

**Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers:  
Final Impact Report for the Pilot Employment Programs**

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**by Kye Lippold, Austin Nichols, and Elaine Sorensen**

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## Executive Summary

In 2006, New York launched five pilot programs aimed at boosting the job prospects—and child support payments—of low-income noncustodial parents (most of whom are fathers). These parents often face multiple employment barriers, which affect their ability to pay child support. Conventional means of collecting child support have tended to be ineffective for this population. In response, New York policymakers launched the Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative to help these parents become more financially and emotionally involved with their kids.

This initiative was based on the success of New York’s welfare reform, which emphasized work requirements, expanding employment services, and increasing the state earned income tax credit (EITC). As a result, this initiative consisted of two innovative approaches: employment and support programs for low-income noncustodial parents and a state refundable EITC for noncustodial parents who pay the full amount of their current child support obligations for the tax year and meet other eligibility requirements.

The New York Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), which oversees the initiative, contracted with the Urban Institute to evaluate the initiative. Prior reports by the Urban Institute have examined the implementation of the pilot employment programs and the state noncustodial parent EITC. This report measures the impact of the pilot programs on the employment and child support payments of the participants in the pilot programs.

### Background

More than one-quarter of all children in the United States live apart from one of their parents and nearly 30 percent of these children are poor. Child support is an important source of income for these families. It lifts a million people out of poverty every year and represents, on average, 40 percent of the income of poor custodial parents and their children when they receive it. However, less than half of poor custodial families receive child support.

The national child support program collects substantial amounts of child support every year. In FY 2010, it collected \$26 billion. The New York child support program collected \$1.6 billion that year. Most child support is collected through automatic income withholding and thus the child support program works well for families in which the noncustodial parent is steadily employed. The program is less effective for families in which the noncustodial parent does not have a steady job.

The secular decline in employment and earnings of less-educated men, especially African American men, over the past 30 years has made it more difficult to collect child support over time. Most noncustodial parents have at most a high school education and a disproportionate share are African American. Thus, the secular decline in the earnings and employment of this group of men has meant that more noncustodial parents lack a steady job.

Most unpaid child support is owed by noncustodial parents with little or no reported earnings. New York has a particularly high proportion of noncustodial parents in this situation.

In 2009, an estimated 291,819 noncustodial parents in New York owed back support and had less than \$10,000 in reported earnings that year. Many of these parents face multiple employment barriers that affect their ability to pay child support, including intermittent employment, limited education, and criminal records. These employment barriers are often compounded by other circumstances of poverty, such as unstable housing, lack of access to transportation, and no health insurance.

### **The Intervention**

The Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative included a pilot program to test the effectiveness of providing employment and other support services to low-income parents behind in their child support. OTDA contracted with five large, well-established organizations to provide the services. These organizations operated in four cities: Buffalo, Jamestown, Syracuse, and New York City.

The contracting agencies used a case management model to deliver services: participants worked with a case manager to assess their needs, develop a service plan, and manage service delivery. The services focused on employment and included job readiness training, job search assistance, and job placement. Some sites offered job skills training, transitional jobs, and work supports. Each site also provided parenting or relationship skills workshops and child support-related services.

The pilot programs used a variety of methods to recruit participants. Some pilots relied almost exclusively on the family courts for referrals. Others received relatively few court referrals and relied instead on internal referrals, advertisement, and outreach. One program was co-located in a high-volume one-stop career center and received large numbers of referrals from the center.

Each contracting agency had a relationship with its local child support agency, but the nature of the relationship varied. At one site, the local child support agency was the contracting agency and played a central role in the day-to-day operations of the pilot. At other sites, the local child support agency had a supportive role that mostly involved verifying eligibility, resolving individual child support issues, and conducting child support workshops.

### **Participant Characteristics**

Over the course of the demonstration (October 2006 to September 2009), the pilot programs served 3,668 participants. Based on data collected by the pilot programs, these participants were a disadvantaged population. An estimated 72 percent had an arrest record, 79 percent had at most a high school education, 52 percent lived rent free with friends or family, and only 30 percent held a job in the three months before enrolling in the pilot program. Despite these barriers, more than half (61 percent) reported receiving no public benefits.

Nearly all the participants were men (93 percent) and most (78 percent) were between the age of 25 and 45. Most were racial minorities (58 percent black, 23 percent Hispanic) and most had never been married (69 percent). The average participant had two children who did not live

with him. More than half (56 percent) had weekly contact with their nonresident children in the month before the program started; 27 percent had no contact.

## Results

To assess how participants were affected by the pilots, we compared their outcomes with those of a comparison group of nonparticipants selected using a non-experimental procedure called propensity score matching. Our analysis shows that participants experienced gains in wages and employment in the first quarter following their enrollment in the pilot program—and those gains continued for at least a year after enrollment, the length of time we followed participant outcomes. (This analysis was limited to men because so few women were enrolled in the programs.) Participants earned an average of \$986 more than nonparticipants in the year after enrollment, a 22 percent increase in earnings. Their earnings increased more than nonparticipants' earnings and stayed at that level for the following year. Participants were also 19 percent more likely than the comparison group to be employed in the year after enrolling in the program.

Child support outcomes were similarly positive. Participants paid an average of \$504 more in child support than nonparticipants in the year after enrollment—a 38 percent increase. The difference grew over time and remained substantial one year after enrollment. On average, participants were 22 percent more likely than the comparison group to pay child support in the year after enrollment.

## Recommendations

The evaluation of the Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative pilot projects shows that the programs successfully boosted the earnings and child support payments of low-income parents who owed back child support. After the pilot phase ended, the New York Legislature allocated \$2.7 million in fiscal year 2009 to continue the employment programs. Eight programs (four of which were in the original pilot) were selected through a competitive process to receive funding to operate programs for one year. These funds have now been spent and the Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative no longer funds employment-oriented programs.

In 2010 and 2011, the New York Legislature expanded the authority of the family courts to refer unemployed noncustodial parents to employment-oriented programs at order establishment, order modification, and order enforcement hearings if an employment program is available. However, no funding was included to operate these programs.

Employment-oriented programs that generate such large benefits for disadvantaged fathers and their children are uncommon. Given the success of these programs, allocating new funding to support these types of programs makes sense. If additional funding is forthcoming, some of the nearly 300,000 noncustodial parents in New York who have no or low reported earnings and owe back support will be helped in their efforts to secure work and pay their child support, benefiting them and their children.

## I. Introduction

### A. The Issue

More than one-quarter of all children in the United States live apart from one of their parents and nearly 30 percent of these children are poor.<sup>1</sup> Child support is an important source of income for these families. It lifts a million people out of poverty every year and represents, on average, 40 percent of the income of poor custodial parents and their children when they receive it (Sorensen 2010). Nonetheless, in fiscal year (FY) 2010, \$12.5 billion of child support went unpaid (U.S. Office of Child Support Enforcement 2010), most of which was owed by fathers with little or no reported incomes. An estimated 70 percent of unpaid back support is owed by noncustodial parents (nearly all of whom are fathers) with no reported income or reported incomes below \$10,000 a year (Sorensen, Sousa, and Schaner 2007).

New York has been particularly successful at collecting child support. The state collected 67 percent of payments due during the past two years, 5 percentage points higher than the national average. This success has been achieved despite the high proportion of noncustodial parents with little or no reported earnings in New York. In 2009, an estimated 291,819 noncustodial parents in New York owed back support and had less than \$10,000 in reported earnings that year. Although these parents could have unreported earnings, research suggests that noncustodial parents with low or no reported wage data are more similar to low-wage workers with reported data than high-wage workers (Sorensen et al. 2003).

Low-income noncustodial fathers tend to face multiple employment barriers that affect their ability to pay child support. Although most have some work experience, many work intermittently. Fewer than 10 percent have full-time year-round work, and 40 percent report being jobless for a year or more (Sorensen and Oliver 2002). Forty percent lack a high school diploma or GED, and only 6 percent report having received job-specific training or education. Many have criminal records, which can make it difficult to secure a job. These employment barriers are compounded by other circumstances of poverty. More than half of low-income noncustodial fathers report that they do not have health insurance, and half say that they are worried about being able to afford food.

Even though they may not keep up with their child support payments, many of these fathers have some contact with their children and are involved in their children's lives. According to one study, roughly 36 percent of poor noncustodial fathers (excluding incarcerated fathers) reported that they had seen their youngest child at least once a week in the preceding 12 months, compared with 27 percent who had not seen their youngest child at all during that time (Sorensen and Oliver 2002).

Although the U.S. Census Bureau does not track the earnings of noncustodial fathers, it does track the earnings of working-age men and women. Most noncustodial fathers have a high school education or less, and they are disproportionately African American (Sorensen 1997). During the past 30 years, the employment and earnings of less-educated men have declined steadily, while they have been increasing among less-educated women (Blank and Shierholz

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<sup>2</sup> Based on authors' calculations of the 2010 Current Population Survey, Child Support Supplement.



2006). These trends have been particularly stark among African Americans (Holzer and Offner 2006). The most recent “mancession” exacerbated this trend, during which unemployment rose faster for men than women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008). Further, less-educated minority men traditionally experience disproportionate employment losses during recessions (Hoynes 2000). Although recent data suggest that male employment is recovering more quickly than female employment from the last recession, the secular downward trend in employment and earnings among less-educated men still prevails.

These secular trends in the U.S. labor market have made collecting child support more difficult. Since most child support is collected through automatic income withholding, the child support program works well for families in which the noncustodial parent is steadily employed or has steady income from other means. However, the program is less effective for families in which the noncustodial parent does not have a steady job. Traditional debt-driven enforcement tools, such as imposing liens, revoking drivers’ licenses, and incarceration, are not particularly effective for low-income noncustodial parents.

