in a timely manner is to set aside funding in the contract for the county DSS to hire a project coordinator for the program, a step that was taken in Chautauqua County but not Erie County as we discuss further in the next section.



In this section of the report, we describe the organizational structure of the pilot programs. We explain who is responsible for providing general oversight and monitoring in each of the pilots. In addition, we describe the programs associated with each of the pilots that provide direct services to program participants.

All of the pilot sites, except Erie County, established contracts with multiple partners to provide services to their participants. In New York City, both Seedco and STRIVE provide case management and employment services themselves, but they still contracted with other community-based organizations to provide these services in other parts of the city that they do not serve. They also contracted with organizations that provide specialized services that they do not provide, such as parenting classes, legal services, financial literacy, and specialized services for ex-offenders. The Chautauqua County DSS and OCM-BOCES do not typically provide case management and direct employment services and so their key contractual relationships are with organizations that provide these services. However, they also contracted with organizations that provide specialized services, such as parenting classes and legal services. Erie County contracted with two public entities in Buffalo to operate separate programs.

### A. Chautauqua County Program

The Chautauqua County DSS does not provide direct services to pilot participants, but employs a paid project coordinator, a child support supervisor, to work part-time for the pilot program. The project coordinator at this site is responsible for providing general oversight, monitoring, and management for overall program administration and operations. The project coordinator at this site also assists with the recruitment and screening of new enrollees. The Chautauqua County Office of Child Support Enforcement reviews its caseload on a regular basis to identify candidates who may be eligible for the program. These cases are flagged for child support enforcement attorneys, who then request that the Family Court refer these individuals to the program. These recruitment and screening efforts are overseen by the project coordinator.

The Chautauqua County DSS contracted with three service providers to serve noncustodial parents enrolled in their Strengthening Families Initiative. Ross IES has a contract to provide case management and employment services. The Center for Family Unity provides parenting services and the Cornell Cooperative Extension provides financial and nutrition services. These organizations are described below.

**Ross Innovative Employment Solutions (Ross IES)** is a for-profit organization that has provided workforce development services since the 1970s (<http://www.rossprov.com>). With sites in five states, its mission is to partner with state and local agencies to design and implement high-quality job readiness and workforce development programs to address the needs of the community. In Chautauqua, it services noncustodial parents and welfare-to-work participants.

## V. Organizational Structure of the Pilot Programs, cont.

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**Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE)**, an arm of Cornell University, has offices in nearly every county in New York and employs over 400 educators statewide (<http://www.cce.cornell.edu>). Their mission is to enable people to improve their lives and communities. The Chautauqua County CCE has a staff of 20, with program areas in agriculture, family life, and child development (<http://counties.cce.cornell.edu/chautauqua>).

**Center for Family Unity** is a non-profit organization serving families in New York's Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, and Allegany Counties (<http://www.centerforfamilyunity.org>). Founded in 1990, it began as a child abuse prevention center and currently provides parenting classes, in-home and supervised visiting programs, and other family support services.

### B. Erie County Programs

The Erie County DSS is the only contracting agency that did not allocate funding to pay for a project coordinator to oversee, monitor, and manage overall program administration and operations. Erie County has an unpaid project director; however, because this person is not involved in the overall program administration of the pilot, the extent to which he can provide oversight and monitoring is limited. Instead, the Erie County DSS contracted with two public entities, both of which are part of the State University of New York system, which act separately to operate this site's two pilot programs.

Although the Erie County DSS does not contract with multiple partners, the Erie County ECC program does contract with Lakeshore Behavioral Health, Inc to provide a court liaison/case coordinator who works at the City Court in Buffalo. The Erie County EOC program did not establish formal contractual partnerships specific to this initiative, but it does work with other service providers in the community.

**Erie Community College (ECC)** is part of the State University of New York system. It provides academic and training programs, along with related services (<http://www.ecc.edu>). Since 2001, ECC has worked with Buffalo's City Court to provide a court-monitored academic recovery program for non-violent drug offenders. It worked with the Court Outreach Unit Referral and Treatment Services (C.O.U.R.T.S.) program, which is part of Buffalo's City Court, to design and implement the Education 2 Recovery (E2R) Program. ECC administers this program through the college's Department of Mental Health and the Department of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse. Individuals eligible for the program are enrolled in remedial literacy, academic, certificate training and employment services. Building on these experiences, a similar program was developed to meet the needs of the Erie County Family Court. This program, Dedicated, Accountable, Dependable and Self-Sufficient, or D.A.D.S, began in 2005. It offered case management services, vocational training, employment services, and judicial monitoring of participants'

compliance with court orders. ECC's current OTDA initiative is also called D.A.D.S.

**Educational Opportunity Center (EOC)** in Buffalo is part of a statewide network of Educational Opportunity Centers operated by the State University of New York. The mission of these centers is to provide urban communities with innovative academic and vocational training programs that allow individuals to pursue additional higher education or gainful employment (<http://www.eoc.buffalo.edu>). EOC in Buffalo has administered a long-term successful program with the Employment Division of the Erie County Department of Social Services to provide public assistance recipients with job readiness, academic and vocational training, and case management services. Since 2003, EOC has operated the Fathers Forever program for noncustodial parents, which provides case management, employment assistance, and supportive services. EOC's OTDA initiative is called the Strengthening Families Initiative.

### C. OCM-BOCES Program

OCM-BOCES generally does not provide direct services to pilot participants, but provides contractual and fiscal management for the pilot. In addition, OCM-BOCES contracts with two individuals, a full-time project coordinator and an intake specialist, to oversee the program's project office. Project office staff are responsible for providing general oversight and managing program operations between the pilot's many partners. Through its project office, OCM-BOCES has instituted procedures to monitor the activities of its service providers to ensure consistency and quality of service, including regular staff training and on-site case file reviews. In addition, project office staff spend a considerable amount of time recruiting participants to the program using TV ads, brochures, regular contacts with referring agencies, and outreach events. Project office staff also perform initial intake functions and orientations for new referrals.

OCM-BOCES retained the name of its welfare-to-work program, the Parent Success Initiative (PSI), for the current OTDA initiative. OCM-BOCES initially contracted with three private community organizations to provide case management and employment services to PSI participants. They were: Center for Community Alternatives (CCA), Westcott Community Center, and the Spanish Action League (SAL). SAL was phased out as a contracted partner for employment services in February of 2008 because it had trouble recruiting pilot participants. It was replaced by Syracuse Model Neighborhood. OCM-BOCES also contracted with the Consortium for Children's Services and SAL to provide parenting services. In addition, they have contracts with two legal aid societies and CCA to provide legal services. These organizations are described below.

**Center for Community Alternatives (CCA)** provides community-based alternatives to incarceration. The mission of the organization is to promote re-integrative justice

## V. Organizational Structure of the Pilot Programs, cont.

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and reduce reliance on incarceration (<http://www.communityalternatives.org>). CCA serves people in trouble: youth at risk; families in crisis; people with drug and alcohol problems and HIV/AIDS. CCA's programs provide court services, health and HIV/AIDS education, drug treatment, employment, re-entry, and community services.

**Westcott Community Center (WCC)** is a non-profit community center serving the Westcott neighborhood of Syracuse. The community center's goal is to provide a safe, accessible community space for activities and programs that meet community needs. Most of their program services are directed toward youth and seniors (<http://www.westcottcc.org>).

**The Spanish Action League (SAL) of Onondaga County Inc.** is a non-profit, bilingual organization that provides comprehensive services to the Latino community in Onondaga County (<http://www.indiraguzman.com>). The Spanish Action League provides the following social services: housing assistance; domestic violence prevention; family support; and translation and interpretation services. Although SAL's contract to provide employment and case management services was cancelled in early 2008, the organization continues to provide parenting classes.

**Syracuse Model Neighborhood (SMN)** was founded in 1975 as a settlement house. Its mission is to help people better manage their lives by offering a wide array of services through community oriented programming (<http://www.swccsyr.org>). It is also the governing agency of the Southwest Community Center (SWCC), which focuses its services on residents of the predominantly African-American, low-income neighborhood of southwest inner-city Syracuse. SMN was added as an employment and case management service provider in the spring of 2008.

**Consortium for Children's Services** is a non-profit organization that works with caregivers to promote successful emotional, physical, educational, and economic outcomes for children and their families (<http://www.consortiumchildren.org>). They provide home- and center-based services that target family literacy, parent education and employment opportunities in Onondaga County, New York.

