



W11. Engaging Noncustodial Parents To Improve Outcomes for Children: Findings From Research and Practice

Wednesday, June 5, 2019
4:15 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Moderator:

- Lisa Washington-Thomas, Branch Chief, Self-Sufficiency Branch, Office of Family Assistance, Washington, D.C.

Presenters:

- Dr. Reginald Covington, Senior Researcher, Mathematica, Washington, D.C.
- Sarah Culp, Colorado Parent Employment Project/Parents to Work Case Manager, Arapahoe County, Colorado
- Cheri Tillis, Executive Director, Fathers & Families Support Center, St. Louis, Missouri

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Thank you so much for joining us on Engaging Noncustodial Parents To Improve Outcomes for Children: Findings From Research and Practice. My name is Lisa Washington-Thomas, Branch Chief, Office of Family Assistance, working under Robin McDonald. We're here to talk about the PACT Evaluation and our branch project, ASPIRE, which is Assisting Special Populations in Improving Readiness Engagement. We're so pleased to have our panelist, Dr. Reginald Covington from Mathematica. Mathematica and Reggie, in particular, worked on both of these projects. Reggie did the research for the PACT Evaluation, looking at four responsible fatherhood programs, and their efficacy, as well as looking at how TANF programs are engaging noncustodial parents. We feel this is important because over the last couple of days several people have spoken about the [federal] information memorandum, encouraging work to noncustodial parents and fathers using our safety net program.

When the discretionary grants are awarded, they are usually locked in for four or five years because they're non-continuation applications; but there's still hope for funding programs through TANF, which is the program I work for, and through child support. What we learned as we were looking at the ASPIRE project is there's a lot of TANF and child support collaboration, that's not necessarily trying to catch the dad, but trying to get them the services they need so they can provide for their children. Today, we're going to talk about the efficacy of the fatherhood programs that were under the PACT Evaluation, and what do you do if you're not necessarily a funded grantee; what other resources are there and how are people collaborating to help the entire family. I would like to introduce Dr. Reginald Covington.



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Office of Family Assistance



National
Responsible
Fatherhood Clearinghouse
fatherhood.gov



Dr. Covington: Good afternoon everyone, I am happy to be here. My name is Reggie Covington from South Carolina, I'm a father of a four-year-old boy and a three-year-old boy. I grew up in a single parent home, so this topic is near and dear to me. While I will be sharing some research findings, for me it's not a thought exercise, it's something that's really important. It's why I got into the field, because I saw, I witnessed, or I experienced, firsthand, the consequences of living in a single parent home. Yet, I love my father, and I understand some of the challenges that he faced. We'll be talking about some of those challenges today.

I will be sharing research findings from two of the projects that I'm working on. Before I begin, I would like to thank the Office of Family Assistance as they funded both projects. I would like to also thank the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation for their guidance with the PACT Project. The ASPIRE Project is in collaboration with Insight Policy Research and Mathematica; and the Parents and Children Together (PACT) Study, conducted by Mathematica.

Many of us are here in part because we recognize that more guidance is needed on how to serve noncustodial parents (NCPs), many of whom are fathers. We know that evidence is mounting that noncustodial parent involvement is associated with better outcomes for children. Children who are involved with their fathers, noncustodial or nonresidential fathers, have better language development, are less likely to have eating disorders, are less likely to start smoking as a teenager, and the list goes on and on. Yet, there's little research known about how to effectively serve nonresident fathers. Why is this important? It's important because we realize that they face numerous barriers. Some of these barriers have been discussed throughout this summit. There are substance abuse issues, mental disorders, homelessness, inadequate transportation, limited education, low earnings, etc.

We're here because the field is searching for promising strategies to support NCPs. The thing that's exciting about this summit is that we're looking for ways to do it that's not in a silo. We're looking for ways that the system can serve noncustodial fathers. In an effort to learn more about how to serve noncustodial fathers, OFA funded two projects, which I'm going to share findings of today. The first is the Parents and Children Together (PACT) Evaluation, a large-scale evaluation of select responsible fatherhood programs that received grants in 2011. The second project is the Assistance Special Populations and Readiness and Engagement (ASPIRE) Project, an assessment of how state and local TANF agencies, and their partners, are collaborating to boost noncustodial parent engagement in employment or readiness for employment, and how they are engaging them in their services.

There were three components to the PACT responsible fatherhood study. The component that I'll talk a lot about today is the impact study, but there were two other components that were just as important. First there was a process study, where we examined how the programs were





structured, and how they were operated, as well as fathers' participation in the services that were offered. For this study we answered questions such as how many fathers or what percentage of fathers actually attended their first workshop? What percentage of fathers attended half of the sessions? What percentage of fathers actually completed their programs? What were some of the barriers that responsible fatherhood programs faced in serving dads?