## **B. New York’s Response**

New York policymakers chose to implement an initiative directed at improving the employment prospects of low-income noncustodial fathers and their ability to provide financial support for their children. In June 2006, the New York Legislature enacted the Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative, which authorized the implementation of two innovative approaches to help address the problem of noncompliance with child support orders among low-income noncustodial parents.

The first provision of the legislation authorized funding for pilot programs in five sites that would provide employment and other supportive services to low-income noncustodial parents.<sup>2</sup> These pilot programs aimed to help low-income noncustodial parents find and keep a job so they could better contribute to the economic and social well-being of their children. The second provision established a state refundable earned income tax credit (EITC) for noncustodial parents with low earnings who paid the full amount of their current child support obligations in a given year and were otherwise eligible for the credit.<sup>3</sup> The goal of this policy was to encourage low-income noncustodial parents to financially support their children by assisting those who complied with their current support orders. The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) took the lead role in administering this initiative.

New York selected this approach because of its success with welfare reform. Since the mid-1990s, New York has used both “carrots” and “sticks” to reform its welfare program. A major element of the stick was strengthened work requirements for welfare recipients coupled with an expansion of welfare-to-work programs to help welfare recipients find work. Increasing the New York state EITC, from 7.5 percent of the federal EITC in 1994 to 30 percent in 2003, was a major component of the carrot.<sup>4</sup> During this period, the number of people receiving cash

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<sup>2</sup> NY Social Services Law § 335-c.

<sup>3</sup> NY Tax Law § 606 (d-1).

<sup>4</sup> New York Department of Taxation and Finance, Office of Tax Policy Analysis, *Earned Income Tax Credit: Analysis of Credit Claims for 2005*, August 2007.

assistance declined by more than 60 percent,<sup>5</sup> the statewide child poverty rate declined from 25 to 20 percent, and the employment rate among single never-married mothers increased from 50 to 70 percent.<sup>6</sup> Given these impressive reductions in child poverty and welfare dependency, the New York Legislature was willing to try a similar two-pronged approach to address another apparently intractable problem: that of increasing employment and child support payments among low-income noncustodial parents.

### C. Scope of This Report

OTDA contracted with the Urban Institute to evaluate this initiative. This report is the fourth report that the Urban Institute has prepared for OTDA. The purpose of this report is to discuss the impact of the pilot programs on the employment and child support payments of program participants. The prior three reports provided a preliminary view of the pilot programs at the second anniversary of the initiative, a process report of the pilot programs, and an implementation report on the New York noncustodial parent EITC. These reports are available on the Urban Institute web site (<http://www.urban.org>).

This report measures the impact of the pilot programs on the employment and child support payments of program participants using a scientifically rigorous non-experimental method, which consists of using propensity score matching to identify a comparison group and regression analysis to measure the differences between the participants and comparison group. Before presenting these results, we provide an overview of the pilot programs and describe the characteristics of the program participants.

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<sup>5</sup> E. J. McMahon, director of the Empire Center for New York State Policy, presentation at *Welfare Reform Turns 10*, Empire Center for New York State Policy, October 26, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Doar, commissioner of the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, presentation at *Welfare Reform Turns 10*, Empire Center for New York State Policy, October 26, 2006.

## II. Overview of New York's Pilot Program for Noncustodial Parents

The ultimate goal of New York's pilot program for low-income noncustodial parents was to boost their financial and emotional involvement with their children. To achieve that goal, OTDA contracted with five large, well-established organizations to provide employment and other support services to low-income noncustodial parents. These organizations provided services in four cities: Buffalo, Jamestown, Syracuse, and New York City. The contracting agencies implemented a case management model to deliver services: participants worked with a case manager to assess their needs, develop a service plan, and manage service delivery.

### A. Goals of the Pilot Program

The pilot program had three main goals:

1. **To increase the employment and earnings of unemployed or underemployed noncustodial parents (largely fathers).** It was anticipated that most participants would face multiple employment barriers, including low education levels, spotty employment histories, and criminal records. Thus, the challenge for these programs was to help participants find work as quickly as possible, but also to try to help them find better-paying jobs.
2. **To increase child support payments.** The frequency and level of child support payments are linked to parental income; hence, the goal of increased earnings is linked to the goal of greater support. However, noncustodial parents' attitudes toward parental roles and responsibilities, relations with the custodial parent, and knowledge about the child support system also affect behavior. Thus, programs sought to increase support by affecting all these factors.
3. **To support and improve parenting behavior.** Research suggests that in addition to financial support, noncustodial parents can help their children through responsible and constructive involvement in their lives (Amato and Gilbreth 1999). Further, many noncustodial parents in programs like this one have expressed a strong desire to be involved parents (Martinson and Nightingale 2008). Finally, research suggests that greater involvement in children's lives may be a motivating factor behind greater financial support (Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson 1998). Thus, the initiative was designed to help noncustodial parents become more effective and responsible parents.

### B. Organizational Structure

To achieve these goals, OTDA selected three types of organizations to serve as contracting agencies for the initiative: two government agencies (i.e., county departments of social services, or DSSs), two private nonprofit workforce development organizations, and one quasi school district (table 2.1). The contracting agencies were responsible for the contractual and fiscal management of the pilot programs. The selected agencies were all well-established organizations within their communities and had considerable experience serving low-income families.

All contracting agencies established formal relationships with other community organizations to provide case management and employment services to pilot participants.<sup>7</sup> In New York City, the two contracting agencies (Seedco and STRIVE) provided case management and employment services to pilot participants directly; however, they also contracted with other community-based organizations to provide these services in parts of the city that Seedco and STRIVE did not serve. In contrast, the contracting agencies for the upstate sites did not provide case management and employment services directly to pilot participants; instead, they contracted with other organizations in the community.

In addition to establishing formal relationships with other community organizations to provide case management and employment services, all the contracting agencies established formal relationships with other organizations or individuals to provide various other services to pilot participants (except Erie County DSS). Through these contracts, the pilots were able to provide participants with access to, for example, parenting and relationship building, legal, financial, nutrition, and mental health services. (In Erie County, DSS contracted with two community organizations, both of which provided case management, employment-related services, and other supportive services to participants.)

### C. Eligibility Criteria

The statute authorizing the pilot programs listed the following eligibility criteria.<sup>8</sup> The participant must

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 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 18 and 35 years old. However, some of the programs soon found that many recruits were outside this initial age range. The pilot sites asked OTDA to expand the age range to 16 to 45 years old, which it did in early 2007.

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<sup>7</sup> For a complete list of partners, see Sorensen, Carolyn O'Brien, and Mincy (2009).

<sup>8</sup> New York Social Services Law § 335-c.

**Table 2.1 Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative Pilot Programs**

| <b>Contracting agency</b>  | <b>Program name</b>                  | <b>Location</b> | <b>Program description</b>  |
|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| <b>Erie County Department of Social Services</b>                                       | Strengthening Families Pilot Program | Buffalo         | The Erie County Department of Social Services contracted with Erie Community College (ECC) and the University of Buffalo Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) to operate this program. ECC contracted with Lakeshore Behavioral Health, Inc., to provide a court liaison/case manager who worked at the city court in Buffalo. All other pilot-funded services were provided by ECC or EOC staff. This program relied primarily on family court referrals for recruitment.              |
| <b>Chautauqua County Department of Social Services</b>                                 | Strengthening Families Initiative    | Jamestown       | The Chautauqua County Office of Child Support Enforcement provided program oversight and identified potential participants for court referral. It contracted with Ross Innovative Employment Solutions to deliver case management and employment services and with the Center for Family Unity and the Cornell Cooperative Extension for other support services. This program relied primarily on family court referrals for recruitment.   |
| <b>Seedco</b>  | Fatherhood Program                   | New York City   | This program was operated by Seedco, a nonprofit workforce intermediary. It delivered pilot services at the Upper Manhattan Workforce 1 Career Center, which it operated. It also partnered with several organizations to deliver services, including case management, employment, fatherhood, legal, and financial services. This program relied on various methods to recruit participants, including family court referrals, internal referrals, and self-referrals for recruitment. |
| <b>Support and Training Result in Valuable Employees (STRIVE)</b>                      | Dads Embracing Fatherhood            | New York City   | This program was operated by STRIVE, a nonprofit workforce development organization in East Harlem, where it delivered pilot services. It also partnered with several organizations to deliver pilot services in other parts of New York City and with individuals to conduct relationship-building workshops and provide other support services. This program relied primarily on internal referrals for recruitment.  |
| <b>Onondaga-Cortland-Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services (OCM-BOCES)</b> | Parent Success Initiative            | Syracuse        | This program was operated by OCM-BOCES, a quasi school district that provides educational, vocational, and employment services. OCM-BOCES did not provide direct services to pilot participants; it provided oversight, outreach, referrals, training, and data management. It contracted with several organizations in Syracuse to deliver direct services to pilot participants. This program relied on various recruitment strategies, including television advertising.             |

## **D. Recruitment**

Unlike many previous fatherhood initiatives, these pilot programs met or nearly met their enrollment goals, and some far exceeded their enrollment goals. Pilot staff used various referral sources and outreach methods to recruit participants, some of which changed as the programs evolved and matured over time. All the pilots received some referrals from the family court, although the proportion of all referrals varied. Some programs relied almost exclusively on the family court to meet their enrollment goals (e.g., Erie Community College), whereas others at least initially focused more on referrals from other sources or their own outreach efforts. Seedco recruited from the high-volume one-stop center it operated, which was highly successful. STRIVE and its partner organization Fortune Society regularly recruited pilot participants from within their organizations. The Onondaga-Cortland-Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services (OCM-BOCES) relied on television advertisements during the first 18 months of the initiative, which project staff felt was a key recruitment tool.