**Frank H. Hiscock Legal Aid Society** was founded in 1949 to provide free legal assistance to indigent residents of Onondaga County. The Hiscock Legal Aid Society currently employs a staff of 36, including 21 attorneys (<http://www.hiscocklegalaid.org>).

**Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York** is a non-for-profit law office that provides free legal information, advice, and representation in civil matters to people who can't afford a lawyer in 13 counties in Mid-New York (<http://www.lasmny.org>). Eligibility for services is based on income and family size.

### D. Seedco Program

Seedco provides direct case management and employment services themselves, but also contracts with community-based partners to serve pilot participants in areas of the city that they do not serve. Seedco contracted with three non-profit community organizations to provide case management, employment services, and other supportive services for participants in its pilot program called the Parent Support Pilot (PSP). They are: Citizens Advice Bureau, the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, and St. Nicholas Neighborhood Corporation. Seedco initially contracted with the Bronx Defenders to provide legal services, the Center for Employment Opportunities to provide transitional employment services and parenting workshops, and Credit Where Credit is Due, Inc. for financial services. Seedco uses grant funding to pay for a part-time project coordinator who oversees and monitors program operations among these partners. We describe each of the organizations with whom Seedco partners below.

**Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)** is a non-profit community-based organization in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx that works to improve the economic and social well-being of individuals, families and communities who are most in need. Originally a settlement house, CAB started Bronx Works as a welfare-to-work program for women who had been long-term public assistance recipients (<http://www.cabny.org>). CAB is a member of the EarnFair Alliance and has worked with HRA/OCSE as a STEP program provider.

**Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC)** provides support to low-income residents in the community of Washington Heights/Inwood (<http://www.nmic.org>). NMIC offers an occupational skills training and job placement program targeted to building maintenance and construction trades, with a focus on superintendent jobs in residential buildings in Upper Manhattan. As a member of the EarnFair Alliance, NMIC has experience working with hard-to-serve individuals. NMIC also has experience working with HRA/OCSE as a STEP program provider.

**Saint Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation (St. Nicks)** is a nonprofit community-based organization providing services to residents of the Williamsburg-Greenpoint community (<http://www.stnicksnpc.org>). It operates a workforce development and adult education program called Williamsburg Works. It is a member of the EarnFair Alliance and a member of the STRIVE Network of service providers. It also has experience working with HRA/OCSE as a STEP program provider.

**The Bronx Defenders/Reentry Net** provides a range of community-based legal and advocacy services for low-income and indigent individuals (<http://www.bronxdefenders.org>). Bronx Defenders trained Seedco and the other direct service

## V. Organizational Structure of the Pilot Programs, cont.

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providers in the OTDA initiative to educate formerly incarcerated individuals of their legal rights; assisted program participants in cleansing their criminal records and provided them with facilitated access to Certifications of Relief from Disability; and represented a subset of participants with acute legal needs.

**Center for Employment Opportunities, Inc. (CEO)** specializes in providing comprehensive employment-related services for men and women returning from prisons, and for others under community supervision in New York City (<http://www.ceoworks.org>). CEO's Responsible Fatherhood Workshops stress parenting skills to help parents resolve visitation and custody issues and become more actively involved in the lives of their children. CEO's transitional employment program, the Neighborhood Work Project (NWP), provides immediate, paid, short-term employment and serves as an "employment lab", giving participants the essential skills they need to rejoin the workforce and quickly transition back into their community.

**Credit Where Credit is Due, Inc. (CWCID)**, founded in 1994, is a nonprofit organization that promotes economic empowerment among low-income families by increasing access to, understanding of, and control over financial services (<http://www.cwcid.org>).

### E. STRIVE Program

As with Seedco, STRIVE offers direct case management and employment services to program participants, but also contracts with community-based partners to provide services to participants in areas of the city that they do not serve. In addition, STRIVE employs a paid project coordinator to provide overall program management and oversight for the pilot.

STRIVE partnered with three non-profit community-based organizations to provide case management, employment, and other supportive services to participants of its pilot program called Dads Embracing Fatherhood (DEF). They are: The Fortune Society, Rockaway Development and Revitalization Corporation, and St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation. This latter organization is a partner with both the Seedco and STRIVE sites. These organizations are described below (except for St. Nicholas which was described above). STRIVE also contracted with several different individuals to provide other services. It contracted with four individuals to provide a 10-week series of workshops focusing on relationship building, a paralegal professional to provide legal services to fathers struggling with child support, child custody or visitation issues and a mental health professional to provide mental health counseling to DEF participants if such services were requested.



**Fortune Society** offers a holistic, one-stop model of service provision for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated adults that includes: substance abuse treatment, counseling, career development, education, housing, recreation and lifetime aftercare. Fortune Society provides services at four New York City-area locations – lower Manhattan, Long Island City, West Harlem, and Queens (<http://www.fortunesociety.org>).

**Rockaway Development and Revitalization Corporation (RDRC)** is a non-profit local development corporation serving the residents of the Rockaway region of Queens. Its mandate is to develop solutions to problems such as deteriorating commercial areas, residential blight, substandard housing, and high rates of poverty, unemployment, and crime (<http://www.rdrc.org>).



This section discusses how the pilot sites recruit enrollees, the types of services they provide, and how they use incentives to recruit and retain enrollees.

### A. Outreach and Recruitment

The five pilot sites employ different outreach and recruitment strategies, some of which changed as the programs evolved over the first 18 months of operation. All sites have developed flyers that describe available program services and have distributed them at various locations throughout their communities. These locations include local child support offices, Family Court facilities, one-stop career centers, drug and alcohol treatment centers, Planned Parenthood offices, job fairs, churches, and parole offices.

Two sites took advantage of the broadcast media to disseminate information about their services during the early implementation stages of their initiatives. OCM-BOCES staff, building on their experiences operating an employment program for noncustodial parents under the Welfare-to-Work program, ran more than 800 ten-second spots advertising their services on five local television stations. EOC team members discussed their program during interviews aired on both a local radio station and the “Buffalo Matters” television program.

Pilot program staff also make in-person outreach presentations to numerous organizations with contacts to and interest in the population eligible for program services. For example, members of the Chautauqua team have conducted informational sessions for various community groups, including the local faith-based initiative, a community transitional program for ex-offenders, and the local United Way. STRIVE-RDRC has made contacts and developed relationships with the local schools, the veteran’s administration, churches, and the department of probation for recruitment purposes.

Sites also make recruitment presentations to noncustodial parents enrolled in other programs offered by their organizations. STRIVE case managers regularly recruit for the pilot program through informational sessions conducted during STRIVE’s Core Training program, a four-week job-readiness workshop. The Seedco case manager also identifies potential participants during presentations at registration sessions for individuals served at the one-stop career center that Seedco operates. ECC recruits some participants for its DADS program from the Education 2 Recovery program for alcohol and substance dependent individuals.

Two sites have enhanced existing or established new relationships with the Family Courts as a major component of their recruitment efforts. As noted above, ECC built on the Buffalo City Courts’ existing COURTS program model in developing the DADS program. EOC did not initially rely on court referrals, but in early 2008 it established links with the Family Court and began receiving court referrals as well. Chautauqua County also works closely with the Family Court for its referrals.

## VI. Service Delivery in the Pilot Sites, continued

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For the most part, the other sites have not relied on the courts as the primary focus of their recruitment efforts. However, beginning in April 2008, a new collaboration between OCM-BOCES and the Family Courts emerged. Also based on the drug court model, this initiative provides initial screening for court referrals to OCM-BOCES. In addition, although there are no direct links between the Family Courts and the New York City pilot programs, some STRIVE and Seedco partner organizations receive referrals from the STEP program, a court-referral program operated by the New York City child support program. These organizations enroll at least some STEP participants in their pilot programs if they meet the eligibility criteria.

### B. Referral Sources

Perceptions of key referral sources varied across the five pilot sites. As of summer 2008, two of the five sites (Chautauqua and Erie County) reported that the majority of the referrals were from the Family Courts. While OCM-BOCES had relied primarily on self-referrals during the first 18 months of the pilot, that changed in summer 2008 when it established its partnership with the Family Court. Although most ECC referrals were made by family court support magistrates, some referrals were obtained indirectly through the drug court by way of the E2R program. Seedco partners at CAB and St. Nick's felt that most of their referrals were indirectly through STEP, a court-referral program. Other sites such as Seedco-NMIC and STRIVE-RDRC viewed the departments of parole and/or probation as key referral sources. Some sites (e.g., STRIVE-RDRC) reported that many referrals were "word-of-mouth" or self-referrals. With the exception of the Chautauqua site where child support staff identify and recommend noncustodial parents to support magistrates for referral for services, staff in the other pilot sites generally felt that direct referrals from either the child support program or TANF program were limited.