Those of you that work at a fatherhood program know that it's challenging. It's not easy. The issues with the fathers having limited transportation, issues in their lives that arise daily that might prohibit them from attending some of their assigned workshops, and the programs themselves have challenges that need to be addressed. Understanding their population, and dealing with the trauma that the fathers come with, presents challenges on both sides. There's a qualitative study which I had the privilege of working on. This focused on understanding the broader context of the fathers' lives through three rounds of two-hour in-depth interviews with a subset of fathers assigned to the program group. We interviewed fathers in Minneapolis, Kansas City, and St. Louis. I conducted 25-30 of those interviews. It was amazing. The fathers are experts on their own lives. They know about their deepest needs, their unfulfilled desires, and it was a tremendous opportunity to learn from the fathers. It made me a better researcher to sit down and hear from them. That component was really essential to our impact study. That part of the study examined the effects and the changes that program participation had on the fathers who received the programs, compared to those who did not. None of this research would have been possible without the four programs that participated in the evaluation: Connections to Success in Kansas City, Missouri; Urban Ventures in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Fathers Support Center in St. Louis, Missouri; and the FATHER Project in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota. One thing I want to highlight is that this evaluation was successful because it was truly a collaborative effort. Those sites worked hard to implement their programs and recruit enough fathers to participate in the evaluation. As I mentioned, we learned from the fathers during the qualitative component; but, we also learned from the practitioners, the people who were delivering the program during the process study. Some of the things that we learned from them shaped our research questions, our outcome measures, how we thought about the data that we collected, and it really helped us design and conduct a very rigorous study.

Who were the fathers in this study? There were approximately 5,500 fathers who enrolled in the evaluation. Most of the fathers were African American, mid 30s, and with an average of two to three children. They face multiple life challenges, lower educational levels, high rates of unemployment and housing instability. A lot of the fathers who enrolled in this study were homeless or sleeping on a friend's couch. Some of them reported living in their cars; and this is while they're trying to maintain a job and pay child support. So, you can understand some of the challenges that they're facing. Almost half had children by multiple partners, and only a quarter live with at least one of their children.





What's not shown is that a quarter of the fathers showed symptoms of moderate to severe depression at enrollment. Problems sleeping, issues with anxiety, and then about one-third were on probation or parole when they enrolled. You can imagine how hard it is to get a job when you're on probation and parole, but you also need a job so you can pay your child support. These are some of the challenges these fathers face, and some of the challenges Cheri and Sarah had to deal with in serving the fathers. How did they serve the fathers? Primarily through group-based workshops. They delivered the core services in regard to parenting, relating to healthy relationships, and economic stability. Programs also had specialized employment staff who met one-on-one with participants. Programs covered topics such as coping with stress, responding to discrimination, problem solving, self-sufficiency, and goal planning.

One thing I'd like to note is that during the evaluation the Ferguson riots happened, and then there were also incidences in Minneapolis, Minnesota with police shooting unarmed black citizens. So, the focus on discrimination and handling stress was very real for a predominantly black population of men who "look the part" according to police. When I was interviewing the fathers during this time, they were very concerned about their well-being in terms of walking the streets and being pulled over without any incident. Just being pulled over under suspicion was very real for the fathers and yet the programs had to address these challenges and barriers. These topics were emphasized in workshops and one-on-one services.

There was diversity in how the programs offered the responsible fatherhood services. Two of the programs in our evaluation used an integrated approach where the groups met every day for approximately eight hours a day. I know Cheri's program offered a day and night program for fathers who had jobs. The other two programs offered an open entry approach, where there was a menu of services and fathers could pick and choose which services they wanted to attend. This was still in a group workshop format, but the fathers sometimes went through certain workshops with different fathers. I think with the Fathers Support Center it was more of a cohort style where you went through with mostly the same group of fathers. With the menu style approach, you could be in one class with one set of fathers, and then another day in a class with a different set of fathers.

What did we find in regard to impact? We see that for the four programs in our evaluation there were some areas in which they had success, and then there were areas where we did not find evidence of success. One of the main areas we found that the programs had an impact on was parenting. In particular, we found that fathers in the program group increased the frequency of age-appropriate activities with their children. Specifically, they reported reading to their children more, feeding their children if they had young children, and helping them with homework. We found that the programs had a positive impact on the fathers' nurturing behavior. They showed





more patience when the children got in trouble. They reported being more loving, listening more, hugging their children more.