All sites developed flyers that described available program services and distributed them at various locations throughout their communities. These locations included, for example, local child support offices, family court facilities, one-stop workforce career centers, drug and alcohol treatment centers, Planned Parenthood offices, job fairs, churches, parole offices, and other locations frequented by members of the target population. Pilot program staff also made presentations in person to numerous organizations with contacts and interest in the population eligible for program services.

Some pilot programs had outreach personnel or departments dedicated specifically to recruitment efforts for all programs and activities funded through other non-OTDA grant sources. Other sites had high-level staff who used grant funds to help their project partners recruit participants. Some pilot staff indicated that both strategies may have helped them meet their enrollment goals.

## **E. Program Services**

Based on the needs of pilot participants and available funding, each pilot program offered a range of services that varied in content, structure, and intensity. Some services were provided through pilot funding, either directly by the contracting agency or through subcontracts for specialized services. Other services were made available through existing programs administered by the contracting agency but not funded directly by the pilot programs or through referrals made to organizations in the community. The pilot programs offered the following services:

- Evaluation and needs assessments;
- Case management and follow-up services;
- Employment-related services, including job readiness assistance, job placement assistance, job skills training, transitional employment assistance, and work supports;
- Parenting, relationship, and fatherhood skills workshops;
- Assistance in obtaining visitation;
- Legal assistance, including access to attorneys or court advocates to help modify child support orders and navigate driver's license reinstatement;



- Child support–related services (not provided by attorneys or court advocates);
- Financial literacy services, including financial planning, public benefits screening, and tax assistance;
- Incentives for recruitment and participation, including monetary stipends and transportation assistance;
- Cooking classes;
- Education assistance, including help obtaining GEDs and enrolling in vocational training programs;
- Mental health and other counseling services; and
- Housing assistance.

***Case Management.*** All pilots adopted a one-on-one case management approach for providing services. In some programs, staff shared case management responsibilities for all pilot participants, while others assigned each noncustodial parent to a dedicated case manager with whom they worked closely throughout the period of participation. Staff in all programs reported that they had some type of contact with participants at least once a month, although most described more frequent interaction by phone, by e-mail, and in person, depending on participants’ level of engagement. Ongoing case management activities were directed at, 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-Related Services.*** One of the most crucial needs of pilot participants was assistance in finding and maintaining employment; as a result, most programs were designed to focus on the provision of employment-related services. Most pilots provided participants with job readiness services, which included assisting participants with résumé development, interviewing skills, work-related attitudinal training, and guidance in filling out job applications. All programs also provided participants with access to job developers, either through their own organization or through relationships with a JOBS program or one-stop center, which help pilot participants find employment through direct links to local employers.

Many programs also offered participants access to short-term job skills training programs, some of which were provided on site and free of charge. Except ECC, all the pilots offered participants employment-related supports in the form of cash stipends, transportation, or clothing assistance to help them search for, obtain, and sustain long-term employment. In addition, Seedco offered transitional employment assistance to some of its hardest to employ participants through a subcontracted partner. Some sites also provided post-employment/career enhancement services, such as helping participants find subsequent jobs, while others provided access to long-term employment-related follow-up services for graduates of their programs.

***Parenting/Fatherhood/Relationship Services.*** All the pilots provided parenting services in some capacity, but the content, structure, and intensity of these services varied by program. Most sites provided some parenting instruction or classes, but each used a different curriculum with a different focus. Some curricula emphasized traditional parenting skills, including how to foster positive parent-child interactions, proper nutrition for children, and child discipline. Others focused on improving communication skills between noncustodial and custodial parents. These

curricula tended to emphasize the development of conflict resolution and anger management skills. Still others focused on developing and maintaining healthy adult relationships and marriages. In addition to the one-on-one and group parenting instructional services that all programs offered, most programs helped arrange visitation for pilot participants to have contact with their children. Some programs had designated staff who were available to help pilot participants complete visitation petitions to obtain legal authority to visit their children, and others helped arrange actual visits.

According to some pilot staff, completing parenting workshops was not a priority for many participants. As a result, staff struggled to persuade participants to attend parenting workshops. To help address this issue, several programs continually adjusted the length, format, and location of workshops, and some even found it necessary to provide cash stipends, transportation, and other service incentives to persuade participants to complete their programs' parenting components.

***Legal Services.*** Pilot staff agreed that one of the most pressing needs of pilot participants was legal assistance, particularly for child support issues. Three pilot programs (Chautauqua, ECC, and EOC) did not have contracts with specialized partners to provide legal services to participants. The other three pilots (OCM-BOCES, Seedco, and STRIVE) did, but even among these programs, the type of legal providers and the services offered varied greatly. OCM-BOCES, Seedco, and Fortune Society (one of STRIVE's partner organizations) contracted with attorneys to provide legal services to pilot participants. OCM-BOCES chose to contract with two legal aid organizations, each of which provided access to one full-time attorney. Seedco contracted with an attorney to provide monthly one-hour legal clinics at each of Seedco's partner organizations as well as individual counseling sessions. STRIVE and its partners (except Fortune Society, as noted above) did not contract with attorneys, but instead used grant funds to employ court advocates at each partner organization.

Attorneys at OCM-BOCES, Seedco, and Fortune Society were most often asked to assist participants with legal matters related to their child support obligations. This included helping with order modification and arrears forgiveness, and helping those facing violation petitions in family court. According to the legal services providers at OCM-BOCES, their close relationship with the county child support program enabled them to address administrative enforcement measures taken against participants, resulting in quicker resolution of problems such as driver's license suspensions and inaccurate income executions. STRIVE's court advocates coached participants on how to prepare for family court (including what to wear, how to behave, and what to say), helped participants access their child support records, reviewed court documents, helped file petitions for visitation and modification, helped with driver's license reinstatements, and often accompanied participants to court.

***Child Support-Related Services.*** Pilot staff agreed that the child support system is a major source of fear and anxiety for pilot participants. As a result, helping noncustodial parents understand, navigate, and demystify the child support program was an important service goal. To this end, all the pilot programs (except ECC), offered workshops aimed at explaining how the child support program worked. Most programs also worked with pilot participants individually to assist them with various child support-related services, such as helping participants obtain



information on their child support obligations, assisting with reinstatement of their driver's licenses (which are sometimes revoked as a result of not paying child support), and completing modification petitions.

***Financial Services.*** Except ECC, all the pilots offered some type of financial services to participants, although the extent and format of these services varied. Three sites offered these services in regular group workshops, and two provided information in less formal one-on-one sessions. Group workshops covered topics including basic budgeting skills, financial security, and making ends meet while paying child support. Some pilots also helped participants obtain credit reports, provided free assistance and advice on tax preparation (including information on the noncustodial parent EITC), and conducted benefits screening. In addition, Seedco used pilot funding to pay for an innovative loan program that helped participants pay child support arrears.

***Incentives for Enrollment and Retention.*** In addition to employment-related supports and incentives to complete parenting workshops, most programs organized and sponsored father-child events, such as picnics, barbeques, and bowling outings as incentives to enroll and continue to participate in their programs. These events, along with other services, such as assistance with the driver's license reinstatement process and legal services, were considered important incentives for participant recruitment and retention.

***Other Services.*** In addition to the primary service components discussed above, all the pilots offered various other services such as GED preparation, mental health and substance abuse counseling, and housing assistance. Some services were provided to participants directly by the contracting agency or its partners, while others were provided through referrals to programs outside the initiative.

## **F. Key Links with Other Agencies**

In addition to the partners with which the pilots had established formal contracts to provide direct services to pilot participants, all the programs had relationships with other public agencies that allowed them to supplement these services. These included the local child support enforcement agency, family court, and the Department of Labor, one-stops, and JOBS programs.

***Local Child Support Agency.*** The role of the local child support agency in each pilot varied considerably. In Chautauqua County, the local child support agency was the contracting agency and was central to the day-to-day operations of the pilot. In New York City, however, the local child support agency had comparatively little contact with staff involved with the pilot. Other local agencies dedicated a high-level staff member to ensure that requests for child support information from pilot staff were addressed in a timely manner. Regardless of whether they had their own contact, pilot staff at all sites emphasized having a key high-level contact within the child support agency able to provide information for eligibility determinations, resolve problems with individual cases, and help schedule child support workshops. Apart from Chautauqua County, which used grant funds to pay for the services of a child support supervisor involved in their initiative, any services provided by child support staff were provided in kind to the pilots.

**Family Courts.** Previous fatherhood programs have typically struggled to meet their recruitment goals (Martinson et al. 2007). The five pilot programs largely avoided this problem, in part by establishing referral-based relationships with the family court. Participants who were referred to the program by family court were not generally court ordered, or mandated, to participate in the program, but they were told that if they did not participate they could face further legal actions against them, including jail. Thus, although these participants were not mandated to participate, the threat of jail for not paying their child support was usually made quite clear. Buffalo's ECC program received family court referrals before the start of the initiative, which helped this program exceed its enrollment goals. Buffalo's other program, the Educational Opportunity Center, established a referral-based relationship with the family court after struggling initially to meet its enrollment goals. Staff from both Buffalo programs attended the compliance hearings of noncustodial parents referred to them by the family court to update child support magistrates on participants' status and accomplishments.