### C. Program Services

The following section provides an overview of the key services offered to program participants in the five pilot sites.

#### *Intake and Assessment*

During the initial meeting between the case manager and the noncustodial parent, staff complete various intake forms, including those required for the pilot project as well as others that are in some cases unique to a particular organization. These forms include, for example, an eligibility certification checklist, a participation agreement outlining responsibilities of both the participant and the case manager, and a contact/information sheet. Case managers use this first meeting to collect preliminary information about the pilot participant's family and living situation, work history, participation in other public

programs, financial needs, child support obligations, and any other service needs. Based on these discussions, case managers describe available services and then work with the noncustodial parent to develop a service plan or “road map” outlining next steps. These initial intake and assessment sessions range from 10–15 minutes in some sites to an hour in others. Some Seedco sites conduct automated benefits screenings for pilot participants as part of the intake process.

Some sites conduct program orientation sessions before the initial intake and assessment meeting. In the first months of the program’s operation, Chautauqua had offered group orientations but later decided to cover the same information in the one-on-one intake sessions. With the recent increase in court referrals, OCM-BOCES instituted a group orientation meeting at its project office to provide an overview of services before referral to the selected partner organizations.

### *Case Management*

As described earlier in this report, all the programs are using a one-on-one case management approach for providing services. Although some sites share responsibility for caseloads, most enrolled noncustodial parents have a single case manager assigned to them who they work closely with throughout the period of participation. Staff in all sites reported that they had some type of contact with participants at least once a month, although most described more frequent interaction, by phone, e-mail, and in person. Staff at CAB indicated that they had met with an average pilot participant three times a week. Ongoing case management activities includes for example, following up on milestones outlined in the service plan, making arrangements or referrals for specialized services, assisting with child support issues, following up on job leads and referrals, and providing general support.

### *Employment Services*

The employment services offered by these programs vary across the pilot sites, and, in some cases, among the partner organizations associated with each site. In general, all sites provide some job-readiness training, including help with résumé development, interviewing skills, guidance in filling out job applications, and assistance with job leads and referrals.

All sites have access to job developers, either through their own organization or through relationships with the Jobs program or the one-stop career center. Some sites are co-located with (or located close to) a one-stop career center, enabling case managers to facilitate referrals to and participation in regularly scheduled workshops or training sessions and to help noncustodial parents take advantage of the services of their on-site job developers. Other sites have access to job developers who provide services to all customers of the partner organization.

## VI. Service Delivery in the Pilot Sites, continued

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EOC staff initially scheduled individual appointments for their noncustodial parents with the nearby Jobs program. But, as their caseload grew, they worked with the Jobs program to set up a two-hour job club held twice a month specifically for their participants. ECC also arranges for staff from the one-stop career center to hold on-site job readiness classes.

Chautauqua sponsors a five-day, six-hours-a-day workshop which includes, among other components, soft skills and job-readiness services. It also developed a once-a-week two-hour job club as a next step for those who have completed the week-long workshop. Seedco-CAB conducts weekly job-readiness classes.

All current STRIVE partners were contractors of STRIVE through its New York Network and had offered STRIVE'S short-term CORE job readiness/job search program. Some variation of this model continues to be offered in these partner organizations and is available for pilot participants.

### *Parenting Services*

Parenting services are provided by all pilot sites, but the content and intensity of these services vary. Most sites provide some parenting instruction or classes, but each uses a different curriculum with a different focus. Some curricula emphasize traditional parenting skills, such as how to foster positive parent-child interactions, proper nutrition for children, and child discipline. Others focus more on improving communication skills between adults, such as the mother/father of his/her nonresident children. These curricula tend to include conflict resolution and anger management skills. Still others focus on developing and maintaining healthy adult relationships and marriages.

The amount of time spent in parenting classes also varies among the sites. In Chautauqua, the parenting instruction is a three-hour condensed version of a parenting class from the Center for Family Unity, a partner organization. ECC developed two course curricula, one in parenting and one in conflict resolution. Each curriculum was designed to include five two-hour sessions, or 10 hours per course, but ECC condensed these curricula and provides each in five one-hour sessions for a total of 10 hours. STRIVE's program uses "Exploring Relationships and Marriage with Fragile Families," a curriculum developed by Joe Jones and Julia Hayman Hamilton. It is presented during 10 three-hour workshops held once a week in the evenings for a total of 30 hours. OCM-BOCES modified a parenting curriculum called Systematic Training for Effective Parenting, developed by Don Dinkmeyer and others, into six sessions. OCM-BOCES typically conducts this class in three-day seminars or in classes over six weeks. Seedco initially contracted with the Center for Employment Opportunities to provide classes based on a modified version of its responsible fatherhood workshops. This site is now shifting to an in-house model that Seedco is developing based on a review of existing curricula. EOC does not offer parenting classes but provides referrals to other

organizations in the community and incorporates parenting services into its one-on-one case management sessions.

Another parenting service that most sites provide is helping participants see their children. Some sites help pilot participants complete visitation petitions to obtain legal authority to visit their children, while others help arrange actual visits.

### *Child Support–Related Services*

Staff in most sites felt that one of their most important roles is helping noncustodial parents understand, navigate, and demystify the child support system. To this end, some pilot sites have facilitated workshops and presentations explaining the workings of the child support program. In New York City, the Office of Child Support Enforcement staff provide a workshop at both STRIVE and Seedco partner organizations regularly. Chautauqua includes a one-hour component on the child support process developed by its project coordinator (a child support enforcement supervisor) as part of its week-long workshop.

Several sites work with pilot participants to help them reinstate their driver's licenses, which are sometimes revoked as a result of not paying child support. In some sites, this service is typically provided by a partner who works with the pilot participant to compile the required documentation and then contacts child support staff to help the participant complete the process. In other sites, program staff typically help explain the driver's license reinstatement process to the participant, but then refer the participant to the child support agency to work through this problem on their own.

Seedco also established a loan program, designed to provide participating noncustodial parents with assistance in paying back child support arrearages. Seedco makes a payment to the New York City support collection unit for eligible noncustodial parents with arrearages. This amount is considered a loan to the noncustodial parent, who is required to pay half of it. When that requirement is met, the other half is forgiven by Seedco and the loan is considered paid. Although this program is still in the early stages, a number of these loans have been given to participants in Seedco's program.

### *Financial Literacy*

All five pilot sites offer some financial literacy and/or budgeting training. As part of its week-long workshop, Chautauqua includes three hours of instruction on budgeting, financial planning, and the costs associated with raising children. Seedco has a contract with a nonprofit organization that provides workshops on banking, budgeting, borrowing, and credit for its partner organizations. STRIVE's parenting course includes a module on financial literacy that is led by a volunteer from the National Association of Black Accountants. EOC staff reported that they offered free assistance and advice on tax preparation during the last tax season to all their participants.

## VI. Service Delivery in the Pilot Sites, continued

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Although staff in all sites reported that they provide information on the new noncustodial EITC to program participants, they overwhelmingly agreed that few participants qualify for the credit because they are rarely in compliance with their child support order.

### *Legal Services*

Staff in the pilot sites agreed that one of the most pressing needs among this population was assistance with criminal and civil legal issues. While three sites are able to offer help in this area, two sites (Chautauqua and Erie County) are only able to refer their noncustodial parents to local Legal Aid organizations. As part of their grant monies, OCM-BOCES pays for the services of two full-time lawyers at two legal agencies who are available to work with their participants. Seedco has a contract with a legal aid organization to conduct monthly workshops at partner sites, followed by one-on-one counseling sessions with program participants who sign up in advance. Their staff provide assistance with “rap sheet cleansing” as well as individual advocacy. STRIVE has a contract with a paralegal to assist program participants with legal matters. In addition, STRIVE allocated grant funds for each of its partner organizations to hire a court advocate. With the exception of Fortune Society, which uses these funds to pay for a portion of its Family Law attorney’s time, all of STRIVE’s partners have a full-time court advocate on staff. STRIVE’s court advocates coach participants on how to prepare for family court, including what to wear, how to behave, and what to say. They also assist participants by helping them understand how to access their child support records, review court documents, file petitions for visitation and modification, and reinstate their driver’s license. They also sometimes accompany participants to court.