We also found that the program had an impact on the father's economic stability. Programs had a positive impact on the number of consecutive quarters employed. As many of you know, that can be a challenge for men in this population who may not have the soft skills to work or take correction effectively. They may not have a problem getting a job, but keeping a job can sometimes be a challenge. What we did not find was evidence that the programs had an impact on fathers' healthy relationships, most notable co-parenting. We focused on co-parenting because not all fathers in our sample were in romantic relationships, but all the men were fathers. When we focused on their co-parenting relationships, we found that the quality of the relationships with the mother was about the same, as measured by our scale scores.

We didn't find any evidence that the programs had an impact on the fathers' mental or socio-emotional well-being. We didn't find evidence that the programs had an impact on the incidence of depression symptoms. We didn't find any evidence that the programs had any control or impact on fathers reported feelings of control over their lives, like how much does she control his life. Now I can say that one of the programs, most notably in our study, Fathers Support Center, did have a very strong impact in terms of the fathers' co-parenting relationships with the mothers and on depression symptoms.

What does that mean for the field? One of the things I'm delighted to work on is the ASPIRE Project, because I think it has a lot of potential to build on what we learned from the PACT study. Under ASPIRE, with Insight and Mathematica we're exploring ways that state and local TANF programs and their partners meet the needs of noncustodial partners. As you know, OFA administers the TANF program and in this role offers support to TANF agencies and their partners to meet the current challenges and help agencies recognize areas that may warrant greater attention. One way to address challenges that NCPs face is for programs that serve NCPs, such as our programs, to partner with their state and local TANF agencies. This is key because while, in the PACT study we found that the programs had success in some areas like parenting and moderate success with economic stability, we did not find evidence that the programs impact increased earnings or fathers' child support contributions.

In a sense, TANF funds may help broaden and intensify services available to noncustodial parents. For ASPIRE, the goal is to identify evidence informed or innovative strategies to improve the readiness and engagement of noncustodial parents, with a specific focus on economic sufficiency. How can we fan the fire? Well one obvious way is to use TANF funds to serve noncustodial parents. As Lisa mentioned, for a lot of programs TANF funds have the





potential to be a more stable source of income. With some of the responsible fatherhood grants, they're what, four years?

Cheri Tillis: Five.

Dr. Covington: Five years. There's no guarantee that the programs are going to get that grant again. TANF funds offer a more sustainable and stable stream of income, such that if the programs did not get the grant, they could still serve fathers in their area. There are some very notable examples of promising ways to use TANF funds. You could fund a fatherhood program, as in Arapaho County, and Sarah can talk about that. One of the notable fatherhood initiatives, the Kansas Fatherhood Initiative, is administered by Kansas Child Support Services and they contribute TANF funds to serve noncustodial parents in 20 of the state's counties. The funds are used to contract with five community-based organizations to provide workforce, fatherhood, and healthy relationship co-parenting services. Connections to Success is an example of one of those community organizations, and fathers who graduate from the program are eligible for a reduction in their state owed arrears. Lastly, NCP Choices which focuses on workforce development services and monitoring child support payments. The program serves any noncustodial parent, not just those who are behind on their child support, but any noncustodial parent who's unemployed, is legally and physically able to work, and resides in the workforce development board service area. The Texas Workforce Commission provides two-thirds of the program funding from available TANF discretionary funds. Are there any practitioners in the room who provide services to nonresident fathers, who receive TANF funding to do so?

Participant: We use TANF funding for substance abuse programs.

Dr. Covington: We're going to have two people come up and talk about the services they offered and their relationships, and then afterward I can point you to a number of briefs. Lisa might be able to talk more about that as well. Next, we have Cheri.

Cheri Tillis: My name is Cheri Tillis and I'm Executive Director of the Fathers & Families Support Center in St. Louis, Missouri. I've been with the organization for approximately 15 years and I think the beauty of that is I was able to start as a case manager and get my hands dirty. My feet were tired because I was able to really get in there and work on the program, fight with the grant writers to make sure that what we were writing for was something that was doable. Our clients are ages 18 and up, all with a child 18 or under. The majority of them are unemployed and/or underemployed, meaning they may be in minimum wage jobs and/or part-time, temporary employment. The median age for our clients is 25-42 and 96 percent that we serve are African American.





A significant percentage of those are the reentry population, for which we have a partnership with both our state and federal systems. First and foremost is our use of trauma informed services first thing in the morning every day that they come, because every day when they leave, they've experienced something at home, in their neighborhoods, or within themselves that may have caused them to have issues with showing up. One of the tools we use is a "What's up?" circle. In What's Up?, you're able to come in, get in the circle and unpack. What we want to know is how you are doing, what happened last night, what did you do with your children? Those three questions enable them to unpack what actually happened. Did I make an effort to see my child? How did that affect me if I wasn't able to? What type of communication am I having with the mom of my children?