Staff in the Chautauqua County pilot program also struggled initially to recruit participants to their program, but worked quickly to develop a relationship with the family court for referrals. Child support staff flagged cases for family court support magistrates to consider referring to the program. Support magistrates typically made referrals for the noncustodial parents in cases that had been flagged. Pilot program staff attended these hearings and met with noncustodial parents outside the courtroom immediately after referral to describe the program, conduct preliminary intakes, and schedule subsequent meetings.

OCM-BOCES did not anticipate receiving court referrals as a source for participants. However, in October 2007, the Center for Court Innovation applied for and received a federal three-year \$150,000 grant to develop a program to refer unemployed or underemployed noncustodial parents from the family court to the OCM-BOCES program. The Parent Support Program (PSP) emerged from this funding and was launched in April 2008. The PSP office is located within the Onondaga family court house and is staffed with one full-time resource coordinator and a volunteer law student. This program did not receive pilot funding but provided a steady source of referrals to the pilot.

Four of the seven partners associated with Seedco and STRIVE were employment providers for the Support Through Employment Program (STEP), a court-based employment program for noncustodial parents operated by the child support program in New York City. If a STEP referral met the OTDA pilot eligibility criteria and was interested in the services offered, the pilots enrolled the STEP participant in the OTDA pilot. Thus, some pilot participants were dual enrolled in both STEP and the pilot program. For a pilot participant enrolled in STEP, case management staff were required to complete an evaluation and submit it to STEP staff before the participant's next court date. The OCSE coordinated the delivery of these evaluations from each STEP provider to family court support magistrates.

**Local Department of Labor, One-Stop, and JOBS Program.** All pilot sites established a relationship with the local Department of Labor, one-stop center, or JOBS program, although this relationship varied among the programs. In Buffalo and Chautauqua County, these relationships were particularly important since participants there did not have access to job developers through pilot funding. ECC operated one of two one-stops in Erie County; Ross IES (the case management/employment services provider for the Chautauqua County pilot program) formerly

operated and is still co-located with the Department of Labor and the one-stop center; and EOC is co-located with the local Department of Labor, with JOBS program staff housed in an adjacent building. Given these pilots' proximity to and relationships with these agencies, it was common for pilot participants to work simultaneously with pilot program staff and a job developer from the Department of Labor, a one-stop center, or a JOBS program. In contrast, OCM-BOCES employed its own employment specialists who were housed at partner sites.

Seedco operates the Upper Manhattan Workforce 1 Career Center, and pilot participants at this site received employment services from both staff employed by the OTDA-funded pilot and additional staff and resources available outside the initiative through the one-stop. The remaining case management/employment service sites associated with Seedco and STRIVE employed job developers and had established employment programs internal to their organizations. Thus, pilot staff in New York City did not typically make referrals to the local Department of Labor, one-stop center, or JOBS program.

### III. Characteristics of Participants Served

This chapter describes the characteristics of the noncustodial parents who participated in the Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative, using information from the New York Dads Management Information System (MIS) that the Urban Institute built and managed for OTDA. The MIS was designed to collect enrollment and monthly service information for program participants, which was entered by case managers at the end of each month. The MIS generated monthly reports for each site, starting in March 2008. As a result, preliminary information was available regarding the characteristics of the pilot participants and the services received from the MIS at the end of each month during the second half of the pilot, which was shared with sites and OTDA. However, the data were always preliminary until the end of the project since some individuals had been erroneously entered into the MIS.<sup>9</sup>

The MIS data show that the noncustodial parents involved in the initiative were a disadvantaged group. Nearly all were unemployed at enrollment and most of them were not working during the three months before enrollment. The few who were working had relatively low wages. The majority of participants relied on family and friends for a place to stay, and nearly all of them were living in families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Despite their relatively high level of need, most participants reported that they were not receiving any government benefits. For most participants, their primary reason for participating in the pilot was to find stable employment. However, the data suggest that most participants faced several challenges to finding stable employment. Most participants had an arrest record and 79 percent had at most a high school diploma, factors that affected their ability to find and keep jobs.

The economic context in which these parents live posed another challenge. The greatest recession since the Depression, often called the “mancession,” began in December 2007 and ended three months before the end of the pilot. It is referred to as the mancession because it disproportionately affected men, reinforcing a long-run trend in the labor market that has substantially reduced the relative earnings of less-educated men. The unemployment rate increased in all communities in which the pilot operated, and continued to increase well after the recession ended. Unemployment rates were already high in inner cities and among African Americans and Hispanics, but these rates increased even more during the recession. All these factors—a deep recession, continued job loss in inner cities, high unemployment among minority groups, and low earnings for less-educated men—reduced the employment prospects for participants.

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<sup>9</sup> When the initiative ended in September 2009, the MIS was shut down and the data cleaned to eliminate duplicates and erroneous entries. Once this process was completed, 3,668 people were identified as served by the pilot sites throughout the life of the program. Of these records, 145 lacked a valid Social Security number (SSN) for matching to administrative data, and 763 did not agree to be included in the research analysis. Thus, 2,760 records were kept for further analysis.

## A. Demographic and Residential Information

Table 3.1 presents participants' demographic characteristics for all sites combined and by individual site. Not surprisingly, nearly all participants were men (93 percent). The New York City sites were more likely to serve men than the upstate sites, but even Jamestown and Buffalo, the two sites with the highest percent of female participants, served mostly men (89 percent of participants were male). Nearly 80 percent of participants were between 25 and 45 years old, and their average age was 34 years old. The New York City sites served a slightly older group of participants than the upstate sites, with only 7 percent under 25 years old. In contrast, almost a quarter of the participants in Jamestown and Buffalo were under 25 years old.

Most participants were black (58 percent), but the proportion varied considerably by site, from 10 percent in Jamestown to 74 percent in Syracuse. The next-largest ethnic group was Hispanics, representing 23 percent of participants. Again, this share varied among the sites, from 2 percent in Syracuse to 50 percent in Seedco. This variation tends to reflect the differences in racial and ethnic composition of the low-income families in the communities served.

Nearly 70 percent of the participants reported that they had never been married (ranging from 61 percent in Jamestown to 75 percent in Buffalo). Divorced or separated adults accounted for 18 percent of participants. Another 12 percent were currently married (ranging from 8 percent in Seedco to 20 percent in Jamestown).

Table 3.1 also shows the residential characteristics of the noncustodial parents in the initiative. Just over half the participants reported that they lived with family or friends and did not pay rent, reinforcing the image that most participants were having a difficult time making ends meet. Another 36 percent of participants were renting. A small share (6 percent) were living in a shelter or group home, and an even smaller share (3 percent) owned their home.

A large share of participants lived with their parents (30 percent), siblings (11 percent), or other relatives (13 percent). Another large share lived with their girlfriend/boyfriend (23 percent). Relatively few lived with their spouse (9 percent), reflecting the low proportion that were married. Only 13 percent of participants lived with any of their own biological children. This proportion does vary among the sites, with the lowest percentages in Seedco (7 percent) and STRIVE (9 percent) and the highest percentage in Jamestown (22 percent).

**Table 3.1 Demographic and Residential Characteristics of Noncustodial Parents in the New York Fatherhood Pilot**

| <b>Characteristics at Enrollment</b>                    | <b>All Sites</b> | <b>Buffalo</b> | <b>Jamestown</b> | <b>Seedco</b> | <b>STRIVE</b> | <b>Syracuse</b> |
|---|------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| <b>Sex</b>  |                  |                |                  |               |               |                 |
| Male  | 93%              | 89%            | 89%              | 97%           | 99%           | 91%             |
| Female  | 7%               | 11%            | 11%              | 3%            | 1%            | 9%              |
| <b>Age</b>  |                  |                |                  |               |               |                 |
| 16–24   | 14%              | 23%            | 23%              | 7%            | 8%            | 12%             |
| 25–34   | 41%              | 41%            | 50%              | 36%           | 40%           | 43%             |
| 35–45   | 37%              | 28%            | 24%              | 44%           | 39%           | 45%             |
| 46+   | 8%               | 8%             | 3%               | 12%           | 14%           | 1%              |
| Average Age   | 34               | 32             | 31               | 36            | 36            | 33              |
| <b>Race</b>   |                  |                |                  |               |               |                 |
| Black, Non-Hispanic                                     | 58%              | 65%            | 10%              | 47%           | 70%           | 74%             |
| Hispanic  | 23%              | 11%            | 10%              | 50%           | 27%           | 2%              |
| White, Non-Hispanic                                     | 18%              | 24%            | 77%              | 2%            | 2%            | 21%             |
| Other, Non-Hispanic                                     | 2%               | 1%             | 3%               | 1%            | 1%            | 3%              |
| <b>Marital Status</b>                                   |                  |                |                  |               |               |                 |
| Never Married   | 69%              | 75%            | 61%              | 68%           | 68%           | 67%             |
| Divorced or Separated                                   | 18%              | 15%            | 19%              | 23%           | 14%           | 19%             |
| Currently Married                                       | 12%              | 10%            | 20%              | 8%            | 18%           | 14%             |
| Widowed   | 1%               | 0%             | 0%               | 1%            | 0%            | 0%              |
| <b>Type of Residence</b>                                |                  |                |                  |               |               |                 |
| Rent  | 36%              | 38%            | 45%              | 32%           | 40%           | 36%             |
| Own   | 3%               | 5%             | 6%               | 2%            | 2%            | 2%              |
| Stays with Family or Friends (no rent)                  | 52%              | 52%            | 50%              | 47%           | 60%           | 39%             |
| Shelter, Group, or Halfway House                        | 6%               | 5%             | 0%               | 4%            | 9%            | 8%              |
| Other   | 4%               | 3%             | 2%               | 2%            | 10%           | 2%              |
| <b>Lives with (can indicate more than one category)</b> |                  |                |                  |               |               |                 |
| Alone   | 13%              | 16%            | 10%              | 9%            | 15%           | 13%             |
| Parent(s)   | 30%              | 34%            | 23%              | 28%           | 34%           | 26%             |
| Spouse  | 9%               | 7%             | 10%              | 10%           | 10%           | 9%              |
| Girlfriend/Boyfriend                                    | 23%              | 18%            | 31%              | 34%           | 15%           | 25%             |
| Sibling(s)  | 11%              | 14%            | 13%              | 7%            | 12%           | 9%              |
| Other Relatives   | 13%              | 15%            | 9%               | 11%           | 21%           | 10%             |
| Friends   | 8%               | 5%             | 19%              | 5%            | 4%            | 11%             |
| Biological Children                                     | 13%              | 12%            | 22%              | 7%            | 9%            | 16%             |
| Non-biological Children                                 | 6%               | 4%             | 19%              | 2%            | 3%            | 9%              |
| Other   | 1%               | 1%             | 2%               | 0%            | 3%            | 0%              |

Note: Data are from the New York Dads Management Information System.