### *Other Services*

The pilot sites provide assistance with a long list of other services, including help in obtaining GEDs, mental health services, and housing assistance.

## **D. Incentives for Recruitment and Retention**

Pilot sites use a wide range of strategies to encourage eligible noncustodial parents to enroll in their programs, and, once enrolled, to participate in and complete all components. While all five sites report offering some type of incentives, what they classified as incentives varies.

The Seedco and STRIVE sites as well as some of the upstate sites provide transportation assistance to noncustodial parents in the form of bus tokens, bus passes, and metro cards. Because of the high demand for these items, staff have tended to develop distribution guidelines that reward participants’ commitment to the program. For example, Erie County-EOC provides single tokens for the street car or bus only to participants who



are “actively involved in job search.” Bus passes for the first month of employment are made available to participants who are unemployed at the time of enrollment and who successfully find a job while enrolled.

OCM-BOCES allocates a specific per-pilot participant amount of money for employment-related support services as a recruitment incentive. Program staff are able to provide up to \$500 for each noncustodial parent for such services as training, uniforms, clothing for interviews, tools, union fees, and short-term counseling. However, access to this resource is limited to \$100 until the participant has completed the required parenting class.

Two sites also offer monetary payments to participants as incentives for completing the parenting/fatherhood training sessions. The STRIVE sites pay each participant \$25 for completion of each of the 10 three-hour DEF sessions. OCM-BOCES also started providing \$50 gift cards to each noncustodial parent who successfully completed his parenting class.

Other sites view the hot meals provided during program training sessions as a key incentive to both attracting participants and keeping them engaged in the programs. Staff in some sites feel that the opportunity to participate in program-sponsored father-child events, such as picnics, barbecues, and bowling outings, is a major incentive for continued participation.

Staff in some sites feel that the opportunity to access critical specialized services is also a compelling incentive for many noncustodial parents. Assistance in navigating the process to regain a driver’s license, help with a child support case from a court advocate, or advice from an attorney were all mentioned as important incentives to participation during our site visits. In fact, the OCM-BOCES team mentioned that access to legal assistance was so much in demand that they required that their participants complete a parenting class as a condition of receiving a referral to one of their legal services partners, though exceptions were sometimes made for participants with immediate legal needs.



This section discusses the role of the local child support agencies and the Family Courts in the operation of the programs in the pilot sites.

### A. Role of the Local Child Support Agencies

The role of the local child support enforcement agency varies among the pilot sites. At one end of the spectrum, the local child support enforcement agency is the lead office at the county DSS for the program and central to the operation of the pilot. In between these two extremes, some local child support enforcement agencies have dedicated a high-level staff member to make sure that requests for child support information from the pilot staff are addressed in a timely manner.

The local child support enforcement agency is the lead office for the contracting agency for the pilot in Chautauqua. Staff in that agency provide overall oversight, monitoring, and contractual management in addition to some recruitment and screening of potentially eligible participants and individualized support on child support matters. In order to better orient the child support enforcement staff to the OTDA pilot, the local child support agency had its staff participate in several training sessions led by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), which used the engaging fatherhood toolkit. This training was targeted to both child support and TANF caseworkers and addressed how to understand and better interact with noncustodial parents. Much of the training focused on changing the culture of how to treat noncustodial parents. This training was not paid for by the OTDA grant but was one goal of the pilot.

The two other upstate sites have ready access to a high-level child support enforcement staff member who makes sure that their requests for information are responded to in a timely fashion. In Syracuse, all pilot participants must be verified as having a child support order with the local child support office before they can be enrolled in the program. Pilot staff give the local child support office a list of potential participants once a week, and child support staff check their database to see if the potential participants have a child support order, whether they are making child support payments, and whether they are employed. In Buffalo, most pilot participants are court-referred, so child support eligibility is already determined. For pilot participants who are not court-referred, the Buffalo pilot sites can access a high-level child support enforcement staff member who will ascertain whether the pilot participant is a noncustodial parent receiving services through the social services district. The Buffalo sites also rely on this child support staff member to answer child support questions that they may have about their pilot participants.

The two New York City sites have comparatively less contact with the New York City Office of Child Support Enforcement. According to several pilot partners in New York

## VII. Role of the Local Child Support Agencies & the Family Courts in the Pilot, continued

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City, during the first year of the pilot project they submitted requests for verification that their pilot participants were receiving services from the child support office, but the responses to these requests were not timely or not forthcoming. However, some sites reported that an Office of Child Support staff person conducts regular informational workshops at partner sites throughout the city.

### B. Role of the Family Courts

The Family Courts are actively involved in two pilot sites (Buffalo and Chautauqua). Both these sites receive most of their referrals from the Family Court. This means that the court refers noncompliant individuals to programs that help the individuals find work. The Onondaga County Family Court began implementing a court-referral program in April 2008. Before this effort, the Syracuse site did not receive court referrals regularly. The Family Courts in New York City are not directly involved in the referral process for the pilot programs. Nonetheless, some participants in the New York City pilot programs are court referrals, as we explain below.

In Buffalo, the City Court, which has criminal jurisdiction over misdemeanors and civil jurisdiction over claims under \$15,000, has operated a successful problem-solving court for drug offenders since 1995. This program operates as a unit of the City Court called COURTS. In 2004, the Chief Administrative Judge for the 8th Judicial District (which includes Erie County) asked COURTS to develop a similar program for noncustodial parents going through the Family Court. This program began serving noncustodial parents in early 2005. Initially, the Court paid for the program, but now it is funded through OTDA. Currently, support magistrates refer noncustodial parents to either EOC or ECC for program services and then require them to appear in court after a specified time to review their progress. Program staff appear in court with the participants for these follow-up meetings and report on the activities completed by the noncustodial parent.

In Chautauqua, child support staff flag cases that they would like the Family Court to consider for the pilot program. These cases are directed to two support magistrates who hear these cases during the second full week of the month. Pilot staff are present at these hearings and meet with the noncustodial parent outside the courtroom immediately after the referral to describe the program, conduct a preliminary intake, and schedule a meeting at the project office.

In Syracuse, the Family Court recently received a federal grant to develop a problem-solving approach to noncompliance with child support orders by creating a direct link between the courts and the service provider (PSI). The program was launched in April 2008, and direct referrals from the court to PSI are now being made. Before this, the Family Court did not have a role in the pilot program activities.

In New York City, the Family Court currently does not play a direct role in the pilot

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## VII. Role of the Local Child Support Agencies & the Family Courts in the Pilot, continued

programs. However, as noted earlier, the New York City OCSE operates a program called STEP (Support Through Employment Program), which is a court-referral program for unemployed or underemployed noncustodial parents. Individuals referred to the STEP program meet with a STEP staff person who works for the New York City OCSE and is usually located in the court house. STEP participants are generally assigned to a service provider located near their residence. Most New York City pilot program partners are service providers for STEP and are currently receiving STEP referrals. If a STEP participant meets the OTDA eligibility criteria, the pilot sites can enroll the STEP participant in the OTDA pilot. Thus, some of the participants in the OTDA pilot program are also in the STEP program. Service provider staff must evaluate the participant's activities and submit the evaluation to the STEP program before the participant's next court date. The service provider is not expected to attend the court hearing as part of the STEP program.



This section discusses who is eligible to be served by the pilot, how eligibility criteria are verified, and the participants' child support and other characteristics.

### A. Who Is Eligible to Be Served by the Pilot?

The statute authorizing the pilot lists the following eligibility criteria for the pilot programs:

1. be a noncustodial parent;
2. be a public assistance recipient or have income that does not exceed 200 percent of the federal poverty level;
3. be unemployed or working less than 20 hours a week;
4. have a child support order payable through the support collection unit or have had paternity established for his or her child and have had a court proceeding initiated to obtain an order of child support; and
5. be receiving, or the custodial parent must be receiving, child support services through a social services district.

All contracts signed by the pilot sites had the eligibility criteria listed above. In addition, all contracts included an age restriction. In general, pilot participants had to be between the ages of 18 and 35 years old. However, once the pilot programs started, some of them found that many recruits were outside this initial age range and asked OTDA to expand the age range to 16 to 45 years old, which OTDA accomplished in state fiscal year 07-08 budget.