We also employ family therapists and social workers that are actually working hands-on with the participants to make sure that circle is one that stays positive and that we are able to address any issues that come about. I've seen laughter and I've seen tears. In addition, we focus on career pathways. Between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m., we focus on our responsible father, healthy marriage, male health and wellness, and reproductive care; as well as financial stability and economic education through Money Smart's curriculum. They have an hour for lunch, and then in the afternoon we give them the opportunity to go to a practicum worksite, computer classes, GED classes, and/or skills credential training.

I just heard someone ask the question, "Are you going to tell us how to get the funding?" Yes, because one of the ways that we are able to provide a robust service as this is by reaching out to the Department of Labor, local foundations, the State of Missouri child support and TANF dollars, in order to put together the holistic program that we have. Within our comprehensive case management model, each of our participants have five staff they work with on a daily and weekly basis. They have a classroom facilitator, social worker, career advisor, attorney, and a family therapist. Those practitioners come together biweekly to discuss each one of the participants that are in the classes. We compare notes because something that may have been shared with one of the practitioners may not have been shared with the others. We then put together the best plan that we can for that individual.

When we first began receiving federal dollars we said we couldn't discriminate; but when we were asked why we didn't provide this for moms, we would say because we're the Fathers Support Center, and assumed that with the amount of the mother serving organizations that we had locally, that these things were being touched upon. What we came to learn was that they weren't. The courts offered us a small contract to begin doing a mother project. We would ask the fathers for the information of the moms of their children. Our social workers would reach out to them and let them know what the father was participating in, and invite her to a very similar project.





Our mothers project is called PIP and runs the same six weeks. We have a modified schedule because they are usually the custodial parent and have to get the children to school and be there when they get home. Our goal is to establish co-parenting agreements, which you all know is extremely difficult, depending on the nature of the romantic relationship and/or some of the scars that have been left behind. Our social workers work hard to mend those.

When we first started out with the PACT study, some of the challenges we were seeing were the norms in the relationship and how could we address those in a way that they understood that this is not normal. In our group we have a women's panel. One of the most profound parts of our curriculum is that our fathers get to ask questions of women that they may approach or date, the type of women they would encounter anywhere, and they get to have that perspective from them. Also, in that cohort model you may have a father who is 19 years old with one child, and a 32-year-old with three children who is a little further along in his maturity that can give advice. The other caveat to how we try to address those challenges is we actually hire practitioners who have been a part of the population.

Some of our program graduates are now our facilitative staff. Another challenge we saw was establishing effective partnerships, and that's even internal. When we initially started the PACT study we were serving approximately 350 men per year, every one that applied was able to come in. Things were good and we were successful. When the PACT study came on the scene, we had to form a treatment and control group, so establishing the partnership within started first. I had social workers and case managers that were dead set against turning anyone away for services. It was a lot of training and developing. Our partners in the community who had referred clients for years, stopped referring clients. We had to go back and educate the importance of why we need to do this, what it would do for the practice, how this will inform a later project, and how this can improve. One of the opportunities that we were able to show through this work was the legal assistance that we offered.

Earlier I mentioned the five staff, one being an attorney. This is something that hadn't really been done. Our legal advocates are able to pull warrants, address any types of barriers they [fathers] have with child support enforcement, and we actually invited child support enforcement in. One of the things the fathers learned is that child support are not the enemy, they're the partner, and we're going to work together to address what the issues are. Whether that's modification or visitation, we'll work through it through the courts or through information. Another opportunity we had was with mental health and nutrition. As I alluded to earlier, on staff, we have family therapists who are able to offer those insightful services. A large portion of our participants were showing up depressed. Some of that was because they were self-medicating a diagnosed or undiagnosed disability.





Once we started conducting drug tests, we were able to see who we needed to provide additional services for. How is that going to move the needle with the depression that they're having? How can we more appropriately provide them services before we advocate for them to have access to their children? I think that if I were to leave you with anything, it would be that when working with your families sometimes you have to take a step back to take a step forward.

Sarah Culp: My name is Sarah Culp and I'm with the Arapahoe County Child Support Services. I am a child support caseworker and work with the Parents to Work program. I've also worked with the CSPED grant. We were Parents to Work, then CSPED and now we're back to Parents to Work. The only thing that's really changed is that we've been able to grow and learn from mistakes we might have made, and our funding stream is different.