**B. Household Income and Individual Use of Government Benefits**

Despite living in households with very little income, most participants did not receive any government benefits (table 3.2). The average annual household income was \$10,458 (ranging from \$4,408 among Seedco participants to \$16,210 among STRIVE participants). Nearly all participants lived in families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Only two programs appeared to accept participants with family incomes above that level (Jamestown and STRIVE), and they accepted only a small percentage with higher family incomes. Sixty-one percent of participants reported that they received no government benefits. This ranged from 40 percent in Jamestown to 70 percent in Seedco. Food stamps were the most common government benefit received, with 24 percent of participants reporting that they received it. Medicaid was the next most common benefit reported, followed by unemployment insurance and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

**Table 3.2 Household Income and Individual Use of Government Benefits among Noncustodial Parents in the New York Fatherhood Pilot**

| <b>Characteristics at Enrollment</b>                           | <b>All Sites</b> | <b>Buffalo</b> | <b>Jamestown</b> | <b>Seedco</b> | <b>STRIVE</b> | <b>Syracuse</b> |
|--|------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Average Household Income                                       | \$10,458         | \$13,155       | \$12,676         | \$4,408       | \$16,210      | \$7,842         |
| Percent with Household Incomes below 200% of the Poverty Level | 92               | 100            | 90               | 100           | 73            | 100             |
| Percent with the following Government Benefits                 |                  |                |                  |               |               |                 |
| Food Stamps  | 24               | 26             | 43               | 16            | 27            | 26              |
| Medicaid   | 16               | 24             | 35               | 1             | 24            | 20              |
| Unemployment Insurance   | 8                | 4              | 2                | 13            | 11            | 5               |
| TANF   | 7                | 8              | 9                | 4             | 15            | 8               |
| Other Benefits   | 3                | 3              | 4                | 2             | 3             | 3               |
| No Benefits Received   | 61               | 56             | 40               | 70            | 50            | 62              |

Note: Data are from the New York Dads Management Information System.



### C. Employment and Employment-Related Characteristics

Table 3.3 shows the precarious position that most participants faced in the job market. Limited education severely limits job opportunities, and 79 percent of the participants in the pilot sites had at most a high school education. In Jamestown, this figure reached 92 percent. Having an arrest record also hinders employment options since employers are reticent to hire people with an arrest record; an estimated 72 percent of participants had an arrest record.<sup>10</sup> Some participants reported that they had a disability that made it difficult to work. This share reached 28 percent in Jamestown.

**Table 3.3 Employment and Employment-Related Characteristics of Noncustodial Parents in the New York Fatherhood Pilot**

| Characteristics at Enrollment                                | All Sites       | Buffalo | Jamestown | Seedco | STRIVE  | Syracuse |
|--|-----------------|---------|-----------|--------|---------|----------|
| Percent with Highest Level of Education Completed            |                 |         |           |        |         |          |
| Less than 9th grade  | 6               | 5       | 7         | 9      | 4       | 6        |
| Some high school   | 31              | 36      | 28        | 31     | 29      | 28       |
| High school graduate or GED                                  | 41              | 40      | 57        | 38     | 41      | 42       |
| Some college   | 17              | 16      | 7         | 16     | 20      | 21       |
| College graduate   | 4               | 4       | 1         | 4      | 6       | 3        |
| Advanced or graduate degree                                  | 0               | 0       | 0         | 1      | 0       | 0        |
| Percent Ever Arrested  | 72 <sup>a</sup> | 65      | 69        | 37     | 76      | 79       |
| Percent Disabled   | 13              | 13      | 28        | 5      | 8       | 16       |
| Percent Employed at Enrollment                               | 11              | 2       | 2         | 17     | 22      | 9        |
| Average Hourly Wage  | \$9.98          | \$8.93  | \$8.12    | \$9.45 | \$12.65 | \$8.36   |
| Percent Employed during the Three Months Prior to Enrollment | 30              | 22      | 33        | 34     | 37      | 32       |

Note: Data are from the New York Dads Management Information System.

a. The All Sites figure excludes Seedco because Seedco case managers tended to report whether or not participants had ever been incarcerated rather than arrested.

At the time of enrollment, only 11 percent of participants reported that they were working. This figure was only 2 percent in Buffalo and Jamestown, where nearly all referrals came from the family courts, which tended to refer people who said they were not paying their child support because they were out of work. The employment rates were somewhat higher at

<sup>10</sup> Seedco is not included in this estimate because case managers in Seedco tended to report whether a participant had been incarcerated rather than arrested.



enrollment in the other sites, where many participants were self-referrals, but none exceeded 22 percent. Even when participants were working, their average hourly wage was quite low, ranging from \$8.12 in Jamestown to \$12.65 in STRIVE. Finally, 30 percent reported that they had worked in the three months before enrollment, ranging from 22 percent in Buffalo to 37 percent in STRIVE.

**D. Number of and Relationship with Nonresident Children**

The number of children living apart from a participant influences the amount of child support he or she must pay (table 3.4). Forty-four percent of participants had just one child living elsewhere, but 29 percent had three or more children living elsewhere. Participants in Syracuse were more likely than participants in other sites to have three or more children living elsewhere; 40 percent of Syracuse participants had three or more children living elsewhere.

When asked how much contact they had with their children living elsewhere during the month before enrollment, three-quarters of participants (74 percent) reported that they had seen at least one of their children in the previous month. A third of the participants reported that they had seen at least one of their children several times a week in the previous month. This varied significantly among the sites, from 47 percent in Buffalo to 18 percent in Seedco. Thus, some participants had considerable contact with at least some of their children living elsewhere. Nonetheless, 25 percent of participants reported that they had not seen at least one child for a year or more, ranging from 20 percent in Buffalo to 30 percent in Jamestown.

**Table 3.4 Number of and Relationship with Children Living Elsewhere among Noncustodial Parents in the New York Fatherhood Pilot**

| Characteristics at Enrollment   | All Sites | Buffalo | Jamestown | Seedco | STRIVE | Syracuse |
|---|-----------|---------|-----------|--------|--------|----------|
| Percent with the following Number of Children Living Elsewhere  |           |         |           |        |        |          |
| One   | 44        | 48      | 45        | 49     | 44     | 33       |
| Two   | 27        | 25      | 29        | 28     | 27     | 28       |
| Three or more   | 29        | 28      | 26        | 23     | 29     | 40       |
| Percent with the following Number of Contacts with their Children Living Elsewhere in the Month Prior to Enrollment |           |         |           |        |        |          |
| Several times a week  | 33        | 47      | 24        | 18     | 26     | 41       |
| Once or twice a week  | 24        | 20      | 30        | 29     | 26     | 19       |
| Once or twice a month   | 17        | 11      | 20        | 21     | 21     | 13       |
| No contact  | 27        | 21      | 26        | 32     | 28     | 27       |
| Percent who haven't seen Child(ren) Living Elsewhere for a Year or More   |           |         |           |        |        |          |
|   | 25        | 20      | 30        | 25     | 27     | 29       |

Note: Data are from the New York Dads Management Information System.

## IV. Impact Analysis of Program Outcomes

The impact analysis was conducted to determine how much the noncustodial parents in the program benefited from the services received, in terms of increased employment, earnings, and payment of child support.

Specifically, we asked whether the pilot program intervention led to

1. Increased employment for noncustodial parents,
2. Increased earnings for noncustodial parents,
3. Increased propensity to pay child support, and
4. Increased amount of child support paid.

To answer these questions, we used a non-experimental method, called propensity score matching, of selecting a comparison group of noncustodial parents in New York State with similar characteristics to the fatherhood program participants. Ideally, from the perspective of the impact evaluation, the pilot programs would have been conducted as a true experiment by randomly assigning potential participants to experimental and control groups. However, since random assignment was not used in this initiative, an alternative approach was used to select a comparison group. Over the years, researchers have developed several non-experimental methods for creating counterfactual comparison groups when random assignment is not used. These methods can provide evidence regarding the magnitude of program effects (Nichols 2007).

### A. Data Preparation

The data used to identify the comparison group came from administrative data provided by OTDA. OTDA provided annual data files to the Urban Institute that included child support case characteristics, demographics, and quarterly wage information for all noncustodial parent case records in the New York State child support program from 2005 to 2009. All case records met one of three conditions:

1. The case had a positive amount of current support due that year, or
2. The case was flagged as eligible for the noncustodial parent EITC, or
3. The case was open at the end of the year.