Although all contracts had the same eligibility criteria, the STRIVE contract mentioned that STRIVE planned to serve a large proportion of employed noncustodial parents. Based on STRIVE'S stated goals in its contract, it expected that one-third of its participants would be employed at enrollment and that these participants would be given career advancement and income growth services. None of the other site contracts emphasized serving employed noncustodial parents.

### B. Verifying Eligibility Criteria

The contracts between the pilot programs and OTDA did not specify how the pilot programs were going to verify that individual participants met the eligibility criteria listed above. In general, most sites relied upon self-reported information to determine eligibility. In fall 2007, the sites and OTDA held a meeting and discussed verification. At that time, OTDA said that it wanted sites to verify the three child support-related eligibility criteria

## VIII. Characteristics of the Pilot Participants, continued

through their local child support office (i.e., criteria #1, #4, and #5 above). Given the difficulty of verifying the income, public assistance, and employment eligibility criteria, OTDA agreed to accept self-reported information to meet these criteria.

Verifying child support eligibility is not a major issue for the three upstate pilot programs. Nearly all the pilot participants in the Erie County and Chautauqua County programs are court referrals and therefore meet the child support criteria. As discussed above, OCM-BOCES has a system in place where the local child support program verifies that pilot participants meet the child support criteria. However, the New York City pilot staff indicated at the fall 2007 meeting that they were unable to verify whether their participants had a child support case through the local child support enforcement office in a timely and consistent manner. Thus, they continued to rely upon self-reported information to meet these criteria. In July 2008, the New York City OCSE director indicated she would direct staff to conduct the necessary verification process in a timely manner. Since then, the New York City pilot programs have been instructed to resume requests for eligibility verification of their pilot participants through the New York City OCSE program.

### C. Child Support Characteristics of Participants

Below we show the child support characteristics of pilot participants who had enrolled in the pilot programs up to June 20, 2008. These results are based on data found in the NYDADS database as of June 20, 2008, which were sent to OTDA and matched

**Table 1. Child Support Characteristics of Pilot Participants (June 2008)**

Child support characteristics	Total	Pilot Programs					
		OCM-BOCES	CTQ-OCSE	EOC	ECC	Seedco	STRIVE
Number of pilot participants sent to OTDA on June 20, 2008	2,027	240	142	210	728	481	226
Percent without Social Security numbers	6	0	0	2	7	7	15
Percent with Social Security numbers but no match	10	7	3	8	9	12	20
Percent who matched to OTDA	84	93	97	90	84	81	65
Number who matched to OTDA	1,694	223	138	189	608	390	146
Number who are custodial parents	13	0	0	5	6	0	2
Number who are dependents	15	0	0	6	4	2	3
Number of NCPs without an open case	58	5	0	10	19	18	6
Number of NCPs with open case but no order	74	5	1	32	11	16	9
Number of NCPs who matched to OTDA and have an open case and an order	1,534	213	137	136	568	354	126

Source: Urban Institute's NYDADS database matched to OTDA child support administrative data. NCPs = noncustodial parents  
 Note: See footnote 1 for why the total number of pilot participants on this table differs from the total in table 2.



to child support administrative data. The Urban Institute sent 2,027 pilot participants to OTDA<sup>1</sup>. As shown in table 1, the Chautauqua program (CTQ-OCSE) had the fewest program participants at 142; the Erie County ECC program had the most at 728.

Pilot staff are expected to obtain Social Security numbers (SSNs) from all participants, but this effort is not always successful. As table 1 shows, 6 percent of the pilot participants did not have SSNs; as a result, they could not be matched to child support administrative data. STRIVE had the highest share of participants without SSNs at 15 percent. ECC and Seedco were able to obtain SSNs for all but 7 percent of their pilot participants. OCM-BOCES and Chautauqua obtained SSNs for all their participants. EOC was not far behind with 2 percent of its participants without SSNs.

Another 10 percent of the pilot participants had SSNs, but OTDA did not find their SSNs in its child support administrative data or OTDA found the SSN but the participant did not match by date of birth, last name, or first name<sup>2</sup>. This figure varies among the sites, from 3 percent in Chautauqua to 20 percent in STRIVE. Because these participants have SSNs but a match was not found in the child support data, these participants may not have met the child support eligibility criteria for participating in the pilot programs. The SSNs for these participants may also be incorrect.

This means that 84 percent of the pilot participants, or 1,694 participants, were matched to child support administrative data. This figure ranged from 97 percent in Chautauqua to 65 percent in STRIVE.

A few pilot participants who matched to the OTDA data do not meet the child support eligibility criteria listed above as of June 2008. For example, 13 participants were custodial parents in June 2008. However, some of the child support criteria listed above, such as custodial status, can change over time, and because of data limitations we do not know the child support case characteristics of participants at the time they enrolled in the program. Another 74 participants do not have a child support order as of June 2008. However, these cases could have paternity established and a court proceeding initiated to obtain an order of child support. We cannot determine that from the OTDA data we received. Taking out these types of individuals, we were able to determine that 1,534 of the pilot participants were noncustodial parents with a child support order and an open case with the New York child support program in June 2008. This figure is used in subsequent discussions about child support outcomes.

<sup>1</sup>The number of participants sent to OTDA on June 20, 2008, is smaller than the number of participants reported by the sites at the end of June 2008 for two main reasons. First, sites continued to enroll participants after June 20, 2008, and these additional enrollees are reflected in the total numbers reported in table 2. Second, after examining the data submitted by the sites, we found that some participants were double-counted by the sites: some individuals were enrolled in two programs at the same time, and some individuals were listed twice in the same program.

<sup>2</sup>To be considered a valid match, we required individuals to match by SSN and by one of the following: date of birth, the first four letters of the last name, or the first four letters of the first name.

## VIII. Characteristics of the Pilot Participants, continued

### D. Other Characteristics of Participants

Participant characteristics are from the web-based management information system that the Urban Institute developed for the pilot sites, which we refer to as the NYDADS database. Staff at the pilot sites must enter intake information, monthly services provided, and monthly outcomes on all current enrollees and submit these data by the end of the month. Once the data are submitted, the database automatically tabulates the data and generates monthly reports.

As table 2 shows, nearly all participants met the employment eligibility criteria for the pilot initiative. As of June 2008, 82 percent of the participants were unemployed at enrollment. Another 5 percent of pilot participants were employed at enrollment and worked less than 20 hours per week during the three months before enrollment<sup>3</sup>. Thus, 87 percent of participants met the employment eligibility criteria for the pilot initiative. STRIVE had the lowest share (69 percent) and Chautauqua had the highest share (96 percent) of pilot participants who met this eligibility criteria.

Unfortunately, the pilot sites rarely record the family income of noncustodial parents in the NYDADS database, but when they do it is nearly always at or below 200 percent of the poverty level<sup>4</sup>. Receipt of public benefits is also typically missing in the NYDADS database, but for those participants with this information, 17 percent received public assistance at enrollment. According to the eligibility criteria, pilot participants must have income at or below 200 percent of the poverty level or receive public assistance. For those clients with this information in the NYDADS database, 98 percent met this eligibility criteria. Only one site (STRIVE) had pilot participants who had information that indicated they did not meet this eligibility criteria.

The marital status of participants is predominantly never married; 76 percent of participants have this marital status. Chautauqua has the lowest percentage of participants who are never married at 65 percent; ECC has the highest at 82 percent. While none of the sites have served a large percentage of currently married participants, two sites—Chautauqua and STRIVE—have considerably higher percentages of currently married participants (19 and 21 percent, respectively) than the other sites, which vary from 4 to 12 percent. In contrast, Seedco has the highest percentage of divorced and separated participants at 26 percent.

<sup>3</sup> The NYDADS database does not ask about the number of hours worked at the job in which the individual is working at enrollment. It asks about hours worked during the three months before enrollment. If the participant worked less than 240 hours (20 hours times 12 weeks) in the previous three months, then we consider that participant to have worked less than 20 hours a week.

<sup>4</sup> Poverty status is a function of family income and the number of people in the family. The number of people in the family is more frequently recorded in the NYDADS database than family income.