I'm one of two caseworkers in our office. We have over 14,000 child support cases with 65 employees, and two of us doing Parents to Work. Along with that, we have two workforce specialists from the Arapahoe/Douglas Workforce that are housed in our office; a one stop shop. We don't trust anyone to walk across the street and say, "Hey, I'm going to go over here to do this," because something else might come along, so everything is in the office, but together we're Parents to Work.

We take a social services approach to assist in gaining responsible parenting for noncustodial parents, and since late 2017 we've also included the custodial parties. It's designed to assist parents who are willing but unable to pay child support. Our barriers are the exact same barriers that Reggie and Cheri talked about. In fact, our demographic is the same. While we provide all of the support and services to the noncustodial parent, they do all the heavy lifting. This is not a handout program, this is a hand up, and we're willing to help anyone who's willing to help themselves. That's a very clear message that we give at the onset; if you're coming in you must be willing and able to help yourself. Our designed approach includes intensive case management for each individual parent, creating a plan, and holding that parent to the plan. Navigating the parent to the services available and conducting regular follow up with that parent. [We help them with] job readiness and job search in our onsite resource room, equipped with computers that have career assessments and resume building software built in. We also provide other types of classes, interview skills, and resume writing. We have onsite job fairs, and employers that come in weekly that can hire right on the spot.

The idea is not just to get a job, it's to obtain a career. If our clients can't meet their basic needs, they're not going to be able to meet that child support obligation. We look to see what they really want to do. Most of my fathers will come in and tell me they will do anything because they need a job. My next question is, "Would you stand in sewage water for 12 hours a day for \$12 an





hour? Or would you flip burgers for the rest of your life just because it's a job?" Everyone says no. We look for employment that's going to start at \$15 to \$16 an hour. While that's not very sustainable, it's a beginning. \$11.10 is our minimum wage, no one can live on that, not even a 16-year-old.

We're looking to establish a relationship with our clients, and the first thing that we have to do is be willing to sit down and listen. Just listen and let them talk. Find out what they're really about, because child support is nobody's idea of a good time. They don't get up in the morning and say, "Yes, I'm going to child support today." We want them to know that we're not only there to listen, we're there to help, and we build a relationship. It is such a strong relationship that most of them don't want to leave when it's time to graduate. Our enhanced child support services also include expedited modifications, possible arrear forgiveness, and that's primarily state funding. However, I will tell you that I've had moms come in and say, "I can see how hard he's worked, I want to forgive that \$27,000." I had one gentleman with three cases, and he owed about \$30,000 altogether. All three moms forgave the money. It's not something I'm going to advocate because that is their money, but I will present the idea to them if they're willing to work with the dad.

Oftentimes the caveat is, "He just has to stay current. He has to stay involved with my child. He has to do what he says he's going to do." To that end, how do we build that trust with these dads and the moms that come in? We're honest. We speak with authenticity. We are very transparent, and they know right away, I am child support, I am going to try and get this order taken care of, but is it the right size order, let's look at that. If it's not, then we'll handle it. We've heard what their barriers are for not being able to pay child support. Homelessness is a huge issue in Colorado, also mental health, substance abuse, legal concerns, and justice. Approximately 80 percent of my caseload has some form of felony in their background. That's a big barrier for them to try and find a job. Some of them can't stay away from legalized marijuana, and that prevents them from getting a job as well.

Not being able to see their children is a huge barrier because it builds that anger. Mom's angry because dad's not paying child support, dad's angry and won't pay child support because he doesn't get to see his children. It's a relationship building with all parties because, as a child support caseworker, I work with both parties. I work probably more intensively with dad or the payer, than I do with the other, but I do build that relationship with both sides. When someone comes in, first thing I'm going to do is go back and call, "Hey, I'm Sarah, I'm your new caseworker, tell me about you, about your children, is there something I can do to help you? Is there a resource you need?" Again, we're not a handout program, but I can provide resources.

The parents are referred to us by other caseworkers, enforcement, and other agencies within the department of human services. Barriers come in many forms, and so as Cheri said, sometimes we





don't all get the same story, but the idea is to build that trust so that we have that openness because we know how to help someone move to the next level. As far as our funding goes, we use both county and TANF funds. About \$200,000 comes from our county and \$400,000 comes from TANF. We're able to pay the salaries of the workforce and provide supportive services. Driver's license is important to most people, so we'll help them with the reinstatement fee, provided they're doing what they need to do.