We received the last of these data files in September 2010. An additional dataset we received extended the wage information for our universe to include the first two quarters of 2010. We also received data with monthly information on child support payments, current support due, and child support arrears for noncustodial parents in the same universe, although these data covered only the period from January 2008 (when OTDA began saving monthly information for this project) through June 2010.

After receiving the data, we prepared the raw files for analysis. We first merged the data files so case records from different years were grouped together, and monthly child support information and 2010 wages were merged onto the appropriate case records using (scrambled) Social Security numbers (SSNs) and unique case identifiers. We then used (scrambled) SSNs to

identify which cases were associated with a particular noncustodial parent.<sup>11</sup> Finally, we used the (scrambled) SSNs to roll up all variables to the person level. If there were discrepancies in a person's gender or race across the years of data, we took the mode value. All other variables were aggregated separately by year, taking means or totals depending on the desired final variable. The final dataset contained 977,799 individuals, with data structured by person-year.

Next, we merged the MIS data onto the administrative file to identify which noncustodial parents in the administrative data had participated in the pilot program.<sup>12</sup> To help focus our analysis, noncustodial parents had to satisfy all the following characteristics:

- Had data records in the period of our study, from quarter four (Q4) of 2006 to quarter two (Q2) of 2009, with valid data for three consecutive years (before enrollment, in the year of enrollment, and after enrollment). Participants who entered in the third quarter of 2009 were dropped, as we did not have a full year of wage data after their enrollment. Participants who enrolled in 2006 outside New York City, in the Jamestown site during quarter four (Q4) 2007, or in the Syracuse site during quarter three (Q3) 2007 were also dropped from the analysis because there were too few participants in those cells to construct a robust matching model.
- Had at least one case in the same county as one of the four program sites (the counties of Chautauqua [Jamestown], Erie [Buffalo], Onondaga [Syracuse], or New York City). This restriction allowed us to focus on individuals in comparable geographic regions. County was determined based on the administering office for each child support case, with participants imputed as having cases in the same county as the program site where they enrolled. Nonparticipants with cases in multiple treatment counties were dropped, as were those whose zip code information contradicted their administrative county data.
- Had at least one open case (as we were interested in the behavior of individuals still involved in the child support system).
- Had a recorded age between 14 and 100 (to remove discrepant ages).
- Were male (as too few female participants were present among participants to analyze results separately by gender).
- Were not an interstate initiating case (there were too few of such cases to reliably include them in our matching procedure).
- Had an account (i.e., had an order or owed arrears payments).
- Had nonmissing data for all outcome variables.
- Had valid data for all variables used in our matching process (discussed further below).

After imposing these restrictions, 234,182 nonparticipating individuals and 1,757 participants remained in the data file. This sample of participants and nonparticipants was used to identify our comparison group for the employment outcomes. Unfortunately, to estimate monthly child support outcomes, we had to select a different universe that was restricted to records in the final year of the program (from July 2008 to June 2009). This approach was

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<sup>11</sup> If a case was marked as having different SSNs in different years, we used the value that appeared most often; 2,502 of 1,571,306 cases were modified in this way. Because cases without a recorded SSN could not be precisely matched, we dropped those cases from our analysis; this eliminated 217,680 cases (13.9 percent of the total).

<sup>12</sup> Of the 2,760 participants identified for analysis, 275 did not match to administrative data and were thus dropped from the analysis, leaving 2,485 valid participant matches.

required because we had access to monthly child support data only from January 2008 onwards and we wanted six months of child support data before enrollment to be included in the match. This restriction of the sample dropped all participants from Jamestown (as too few participants were served at that site in any month to construct a robust monthly matching model), as well as those from New York City in August 2008. The final subgroup for child support outcomes included 703 participants and 189,377 nonparticipants.

## **B. Comparing Participants with Nonparticipants**

Table 4.1 presents summary statistics for three groups: pre-program characteristics for pilot participants who met the aforementioned criteria, all nonparticipants who met the aforementioned criteria, and the final selected comparison group. In this section, we discuss the summary statistics for the first two groups: participants and all nonparticipants before selecting the comparison group. The third column in table 4.1, labeled *t*-test, indicates whether the mean value of the pre-program characteristics differs significantly between the participants and nonparticipants.

The mean values of the pre-program characteristics for the pilot participants are significantly different from those of the nonparticipants on every variable measured (except for the percent paying arrears in the prior year). For example, mean quarterly earnings for participants during the quarter in which they enrolled were \$811, while nonparticipants earned, on average, five times that amount (\$4,013). In addition, participants' quarterly earnings lagged well behind that of nonparticipants in all four quarters before enrollment. They were also less likely to be employed during the quarter of enrollment and during the four quarters before enrollment. Because individuals whose earnings have declined substantially are more likely to seek out employment-oriented services, we also measured how sharply earnings changed during the prior year, as measured by the percent difference between individuals' highest and lowest recorded quarterly wages in the year before enrollment. Table 4.1 shows that among participants, the largest change in quarterly wages was, on average, a 58 percent change during the year prior to enrollment. Among the nonparticipants, their average largest change in quarterly wages was a 39 percent change in the same period.

Pilot participants were also more likely to be black, younger, have more dependent children, and have a younger youngest child than nonparticipants. Participants were less likely to be Hispanic than nonparticipants. The custodial parents associated with the pilot participants were nearly three times as likely to have received TANF in the previous year than custodial parents associated with nonparticipants.

In general, pilot participants paid less current support and arrears, on average, than nonparticipants in the year prior to enrollment. Pilot participants were more likely to pay current support in the prior year than nonparticipants, but the average amount that they paid in the prior year was less than for nonparticipants. Pilot participants and nonparticipants were just as likely to pay child support arrears in the prior year, but the average amount of arrears paid by pilot participants was significantly lower in the prior year than that paid by nonparticipants.

**Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Participants, Nonparticipants, and Comparison Group**

| Variable   | Participants         | Non-participants     | t-test             | Comparison                   | t-test             |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
|  | [1]<br>Mean<br>(SD)  | [2]<br>Mean<br>(SD)  | [1]-[2]<br>p-value | group<br>[3]<br>Mean<br>(SD) | [1]-[3]<br>p-value |
| Quarterly wages before enrollment                |                      |                      |                    |                              |                    |
| at enrollment                                    | \$811<br>(\$1,930)   | \$4,013<br>(\$5,855) | ***                | \$842<br>(\$1,782)           | ns                 |
| 1 quarter prior                                  | \$1,057<br>(\$2,432) | \$3,969<br>(\$5,799) | ***                | \$1,085<br>(\$2,497)         | ns                 |
| 2 quarters prior                                 | \$1,385<br>(\$2,948) | \$4,140<br>(\$6,063) | ***                | \$1,398<br>(\$3,025)         | ns                 |
| 3 quarters prior                                 | \$1,585<br>(\$3,837) | \$3,964<br>(\$5,738) | ***                | \$1,655<br>(\$4,510)         | ns                 |
| 4 quarters prior                                 | \$1,647<br>(\$3,146) | \$4,048<br>(\$5,873) | ***                | \$1,617<br>(\$3,575)         | ns                 |
| Percent employed before enrollment               |                      |                      |                    |                              |                    |
| at enrollment                                    | 37.2%<br>(48.4%)     | 44.6%<br>(41.6%)     | ***                | 37.3%<br>(48.4%)             | ns                 |
| 1 quarter prior                                  | 37.3%<br>(48.4%)     | 44.8%<br>(42.2%)     | ***                | 38.1%<br>(48.6%)             | ns                 |
| 2 quarters prior                                 | 41.0%<br>(49.2%)     | 45.9%<br>(42.1%)     | ***                | 41.8%<br>(49.3%)             | ns                 |
| 3 quarters prior                                 | 39.6%<br>(48.9%)     | 45.6%<br>(42.2%)     | ***                | 40.0%<br>(49.0%)             | ns                 |
| 4 quarters prior                                 | 42.1%<br>(49.4%)     | 46.5%<br>(42.5%)     | ***                | 41.9%<br>(49.4%)             | ns                 |
| Quarterly wages, among employed<br>at enrollment | \$2,180<br>(\$2,652) | \$7,744<br>(\$6,653) | ***                | \$2,259<br>(\$2,307)         | ns                 |
| 1 quarter prior                                  | \$2,835<br>(\$3,291) | \$7,620<br>(\$6,534) | ***                | \$2,844<br>(\$3,370)         | ns                 |
| 2 quarters prior                                 | \$3,380<br>(\$3,805) | \$7,742<br>(\$6,725) | ***                | \$3,345<br>(\$3,923)         | ns                 |
| 3 quarters prior                                 | \$4,002<br>(\$5,245) | \$7,459<br>(\$6,330) | ***                | \$4,141<br>(\$6,376)         | ns                 |
| 4 quarters prior                                 | \$3,911<br>(\$3,827) | \$7,460<br>(\$6,450) | ***                | \$3,860<br>(\$4,677)         | ns                 |
| Highest % change in wages, prior year            | 57.9%<br>(46.6%)     | 39.0%<br>(35.1%)     | ***                | 58.8%<br>(46.9%)             | ns                 |
| Percent in each racial category                  |                      |                      |                    |                              |                    |
| Black  | 52.3%<br>(50.0%)     | 35.2%<br>(47.8%)     | ***                | 51.6%<br>(50.0%)             | ns                 |
| Hispanic   | 20.1%<br>(40.1%)     | 31.3%<br>(46.4%)     | ***                | 19.5%<br>(39.6%)             | ns                 |
| White, Asian, or Native American                 | 14.7%<br>(35.5%)     | 10.9%<br>(31.1%)     | ***                | 15.0%<br>(35.7%)             | ns                 |
| Missing race                                     | 12.8%<br>(33.4%)     | 22.6%<br>(41.9%)     | ***                | 13.9%<br>(34.7%)             | ns                 |

**Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Participants, Nonparticipants, and Comparison Group (cont.)**

| Variable   | Participants           | Non-                   | t-test                 | Comparison             | t-test                |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
|  | [1]                    | participants           | [1]-[2]                | group                  | [1]-[3]               |
|  | Mean                   | Mean                   | p-value                | Mean                   | p-value               |
|  | (SD)                   | (SD)                   |                        | (SD)                   |                       |
| Age of NCP   | 34.7<br>(8.0)          | 41.9<br>(10.2)         | ***                    | 34.5<br>(9.2)          | ns                    |
| Number of child support cases, prior year                  | 1.8<br>(1.3)           | 1.3<br>(0.7)           | ***                    | 1.7<br>(1.2)           | †                     |
| Number of child support orders, prior year                 | 1.1<br>(0.9)           | 0.7<br>(0.6)           | ***                    | 1.0<br>(0.9)           | ns                    |
| Number of children   | 2.6<br>(1.9)           | 2.0<br>(1.3)           | ***                    | 2.4<br>(1.8)           | *                     |
| Age of youngest child                                      | 7.1<br>(5.4)           | 12.7<br>(7.2)          | ***                    | 7.1<br>(5.7)           | ns                    |
| Current support paid, prior year                           | \$988<br>(\$2,002)     | \$1,724<br>(\$2,984)   | ***                    | \$945<br>(\$2,071)     | ns                    |
| Percent with current support paid, prior year              | 51.6%<br>(50.0%)       | 47.0%<br>(45.1%)       | ***                    | 52.0%<br>(50.0%)       | ns                    |
| <i>Current support paid among those paying, prior year</i> | \$1,914<br>(\$2,449)   | \$3,354<br>(\$3,534)   | ***                    | \$1,817<br>(\$2,581)   | ns                    |
| Arrears paid, prior year                                   | \$298<br>(\$1,017)     | \$455<br>(\$1,203)     | ***                    | \$247<br>(\$820)       | ns                    |
| Percent with arrears paid, prior year                      | 34.1%<br>(47.4%)       | 32.7%<br>(36.9%)       | ns                     | 31.9%<br>(46.6%)       | ns                    |
| <i>Arrears paid among those paying, prior year</i>         | \$940<br>(\$1,465)     | \$1,353<br>(\$2,257)   | ***                    | \$807<br>(\$1,261)     | †                     |
| Current support due, prior year                            | \$2,329<br>(\$3,447)   | \$2,536<br>(\$4,026)   | *                      | \$2,187<br>(\$4,296)   | ns                    |
| Percent with current support due, prior year               | 76.6%<br>(42.4%)       | 62.5%<br>(44.6%)       | ***                    | 76.5%<br>(42.4%)       | ns                    |
| <i>Current support due among those owing, prior year</i>   | \$3,042<br>(\$3,655)   | \$3,972<br>(\$4,701)   | ***                    | \$2,859<br>(\$4,713)   | ns                    |
| Arrears owed, prior year                                   | \$11,924<br>(\$22,969) | \$9,005<br>(\$21,994)  | ***                    | \$10,542<br>(\$23,497) | †                     |
| Percent with arrears owed, prior year                      | 81.8%<br>(38.6%)       | 63.8%<br>(42.4%)       | ***                    | 81.4%<br>(38.9%)       | ns                    |
| <i>Arrears owed among those owing, prior year</i>          | \$14,579<br>(\$24,625) | \$12,299<br>(\$24,756) | ***                    | \$12,953<br>(\$25,440) | †                     |
| Percent interstate receiving, prior year                   | 10.7%<br>(30.9%)       | 12.4%<br>(32.4%)       | *                      | 10.3%<br>(30.4%)       | ns                    |
| Percent with wage withholding, prior year                  | 22.9%<br>(42.0%)       | 33.8%<br>(41.3%)       | ***                    | 22.1%<br>(41.5%)       | ns                    |
| Percent with a custodial parent on TANF, prior year        | 28.1%<br>(44.9%)       | 12.2%<br>(28.4%)       | ***                    | 27.1%<br>(44.5%)       | ns                    |
| <b>Total in category</b>                                   | <b>1,757</b>           | <b>234,182</b>         | <b>***<sup>a</sup></b> | <b>1,757</b>           | <b>ns<sup>a</sup></b> |

Notes: Values for nonparticipants are weighted so each NCP has equal weight across years. Prior year refers to the year before enrollment. Italicized variables are excluded from the matching model.

ns = nonsignificant; †  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

a. This row provides the  $p$ -value of a Hotelling test for equality of distributions across all variables.

The average amount of current support due was slightly lower among participants than nonparticipants, but the share with any current support due was higher. Pilot participants also owed more arrears, on average, than nonparticipants in the year prior to enrollment, and the share with arrears was higher. The percentage of participants with wage withholding orders in place was lower than among nonparticipants, as was the percentage with an interstate receiving child support case.

Finally, a Hotelling *T*-squared test for overall differences between these two groups is highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). These differences underscore the importance of correcting for program selection through our matching procedure, as we discuss in the next section.<sup>13</sup>

### C. Selecting the Comparison Group

We employed a propensity score matching technique to create a comparison group of nonparticipants statistically similar to our participants at program enrollment. It is vital that these two groups are as similar as possible at program enrollment, since any difference after program enrollment will be attributed to the impact of the program in our subsequent analysis. The general approach is described by Rosenbaum (1987) and discussed more recently by Abadie and Imbens (2006), Nichols (2008), and Heinrich, Maffioli, and Vazquez (2010).

To perform our match, we first ran regression models predicting participants' and nonparticipants' probability of program participation using the variables in table 4.1,<sup>14</sup> which are summarized below:

- Demographics at program entry, including age and race/ethnicity;
- Employment and earnings histories, as measured by quarterly earnings data;
- Child support case characteristics, including the number of cases, orders, and types of orders with which the parent was associated; the number children and age of the youngest child with whom the parent had a child support case; payment history; amount of current and past support due in the prior year; and
- Whether the custodial parent on any of the child support cases received TANF in the prior year.

We ran separate matching models by quarter of entry and program county, thus allowing each participant to be matched only to nonparticipants who had cases in the same county at the same time.

Next, we used our models' predicted probabilities to create a comparison group of individuals who did not participate in the program but had similar probabilities of participation relative to actual enrollees. For this analysis, we adopted a nearest neighbor matching approach, corresponding to the method employed by Schroeder and Doughty in their study of the NCP

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<sup>13</sup> Appendix table 1 contains summary statistics for participants, nonparticipants, and the comparison group used in the analysis of child support outcomes. Participants in that analysis differed significantly from nonparticipants on most matching variables, and a Hotelling *T*-squared test of an overall difference between the groups was significant.

<sup>14</sup> Italicized variables in table 4.1 are presented for descriptive purposes but were not included in the matching model.



Choices program for noncustodial parents in Texas (2009). Thus, for each participant in turn, we selected the nonparticipant with the closest probability of participation to add to our comparison group. This matching was performed “with replacement,” allowing each nonparticipant to be matched to more than one participant (14 records were matched twice during the process). We then kept only participants and their matches in our final analysis file, which contained 1,757 participants and 1,757 comparison individuals.

The final two columns of table 4.1 present the summary statistics of the comparison group as well as the *t*-tests comparing the participants and the comparison group. The comparison group differs significantly (at a  $p < .05$  level) from participants on only one measure; the number of children supported by the average comparison group member is slightly lower. However, all other variables do not differ significantly, and a Hotelling *T*-squared test for the overall differences between these two groups is not significant. This implies that the matching procedure successfully selected comparison individuals who had the same observable characteristics as participants at enrollment.

To provide a comparison group for child support outcomes, we employed the same procedure but added monthly measures for the six months of child support payment before enrollment to our matching variables (the variables used in this match are listed in appendix table 1). We then ran models predicting participation separately by county and month of enrollment to select a comparison group of 703 individuals for our 703 participants in the program’s final year. Despite the smaller sample size, this match was similarly accurate to the match for the full year, as shown in appendix table 1; only child support paid in the fourth month before enrollment was significantly higher (at  $p < .05$ ) among participants than in the comparison group. Moreover, a Hotelling *T*-squared test for the equivalence of a set of means indicated that the matched groups did not differ significantly in the aggregate. This suggests that the two groups should be relatively comparable.

#### **D. Results**

We compared employment and child support outcomes between program participants and the comparison group to estimate program effects. To control for any remaining differences between the groups after matching, we employed a double-robust framework, meaning that we both matched participants to the comparison group on relevant characteristics and controlled for those same characteristics when estimating outcomes. Thus, we calculated the effect of treatment on each outcome in a regression with the following control variables: the matching variables, time and place dummies, and dummies for treatment and treatment-site interactions. We then predicted the average response for each treatment group using Stata 11’s *margins* command (StataCorp 2009). The resulting adjusted means for each outcome reflect an estimate of that outcome conditioning on participation in a fatherhood program, while holding all observable factors (the matching variables, variation over time, and differences across sites) constant.

***Employment Outcomes.*** Table 4.2 lists the differences between groups in terms of employment outcomes, namely average wages and employment status in quarters after



enrollment.<sup>15</sup> The results suggest that the fatherhood programs had strong positive effects on both wages and employment. Participants earned an average of \$986 more than comparison group members in the year after enrollment, a 22 percent increase in wages. Participants were also 9.8 percentage points more likely to be employed than the comparison group in the year after enrollment, a 19 percent increase in the likelihood of employment. Results for individual quarters were all significant and positive, suggesting that the program participants saw gains in wages and employment in the first quarter following their enrollment, and that those gains persisted for the duration of our follow-up period.