## VIII. Characteristics of the Pilot Participants, continued

**Table 2. Characteristics of Program Participants at Enrollment Reported by the Pilot Programs (June 2008)**

Participant characteristics	Total	Pilot Programs					
		OCM-BOCES	CTQ-OCSE	EOC	ECC	Seedco	STRIVE
Number of people ever enrolled	2,118	249	146	225	751	510	237
Percent of participants	100	12	7	11	35	24	11
Employment status (%)							
Not employed	82	77	93	85	93	80	50
Working < 20 hours a week	5	15	3	5	0	0	19
Poverty/public assistance status (%)							
Income at or below 200% of poverty or on public assistance	98	100	100	100	100	100	85
Gender (%)							
Male	92	88	92	82	90	97	98
Marital status (%)							
Never married	76	78	65	73	82	69	71
Currently married	10	12	19	10	7	4	21
Divorced or separated	14	11	16	16	10	26	8
Widowed	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Race/Ethnicity (%)							
African American	60	79	11	76	61	52	74
Hispanic	20	5	10	9	14	45	22
White	18	14	77	14	23	2	4
Other	2	2	2	0	2	1	1
Arrest record (%)							
With arrest record (%)	60	79	70	58	56	44	76
Age distribution (%)							
16–24	19	14	27	24	24	10	12
25–35	44	52	62	42	47	38	31
36–45	29	33	8	27	20	41	37
46 and older	8	0	3	6	8	11	20
Educational attainment (%)							
Less than high school graduate	39	37	38	37	45	38	30
High school graduate	40	45	58	47	31	43	40
More than high school graduate	21	18	3	16	25	19	30

Source: Urban Institute's NYDADS database.

Note: Missing values are ignored when determining percentages. Columns do not always sum to 100 because of rounding.

## VIII. Characteristics of the Pilot Participants, continued

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Most participants are either African American (60 percent) or Hispanic (20 percent). Only 18 percent of participants are white, and 2 percent are classified as other race. At OCM-BOCES, EOC, and STRIVE, over 70 percent of participants are African American. In contrast, over 70 percent of participants are white at Chautauqua. Seedco has served the largest percentage of Hispanics at 45 percent, followed by 22 percent at STRIVE.

The two sites with partners that specialize in serving ex-offenders—OCM-BOCES and STRIVE—have the highest shares of participants with arrest records. Over 75 percent of their participants have an arrest record. EOC, ECC, and Chautauqua are not far behind. Only Seedco has a figure below 50 percent.

The average age of the participants is 33 years old. However, participant age varies considerably among the sites. The two New York City sites serve a much older pilot participant population than the upstate sites. On average, the participants in New York City are 36 years old, whereas the average age of Buffalo and Chautauqua pilot participants is 30. The average age of OCM-BOCES participants is in between these two averages at 33. Eight percent of the pilot participants are age 46 and older. This share varies from 0 percent at OCM-BOCES to 20 percent at STRIVE.

Looking at the educational attainment of participants, 40 percent had a high school diploma and 39 percent had less than a high school diploma. Chautauqua has the highest percentage of participants with a high school degree or less at 96 percent. ECC has the highest percentage of participants who have not completed high school at 45 percent.

This section first discusses the development of outcome measures used by the pilot sites and the issue of verifying outcomes. Then it presents initial participant outcomes on enrollment, employment, and child support.

### A. Development of Outcome Measures

All pilot sites had outcome goals for their participants delineated in their proposals that they expected to achieve during the project period. In particular, all sites had outcome goals related to enrollment, job placement, job retention, and child support payments. However, sites varied in the definitions used to measure these goals. For example, in some sites, enrollment began at intake, while for other sites, enrollment began at first service (i.e., after intake). The definition of enrollment affects the number of people enrolled; the earlier in the process that a site defines enrollment, the more people it will enroll.

In fall 2007, OTDA held a meeting in Albany for all the pilot sites, and some of the time was devoted to discussing common definitions of key outcomes. At this meeting, OTDA defined enrollment, job placement, and child support payments. Enrollment would occur at intake; a job placement could only occur for those who were unemployed at enrollment, and each participant could only obtain one job placement (even though he or she may lose that job and obtain another one); and child support payments that are made through the New York support collections unit would be measured separately from those made outside the New York support collections unit. Both the number of people who made payments (either toward current support or arrears) and the amount paid would be collected monthly.

Measuring other outcomes beside enrollment, employment, and child support were not agreed upon. One outcome that was discussed was parental involvement with children who live elsewhere, or nonresident children. Given that one goal of the pilot sites is to increase the involvement of noncustodial parents in their children's lives, OTDA wanted to measure this outcome in some way. However, OTDA and the sites could not agree upon a specific measure of parental involvement. Most pilot sites mentioned in their proposals that one goal was to increase parental involvement, but they often measured parental involvement differently. Some sites focused on increasing the number of visits, others focused in increasing the amount of time spent with their nonresident children, others focused on the quality of the visits or the level of satisfaction with the visit. Still others focused on increasing visitation rights. In addition, it was unclear that sites would be able to collect this information monthly. Thus, the evaluation staff, in consultation with OTDA, decided to ask sites to collect parent-child contact information after three months in the program rather than every month. But this means that monthly measures of parental involvement are not recorded in the NYDADS database. Moreover, most measures of parental involvement that were discussed by OTDA and the sites are not

## IX. Initial Outcomes from the Pilot Sites, continued

collected in the NYDADS database. Instead, they are being collected in the telephone survey of program participants, which the Urban Institute is conducting with the assistance of a survey firm.

### B. Verifying Outcomes

At the fall 2007 meeting, OTDA said that it would accept self-reported employment outcomes, but it wanted child support outcomes to be verified. Because of this decision, most sites do not report child support outcomes in the NYDADS database because they cannot verify them. The child support outcomes presented below are based on the match discussed earlier, between OTDA child support administrative data and data from the NYDADS database. Only two sites—OCM-BOCES and Chautauqua—have routinely reported child support payments. Even in these two sites, they are only reporting child support payments for current enrollees, not all participants who have ever been served by their program. Part of the problem for these two sites is that collecting this information is very labor intensive. Both sites rely upon the local child support program to look up each case one at a time in the child support system to identify this information.

### C. Enrollment Outcomes

A recurring challenge for programs that serve noncustodial parents has been recruiting sufficient numbers to participate in the program (Martinson and Nightingale 2008). Interestingly, the pilot sites involved in the OTDA initiative have overcome this challenge. As we show below, all but one program site met, or surpassed, its enrollment goal for the first contract period<sup>5</sup>. The sites have used varied ways to meet the recruitment challenge. First, in three of the five pilot sites, the contracting agency has partnered with several community-based organizations and specialized ex-offender

**Table 3. Target and Actual Enrollment during First Contract Period**

	Pilot Programs					
	OCM-BOCES	CTQ OCSE	ECC	EOC	Seedco	STRIVE
Enrollment target in first contract	156	150	300	219	230	150
Number of participants served by end of first contract	171	146	732	226	516	166

Sources: Pilot contracts and the Urban Institute's NYDADS database.

Note: See table 6 below for the exact month each contract ended.

<sup>5</sup> The one site that missed its enrollment target (Chautauqua) did so by four participants.

service providers that are geographically dispersed to help reach its enrollment goal. Second, two sites have relied upon court referrals to reach their enrollment goal. Third, one site has used its one-stop career center to reach large numbers of noncustodial parents. These latter two approaches are discussed further below.

As table 3 shows, two sites—Seedco and ECC—far exceeded their enrollment targets. Seedco said in its proposal that it would serve 230 participants during the first contract period, but it actually served 516. ECC said it would serve 300 participants during the first contract period, but it actually served 732. The ability of these two sites to enroll such large numbers of noncustodial parents may be influenced by the type of programs that they operate. While all the Seedco partners exceeded their target enrollments, only the Upper Manhattan one-stop career center (UMOS) far exceeded its target. According to Seedco's proposal, UMOS was supposed to serve 80 participants, but it actually served 242 people. This Center has a high volume of traffic, serving approximately 285 walk-in customers a week. Seedco was able to use this high volume to identify noncustodial parents and serve them through the OTDA pilot. This suggests that high volume one-stop career centers may be one way to identify large numbers of noncustodial parents who need employment services.

The other site that far exceeded its enrollment target – ECC – receives nearly all of its referrals from the Family Court. In its first year of operation, ECC served 535 people. During that time, ECC was the only service provider receiving court referrals in Buffalo. However, EOC, the organization operating the other pilot program in Buffalo, was not reaching its enrollment target. By September 2007, it had enrolled 57 people, but its goal was 72. Thus, it reached out to the Family Court and began receiving court referrals as well. Once that began in early 2008, EOC's enrollment increased dramatically. These findings suggest that a court-referral program can also generate a large volume of noncustodial parents needing employment services.