What do they need to do? They need to comply with their agreement and commitment to the program. That's 12 hours a week of job search, that's what we're asking for. Within that 12 hours we have our relationship classes, nurturing fatherhood, motherhood workshops, father support groups, and relationship skills workshops, all of which is included in that 12 hours each week. The idea is that it's very easy to comply. To come in two or three days a week, sit down with your caseworker, and really pump out the work. Meeting TANF goals, all of our relationship classes will help toward that, they're all free. Anybody in the county can attend if they're receiving services in Arapahoe County, we pay for that. Our rate of return on the investment, I take my success wherever I can find it. They're small sometimes, but just that small success is something to build on.

We heard a lot today about what dads need to hear. They need to hear they're doing a good job. "Hey, I'm really proud of you, you're doing what you need to do." It makes it easier to walk through that child support door because they have to go past the security guard, down the stairs, walk in, talk to the receptionist who's not always in the best mood, and then they have to wait. Wait for us to come out. But I have dads that come in with smiles on their faces. They're happy to be there, because they know they're going to receive assistance and they're going to have someone who actually cares about them, and sometimes that's just a hug. I'm not afraid to give a hug, I am a hugger. I believe that you have to have that human element, or you aren't going to reach anybody, and these people are broken. A lot of them come to us very broken. We help them to establish parenting time; that's the hardest thing to do, to get past that anger, on both sides. But dads are asking for it, and so that's my goal this year to try and be a little more successful.

We offer mediation, but we can't force it. We can't force the other party to come in. We pay for the mediation, but they don't want to come in because there's a barrier there. We're about 65 percent successful in getting parties to come in, but sometimes it's a year-long process. We've all heard don't take no for an answer, we've told our clients not to take no for an answer when they're dealing with the courts, and I just can't take no for an answer.

There's a child out there that deserves both sides, and unless it's detrimental to that child, there's really no reason, in my book, for them not to be able to see their parent. By linking child support





efforts with employment programs, we're establishing relationships with other agencies and continuing education efforts. We need to find the financial resources. Challenges initially started with 65 people not being onboard with what we do. They're child support caseworkers that have been doing it a long time. Their job is to get the money in. I've been doing this for five years and I think I'm winning some over. The idea is we should all be able to talk to a parent and help them with some of these resources. We should all be able to help a parent. It's not just Parents to Work, because not everybody needs intensive job search. Not everybody has the barriers that we offer resources for.

Establishing a retention of parent participants is hard. Some of them say, "I just have to work." They go find that temp day job, and they find a reason why they can't come in. Holding someone to that, helping them learn to be more, to have the determination that's needed to succeed; they've never had that before. A lot of my clients are individuals that started off in foster care and some of them aged out. Some of them went from foster care to juvie, and then from there to DOC. They know a few things, but they don't have that determination. I have a young man, 12-time convicted felon. The one thing he says to me on a regular basis is, "Miss Sarah, it's hard to be legitimate." "I can go to work, I can put my 40 hours in, I can get a paycheck for \$80, but I could have made that money on the street corner in two hours." So, what's the pull? The pull is we have to keep reminding them what the goal is. The goal is to be the better parent. To be that person that's providing for their child and educating them on what child support really is. Yes, there's a lot to it, that monetary half, but the other half of it is far greater. What are you giving to your child? We have served approximately 800 people in the past five years that I've been in this program. I carry a caseload of about 100 people on average. The average enforcement caseworker has 800 clients. How are they going to give everybody what they need? They don't have that amount of time in a day. How many of you are child support people in here? You probably know what I'm talking about. Your day is full.

We want to be able to meet all the guidelines and state goals that are set for us. I just want to be successful. Every Friday I look for those success stories because that carries me through the weekend. Basically, we want to eliminate poverty and we want individuals to run to child support, not run away from us. Thank you.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Thank you Reggie, Sherry and Cheri. We have a bit more time for questions and answers. Please introduce yourself and where you're from.

Participant: I'm Mervil Johnson from Fort Worth, Texas, Workforce Board. Our programs parallel pretty much the same. I wanted to start with you Sarah, about the demographics being the same in Colorado's as the ones that were talked about in Reggie's presentation.



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Office of Family Assistance



National
Responsible
Fatherhood Clearinghouse
fatherhood.gov



Sarah Culp: Very similar.

Participant: Primarily black and Hispanic?

Sarah: Yes.

Participant: One of the differences with the Texas Workforce Commission, we have contractual outcomes of employment, placement and retention. The requirement under our contract to receive TANF dollars is 50 percent placement and 65 percent retention for six months. We follow them for six months. I was wondering when you talked about your ROI, what do you include. By the way, our placement is at 94 percent and our retention is 85 percent, so we're blowing our outcomes out of the water.