### D. Employment Outcomes

As of June 2008, the sites reported that 38 percent of participants who were unemployed at enrollment were placed in jobs. This figure varies substantially, however, among the sites. When the two Buffalo sites are combined, their job placement rate is just 18 percent. In contrast, OCM-BOCES and Chautauqua report that about 56 percent of their unemployed participants are placed in jobs. Seedco reports the highest job placement rate at 67 percent.

It is worth noting that the unemployment rate is higher in Buffalo than in other sites. In Buffalo, the unemployment rate was 7.2 percent in June 2008. It was 6.6 percent in Syracuse, 5.8 percent in Jamestown (Chautauqua County), and 5.3 percent in New York City. The unemployment rate varies among the counties within New York City:

## IX. Initial Outcomes from the Pilot Sites, continued

**Table 4. Employment Outcomes of Program Participants Ever Enrolled as Reported by the Pilot Programs (June 2008)**

Percentage of participants who:	Total	Pilot Programs					
		OCM-BOCES	CTQ-OCSE	EOC	ECC	Seedco	STRIVE
Entered employment	38	56	57	24	16	67	34
Entered employment and retained their job for 90 days	48	18	63	62	42	58	21
Entered employment and retained their job for 180 days	25	5	41	36	N/A	38	15

Source: Urban Institute's NYDADS database.

N/A = not available

Bronx County had the highest unemployment rate in June 2008 at 7.0 percent, followed by Kings County at 5.6 percent, Queens at 4.7 percent, and Manhattan at 4.6 percent (Seedco and STRIVE do not have a service provider in Staten Island).

Turning to job retention, among the unemployed participants who found a job, 48 percent of them remained at their job for 90 days or more. Twenty-five percent of the unemployed participants who were placed in a job reached 180 days or more on the job. These figures vary across the sites; OCM-BOCES has the lowest and Chautauqua the highest job retention rates.

### E. Child Support Outcomes

Based on the OTDA match conducted in June 2008, pilot participants paid \$229,036 in child support that month. Further, 42 percent of pilot participants who matched to the OTDA child support data system (out of 1,534 noncustodial parents with an open case and a child support order) paid child support in June. While that percentage may sound low, earlier research of New York's child support data found that 54 percent of noncustodial parents in the New York child support system who had a child support order paid child support in June 2004 (Sorensen and Sousa 2005). This comparison suggests that pilot participants are less likely to pay child support than the average noncustodial parent in the New York child support program, but that is to be expected because most of them were recently unemployed. The share of matched participants who paid child support did not vary that much across the pilot sites. Percentages were slightly higher in New York City and Chautauqua (45–47 percent) than in Buffalo (38–39 percent) or Syracuse (41 percent).



**Table 5. Child Support Outcomes of Pilot Participants (June 2008)**

Child support outcomes of pilot participants	Total	Pilot Programs					
		OCM-BOCES	CTQ-OCSE	EOC	ECC	Seedco	STRIVE
Total amount paid in June 2008	\$229,036	\$23,276	\$20,403	\$18,476	\$74,439	\$64,742	\$27,700
Number who paid	642	87	64	53	215	166	57
Percent who paid (among participants with an order)	42	41	47	39	38	47	45
Average payment (among paying participants)	\$357	\$268	\$319	\$349	\$346	\$390	\$486
Median amount paid (among paying participants)	\$219	\$217	\$149	\$184	\$200	\$240	\$352
Total arrears owed	\$18,163,754	\$5,117,086	\$1,274,755	\$1,195,582	\$4,726,302	\$4,276,805	\$1,573,225
Number with arrears	1,373	198	129	122	523	303	98
Percent with arrears (among participants with an order)	90	93	94	90	92	86	78
Average arrears (among participants with arrears)	\$13,229	\$25,844	\$9,882	\$9,800	\$9,037	\$14,115	\$16,053
Median arrears (among participants with arrears)	\$4,745	\$9,404	\$2,578	\$4,322	\$3,963	\$5,422	\$8,233
Number of NCPs who matched to OTDA and have an open case and an order	1,534	213	137	136	568	354	126

Source: Urban Institute's NYDADS database matched to OTDA child support administrative data.

The average amount of child support paid in June 2008 was \$357 among matched participants who paid support. However, the median amount paid among payers that month was \$219. The median is a better measure of the typical amount paid. It indicates the amount where 50 percent of the payers paid more than that amount and 50 percent paid less. In contrast, the average is highly affected by the tails of the distribution of amount paid. Because a few payers paid more than \$2,000 in June 2008 (11 people), the average amount paid is significantly higher than it would otherwise be.

Ninety percent of pilot participants with a child support order owe child support arrears and, collectively, they owe over \$18 million. The upstate pilot sites have higher shares of

## IX. Initial Outcomes from the Pilot Sites, continued

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matched participants with arrears than the New York City pilot sites. In all the upstate pilot sites, over 90 percent of the matched participants owe arrears. In contrast, 78 percent of STRIVE participants and 86 percent of Seedco participants who have an order to pay support through the child support program owe arrears.

Table 5 also reports the average and median amount of arrears owed by pilot participants who owe arrears. It shows that the average amount of arrears owed among those who owe arrears is \$13,229 and the median amount owed is \$4,745. Again, the median figure is a better measure of the typical amount owed by participants with arrears because the distribution of arrears is highly skewed, with a small number of participants owing exceedingly large amounts of arrears.

OTDA allocated \$3 million for programs for noncustodial parents across the five pilot sites in fall 2006. These contracts varied by their amounts, their duration, and their enrollment goals. Below, we indicate the total amount of each grant, the original length of the contract, the start and end dates of the contract, the expected number of noncustodial parents to be served over the life of the contract, the actual number served by June 30, 2008 (or earlier if the contract ended before that date), the average estimated cost per pilot participant, and the average actual cost per pilot participant.

Table 6 shows that the total amount of the grant awarded to each site varied from \$200,000 for the Erie County ECC program and the Chautauqua County DSS (CTQ OCSE), to \$900,000 each for STRIVE and Seedco. With the exception of the Erie County EOC program, which was awarded its contract in early 2007, all the OTDA contracts began in fall 2006. The length of the contracts varied from 12 months for STRIVE and OCM-BOCES to 22 months for Seedco. As discussed earlier, the enrollment goal also varied across the pilots, from 150 enrollees for STRIVE and Chautauqua to 300 for ECC.

This table also shows that the average estimated cost of serving a pilot participant varied considerably across the pilot sites, from \$667 for ECC to \$6,000 for STRIVE. According to OTDA administrators, this large variation across the pilot sites in average expected participant costs was tolerated because these contracts were funding pilot programs. OTDA hoped that it would learn what strategies and approaches worked and what actual costs were associated with serving low-income noncustodial parents from this wide range of funding levels.

The average actual cost of serving a pilot participant during the first contract period also varied considerably, from \$273 for ECC to \$5,422 for STRIVE. ECC and Seedco, which far exceeded their enrollment goals during the first contract period, had considerably lower average actual costs per client than expected. ECC had exceptional growth during its first year of operation, reaching 535 enrollees by September 2007. During its second year, ECC shared court referrals with the other Erie County program (EOC), which reduced its growth rate. Nonetheless, it still added over 200 more enrollees by June 2008. Seedco had proposed that it would serve 80 pilot participants through UMOS. But, as noted earlier, it ended up serving 242 pilot participants during the first contract period. This increase reduced its average per pilot participant costs.

Because the pilot phase is still ongoing, we cannot determine the costs of effectively serving low-income pilot participants. However, we can offer some possible explanations for these wide variations in the cost of providing services. One possible explanation for the lower costs in EOC and ECC is that the county Department of Social Services, which is the contracting agency, did not charge these programs for contract oversight. The Erie County DSS did not retain any OTDA funding. Significantly, the project coordinator for the Erie County DSS

## X. OTDA Funding for Pilot Site, continued

is an unpaid position. While all the sites can point to in-kind services provided either by the contracting agency or partner organizations, Erie County is the only site that did not set aside funding for a paid project coordinator.

Another possible explanation for the lower costs in Chautauqua and Erie Counties is that nearly all their referrals are from the Family Court. During the first contract period, OCM-BOCES, Seedco, and STRIVE received most of their referrals from non-court sources. Programs that do not rely on court referrals may spend more time and money on outreach, recruitment, and retention than programs that rely heavily on court referrals because the Family Court can provide a steady flow of referrals and has an effective “stick”—that is, the threat of incarceration for noncompliance. Although the legal authority for the Family Courts to use this stick is limited, it still exists, and participants are aware of it. Thus, programs that rely heavily on court referrals may cost less to operate than programs that do not.