Sarah Culp: I'm child support, so I don't know what our Workforce Board, AD Works [Arapahoe/Douglas Works], actually does in terms of how they gauge it. I can tell you that a lot of our people could have a job in two weeks, but keeping the job is the issue. I have one gentleman that I have issued 28 income assignments since January 2nd of 2018. He's not at any of those jobs. That's my challenge and he's also my opportunity. I know that they also look at the average rate of placement and retention. AD Works has a lot of perks built in. One of the perks for our individuals is if they go to work and they're meeting full child support payments (monthly plus their arrears payment) for six months, they're going to get a \$200 check. That's a big incentive for individuals that are living hand to mouth. If they do this for a full year, they're going to give them another check for \$500. At that point they're going to graduate from Parents to Work. Some do come back because things happen. AD Works is really big on perks so they found that, that's just a bonus for doing what you should be doing, but for individuals that have had difficulty with that determination and being able to find employment, it's a big deal.

Participant: I'm Ed Davies from Chicago with the Power of Fathers initiative. By design, our program is a father only support and intervention, and we just finished our evaluation for our last two years. Reggie, similar to the results that you had from your study, the one area that we're seeing no significant increase in is co-parenting, and that's primarily because we interface with the men. Are there any best practices or promising practices you would recommend if you're a father only support program? How can you impact co-parenting?

Cheri Tillis: I think one of the interesting things that we have built within our program is a family bonding outing. Over the course of the six weeks, once they make it through orientation, the social workers send a letter to the moms letting them know what dad's participating in, and ask if the children can participate in week five in a bonding outing. That gives us four weeks to work on that relationship through phone calls and/or conversation. The first thing we do is teach





our fathers it doesn't matter what happened, humble yourself, apologize, go have the conversation, ask nicely. Usually that cracks the door. The other thing is the fathers can come and meet with the family therapists by themselves; but, they can also bring the mom there and hash it out in that session. Then, of course, we have the legal advocates and assistants to put together those plans.

How successful is that? Sometimes it goes really well; and then, sometimes it takes a much longer time. It depends on the nature of the relationship of the couple.

Dr. Covington: There's really not a lot known about what components of a responsible fatherhood program help the best with co-parenting. I know the ACF is funding work being conducted by Child Trends, looking at best practices to help fathers with their co-parenting relationship. If you read the PACT report and if you read the implementation report, Cheri's program had solid impacts on co-parenting. Again, we don't know which component of that is responsible for the impacts, but I learned a lot as a husband just by sitting in on their sessions, so it worked for me.

Participant: My name is Sydney Frye from the Rochester, Minnesota FATHER Project. We have a different service delivery model because we're replicating the co-parenting model within our local county child support agency. We have our career specialist that's co-located within child support. The challenge is getting CSOs to refer to us; because in their mind, the perception is that it's more work. We're losing a little bit of traction, so we're retrofitting a lot of times, or identifying fathers from outside referrals with open child support cases, so we're also looping in child support that way. I'm curious, in particular to Sarah, how you've engaged child support enforcement officers around the benefit of referring those that they're working with.

Sarah Culp: I understand the challenge. Initially when we started, we were called the fluff team. We weren't fully respected by the other child support caseworkers. By bringing them in, and actually sitting in on an interview, they gained a new respect and a better understanding of what we actually were attempting to do. We've tried bribing, doing pizza parties, giving candy, but the biggest thing is education. As we lose people through attrition, I also think the newer employees are told, "If they're not working, you refer them to Parents to Work." and we get the referrals. There was a period of time that we literally went in and pulled some of their cases that didn't have any money coming in and we were cold calling. Cold calling's never really the best. It's better if the caseworker can say, "You know what, somebody from Parents to Work is going to call you." I do a lot of recruiting, I go to court, so we've engaged the court as well. The court will order people to contact us now, so we go to contempt hearings and we sit outside the courtroom. The court will tell them "You go talk to Parents to Work; she's sitting right outside." It's not always the best because they're angry; but, if you can calm them down, and you can get them to a





point where they're willing to give you a phone number, I'll give them some time and then contact them.

I work in the Pro Se Office a couple times a month to offer child support information. I've had people follow me from court saying, "I want in your program," because we talk about it. Part of it starts with you. Are you a Parents to Work person? I'm very passionate about this program. I've been in child support since 1996, and this past five years is the best time I've had. It's contagious when you're enthusiastic. I think hiring the right people in this program also has a lot to do with it. I'm the oldest, and so I'm the mom of the group. I probably do mother a lot of people, but I think it has a lot to do with compassion, the patience level, and tolerance. I've had caseworkers that walk out saying, "I was ready to slap him five minutes into that conversation." It's true, but you have to work past that. I think when they realize your passion and your ability to actually get someone to talk to you, which they were doing for the 20 minutes prior to that, it changes people's perception, if they can actually see the program in process. I think that's the best recruiting method.