On the other hand, all the Family Court costs of participating in a court-referral program are not included in the costs of operating the pilot programs. Family Court participation is provided via in-kind services to the pilot programs. In addition, the pilot programs that rely on court referrals tend to spend a fair amount of time providing court monitoring, which is a cost that the other programs do not have. Thus, at this point we can not accurately determine the comparative costs of the two types of programs. This issue deserves further investigation.

**Table 6. Summary of First Contracts with Pilot Sites and Numbers Actually Enrolled**

Contract Characteristics	Pilot Programs					
	OCM-BOCES	CTQ OCSE	EOC	ECC	Seedco	STRIVE
Grant amount	\$500,000	\$200,000	\$300,000	\$200,000	\$900,000	\$900,000
Grant length	12 months	20 months	18 months	21 months	22 months	12 months
Start date	11/1/2006	11/1/2006	1/1/2007	10/1/2006	9/1/2006	10/1/2006
End date	10/31/2007	6/30/2008	6/30/2008	6/30/2008	6/30/2008	9/30/2007
Enrollment goal	156	150	219	300	230	150
Average estimated cost per enrollee	\$3,205	\$1,333	\$1,370	\$667	\$3,913	\$6,000
Number actually enrolled by end of first contract	171	146	226	732	516	166
Average actual cost per enrollee and have an open case and an order	\$2,924	\$1,370	\$1,327	\$273	\$1,744	\$5,422

Sources: Pilot contracts and Urban Institute's NYDADS database.

Lessons learned are divided into five categories: program development, program enrollment and participant characteristics, program operations, program outcomes, and evaluation and reporting.

### *Program Development*

1. OTDA contracted with county DSS agencies and large, well-established organizations, all of which (or their partners) had proven track records serving low-income noncustodial parents. This assured that a relatively large number of noncustodial parents would be served while limiting the risk that any one pilot site would fail to meet its goals.
2. The innovation that smaller organizations might bring to the fatherhood programs is still captured by the initiative because most organizations that OTDA contracted with included smaller organizations as partners in their proposed business plan. These partner organizations provide a range of services, including employment services, parenting classes, legal services, and specialized services to ex-offenders.

### *Program Enrollment and Participant Characteristics*

3. As of June 30, 2008, 2,118 people have been enrolled by the pilot sites, far exceeding expectations. This is a major achievement, considering most previous fatherhood programs had problems meeting their enrollment goals. The pilots enroll low-income, unemployed noncustodial parents who are behind in their support that is payable through the New York child support program. These enrollment criteria are similar to earlier fatherhood programs.
4. Pilot participants tend to be highly disadvantaged. As of June 2008, 39 percent of the pilot participants had not completed high school and 40 percent had not gone beyond a high school degree. Sixty percent of the participants had an arrest record. Nearly all the participants were male (92 percent), and three-quarters of them had never been married. Sixty percent of the participants were African American and another 20 percent were Hispanic. The average age of the participants was 33 years old. Chautauqua served mostly Caucasians, but in other respects, such as education and arrest records, the participants at this site do not differ from participants at other sites. These demographic characteristics are consistent with other fatherhood programs.

### *Program Operations*

5. In order to reach the ultimate aim of the pilot programs, which is to increase noncustodial parents' financial and emotional involvement with their children, all service providers adopted a similar service delivery model, which consists of case

## XI. Lessons Learned during the First Evaluation Year, cont.

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management and employment services, coupled with other supportive services. The key supportive services are parenting and child support–related services.

6. The employment services offered by the programs varied across the pilot sites, and, in some cases, among the partner organizations associated with each site. In general, all sites provide some type of job-readiness training, including help with résumé development, interviewing skills, guidance in filling out job applications, and assistance with job leads and referrals. All sites have access to job developers, either through their own organization or through relationships with a Jobs program or a one-stop career center.
7. Pilot sites use a wide range of strategies to encourage eligible noncustodial parents to enroll in their programs, and, once enrolled, to participate in and complete all components. Most programs provide transportation assistance to noncustodial parents in the form of bus tokens, bus passes, and metro cards. Two programs offer monetary payments to participants as incentives for completing the parenting/fatherhood training sessions. Staff in some sites felt that the opportunity to access specialized services is also a compelling incentive for many noncustodial parents. Assistance in navigating the process to regain a driver's license, help with a child support case from a court advocate, or advice from an attorney were mentioned by pilot staff as important incentives to participation.
8. Although we have not conducted a cost-benefit analysis of the program sites, we learned that Chautauqua and Erie Counties experienced significantly lower average costs per pilot participant than the other sites. One possible explanation for these lower costs is that these programs relied more heavily on court referrals than the other programs and that this reduced their recruitment, retention, and service provision costs. Yet, the costs incurred by the Family Courts while participating in these programs are not reflected in the costs of the pilot programs because they are absorbed by the Court. In addition, programs that rely on court referrals tend to spend a fair amount of time providing court monitoring, an expense that other programs do not have. Which type of program costs less to operate deserves further investigation.

### *Program Outcomes*

9. In June 2008, 42 percent of the noncustodial parents with a child support order payable through the New York child support program paid child support for a total of \$229,036. The median amount paid that month among those who paid was \$219. Ninety percent of the noncustodial parents who had a child support order payable through the New York child support program owed arrears, and the median amount owed was \$4,745.

10. In June 2008, 38 percent of participants who were unemployed at enrollment had been placed in a job. However, this figure is heavily influenced by the job placement rate in Buffalo because this site serves a large proportion of the pilot participants. As of June 2008, the Buffalo programs had placed 18 percent of their unemployed participants in jobs. This lower placement rate probably reflects the higher unemployment rate in Buffalo. (Buffalo's unemployment rate was 7.2 percent in June 2008 versus 6.6 percent in Syracuse, 5.8 percent in Jamestown, and 5.3 percent in New York City.) Among unemployed participants who had been placed in jobs, 48 percent of them were still employed 90 days later and 25 percent were still employed 180 days after job placement.

### *Evaluation and Reporting*

11. It may be easier for both OTDA and the program sites if OTDA describes what outcomes will be measured and what definitions will be used for those outcomes in the request for proposals. Before implementing the pilot programs, OTDA did not establish universal outcome goals for the sites, allowing the pilot sites to identify their own goals. This meant, however, that pilot sites established different goals, which they defined in different ways. OTDA and the pilot sites did agree upon common outcomes and definitions for those outcomes, but not until October 2007, about a year after the pilot started.
12. OTDA will need to decide how it wants sites to measure parental involvement with their children. Currently, pilot sites are not collecting parental involvement with non-resident children monthly because it is unclear that sites have sufficient information to collect it that frequently. OTDA decided to collect this outcome at three months after enrollment. This issue is also included in the Urban Institute's telephone survey of program participants at 3 and 12 months after enrollment.
13. OTDA will need to determine if verification of program eligibility and outcomes are required and, if so, how that verification will be obtained. OTDA asked pilot sites to verify child support eligibility and child support outcomes, but it does not require sites to verify other eligibility criteria or employment outcomes. Although OTDA preferred that all eligibility criteria and outcomes be verified, the pilots encountered a number of challenges in their attempts to verify client information during the pilot phase. During the pilot, OTDA anticipated that the child support eligibility criteria would be verified through the local child support office. However, according to staff in some New York City partner sites, they have not been able to obtain these verifications on a consistent and timely basis. OTDA did not specify how it expected sites to verify child support outcomes, but because these outcomes must be verified, very little child support outcome

## XI. Lessons Learned during the First Evaluation Year, cont.

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data is being reported by the sites in the NYDADS database. Only Chautauqua and OCM-BOCES have arrangements with the local child support program to help them obtain these data consistently, and both these arrangements are very time consuming for the local offices because collecting the data requires looking up cases individually. Thus, the evaluation staff is working with OTDA to match program participants to statewide child support administrative data in order to obtain child support outcomes.

14. OTDA will need to decide what information that it wants programs to track and how often programs will need to report that information to OTDA. For the pilot phase, the sites are entering information into the NYDADS database developed by the Urban Institute. This database generates a monthly report that tracks enrollment, employment, program services, and demographic characteristics of enrollees. After the pilot phase, OTDA will need to decide how this information will be tracked.



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