Participant: I'm Leah Bailey from Grand Ronde. I work with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde in Oregon. My community is a lot more rural, so I don't know if it's going to have the same sort of challenges. But one thing that I've been thinking about is that it seems like with the growing number of fathers that are getting custody, when joint custody isn't an option, there's also been an increase in competitiveness between the mother and the father, as they're going through that process. It increases, getting in each other's way and trying to make each other look worse. It seems like that would be a big hindrance for what you are doing. If so, how do you help break those barriers, because both parents are wanting custody, but really both of them are totally adequate to have custody, so it's not becoming a fight over the children.

Cheri Tillis: That comes up in our program quite often. In fact, when we added the mother's project, we had two parents that specifically came to the organization because, in prior years, custody had been awarded to the father. What we do through curriculum, though, is to show the importance and the health of the child, so we strongly focus on making sure that you enter into this with the best interest of the child at heart. Sometimes you have to put your own feelings aside and remember what the goal is, so that's constantly reinforced, and the question is asked, "Are you doing this for you and your ego, and to win the fight? Or are you doing this for your child?"

Dr. Covington: For another project, we were looking at ways to engage fathers in child welfare. One of the things that we found is that sometimes the mother won't tell the child welfare staff about the father. What one study did was they gave the caseworkers a script, or the child welfare frontline staff a script, and they put a paragraph in about the importance of fathers for children.





They found that it led to a higher percentage of mothers giving them information about the fathers.

Participant: My name is Karen Hebert, 4D [child support] director in New Hampshire. I was curious about the TANF and county funding. You have 14,000 cases in your county, and you've provided services to 800 individuals over the last five years, which is great. What was the funding from TANF and the funding from your county? What do those dollars look like? And if we can briefly talk offline about your approach to requisition that funding, I'm sure there's competing forces for those dollars.

Sarah Culp: I don't actually request; I just try to spend. Our assistant director Bob Prevost is the one that is able to obtain that funding. We have \$200,000 that they've worked into the budget that the county gives us for our program. We receive \$15.1 million a year in TANF funding and \$400,000 of that is dedicated to Parents to Work. We use those funds in a number of ways. We buy boots if someone needs to go to work or tools if they're going to be in an apprenticeship. Everything has to be job related; but we have purchased clothing because someone did not have more than a pair of shorts and a shirt on their back and needed to go to work at a construction site. We have also paid some rent and care repairs. We provide transportation in the form of a bus pass or gas vouchers. For someone to come in and say, "You know, I'm making \$14 an hour, I've got to pay \$495 to child support, that leaves me very little money, how am I going to get to work?" The transportation and having a driver's license are both things that are big draws for us. A lot of people are saying, "I can't wait to get into your program, I can't wait." Then some are like, "Yeah, let me think about it for nine months." They do and eventually they call. We're not going to get everyone, it's not always the right time for someone to enroll. Sometimes they come in and they think they can, and they just don't have it in them to commit right now and be able to meet all the obligations they have.

Participant: My name is Jarvis from the Maryland Department of Health. I currently work with the maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting program. The program isn't exclusively for mothers, as the prominent caregivers, it's for the children. We have a few fathers, but we're starting an initiative to look into the fatherhood piece because we serve about 1,000 families a year. I'm looking for suggestions as our home visitors are not social workers, they're parent professionals. We don't give direct services in the home, we refer to different services after we do assessments and screenings. How can we have sustainable fatherhood engagement in our programs, even though we're not necessarily focusing in on the complete two generation approach, with the mother and father, just one primary caregiver?

Cheri Tillis: We had a similar project with an agency called Nurses for Newborns where the nurses went into the homes and decided that it would be good to try and engage the fathers. How





we worked that out is what's important to the father; what are the barriers that he's facing and having that conversation directly with him. Our project initially gave permission to the moms to say whether or not the dad could participate, so initially we didn't get any participation because some of that is a power thing. We changed that to getting involved with him, finding out what's going to help him be the best dad he can be to his child. Oftentimes it would be a job, because fathers have it in their minds that they are the provider and the job is key. Make sure they understand what the services are and how you can get them connected to things important to them. Everything else will come out later.

A lot of the services that we provide came through listening and identifying clients' needs.



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Office of Family Assistance



National
Responsible
Fatherhood Clearinghouse
fatherhood.gov