**Table 4.2 Comparison of Earnings and Employment Outcomes**

|                                  | Participants  |           | Comparison group |           | Difference | p-value | % change |
|----------------------------------|---------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|------------|---------|----------|
|                                  | Adjusted mean | Robust SE | Adjusted mean    | Robust SE |            |         |          |
| <b>Wages after enrollment</b>    |               |           |                  |           |            |         |          |
| 1 quarter after                  | \$1,338       | \$47      | \$1,135          | \$45      | \$203      | **      | 18%      |
| 2 quarters after                 | \$1,444       | \$55      | \$1,165          | \$52      | \$279      | ***     | 24%      |
| 3 quarters after                 | \$1,435       | \$61      | \$1,212          | \$58      | \$224      | **      | 18%      |
| 4 quarters after                 | \$1,290       | \$59      | \$1,009          | \$56      | \$280      | ***     | 28%      |
| Entire year                      | \$5,506       | \$167     | \$4,521          | \$157     | \$986      | ***     | 22%      |
| <b>Employed after enrollment</b> |               |           |                  |           |            |         |          |
| 1 quarter after                  | 42.4%         | 1.0%      | 33.1%            | 0.9%      | 9.3%       | ***     | 28%      |
| 2 quarters after                 | 40.7%         | 1.0%      | 31.4%            | 0.9%      | 9.3%       | ***     | 30%      |
| 3 quarters after                 | 37.3%         | 1.0%      | 30.0%            | 0.9%      | 7.3%       | ***     | 24%      |
| 4 quarters after                 | 31.8%         | 1.0%      | 25.1%            | 0.9%      | 6.7%       | ***     | 27%      |
| Entire year                      | 61.9%         | 1.0%      | 52.1%            | 0.9%      | 9.8%       | ***     | 19%      |

Note: Means reflect double-robust estimates of treatment effects, conditioning on matching variables and time and place dummies.

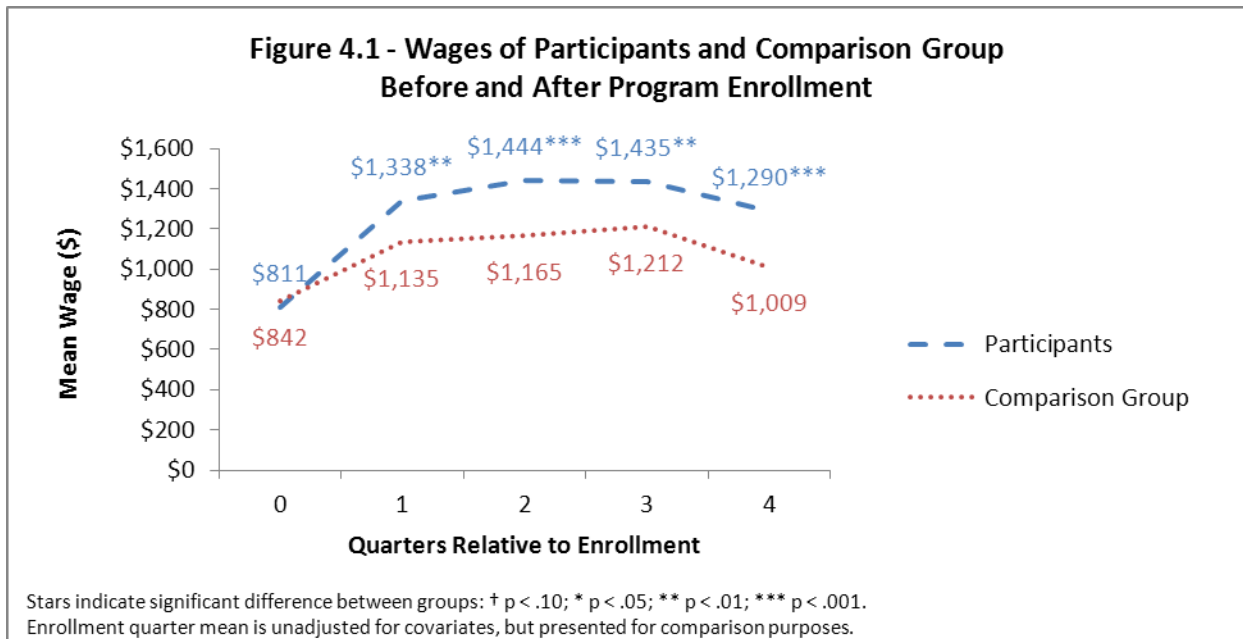
ns = non-significant; †  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

To illustrate the time path of responses, figures 4.1 and 4.2 plot wage and employment outcomes over time, including the simple mean of each outcome in the quarter of enrollment for comparison purposes.<sup>16</sup> As the figures show, although participants and the comparison group were not significantly different in terms of wages and employment in the quarter of enrollment, substantial gaps in outcomes appeared immediately following program entry.

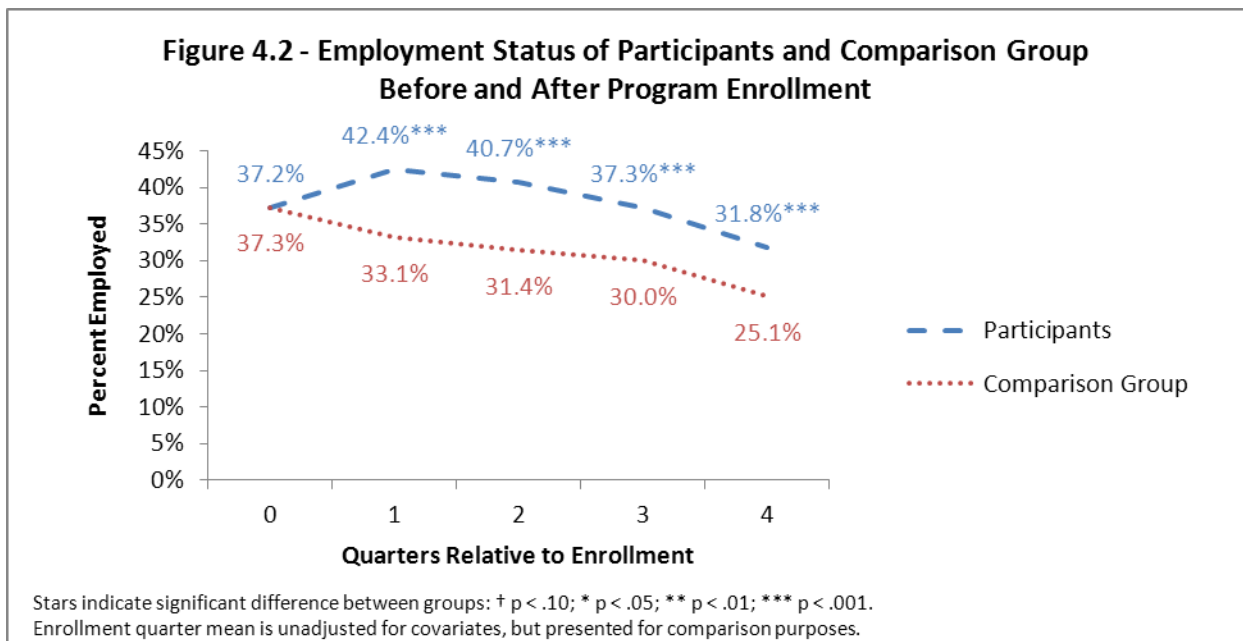
Figure 4.1 shows that wages increased for both participants and the comparison group after enrollment, likely reflecting recovery from the “earnings dip” that many employment program participants experience before program entry (as described by Heckman and Smith 1999). However, participants’ wages increased to a greater degree than nonparticipants and were significantly higher than the comparison group’s wages in all four quarters after enrollment.

<sup>15</sup> “Employed” in this context indicates having any quarterly earnings in our dataset; as Stevens (2002) notes, this data source does not capture any changes in independent contractor wages or self-employment.

<sup>16</sup> Although the simple and adjusted means are not strictly comparable, it is impossible to adjust a pretreatment variable (such as wages at enrollment) for pretreatment characteristics, as the variable is itself included in those characteristics. However, results comparing only simple means over time are similar to those shown here.



The results for the probability of employment (figure 4.2) indicate that participants experienced an initial increase in employment after enrollment, after which both groups became less likely to work over time. This effect may reflect global changes in employment over the study period. Nonetheless, participants were significantly more likely to be employed than the comparison group in all measured quarters.



**Child Support Outcomes.** For child support outcomes, consisting of the amounts of current support paid and the probability of paying any current support, we were only able to examine participants in the final year of the program (as discussed earlier). However, results for this subgroup suggest positive program impacts similar to the wage outcomes (table 4.3). Child support outcomes were measured quarterly to correspond to our employment outcomes.

Participants paid on average \$504 more current support than matched individuals over the year after enrollment, a 38 percent increase. The difference between participants and the comparison group grew over time and remained substantial one year after enrollment in the fatherhood programs.

On average, participants were 13.6 percentage points more likely to pay any current support than the comparison group in the year after enrollment, a 22 percent increase. This effect was also observed in shorter time frames, with between 8.2 and 9.8 percentage points more participants paying any child support in each quarter relative to the comparison group. This effect was significant from the first quarter of the program onward, suggesting that participants were more likely to be in compliance with their child support obligations immediately after exposure to the program, although the effect also grew over time.

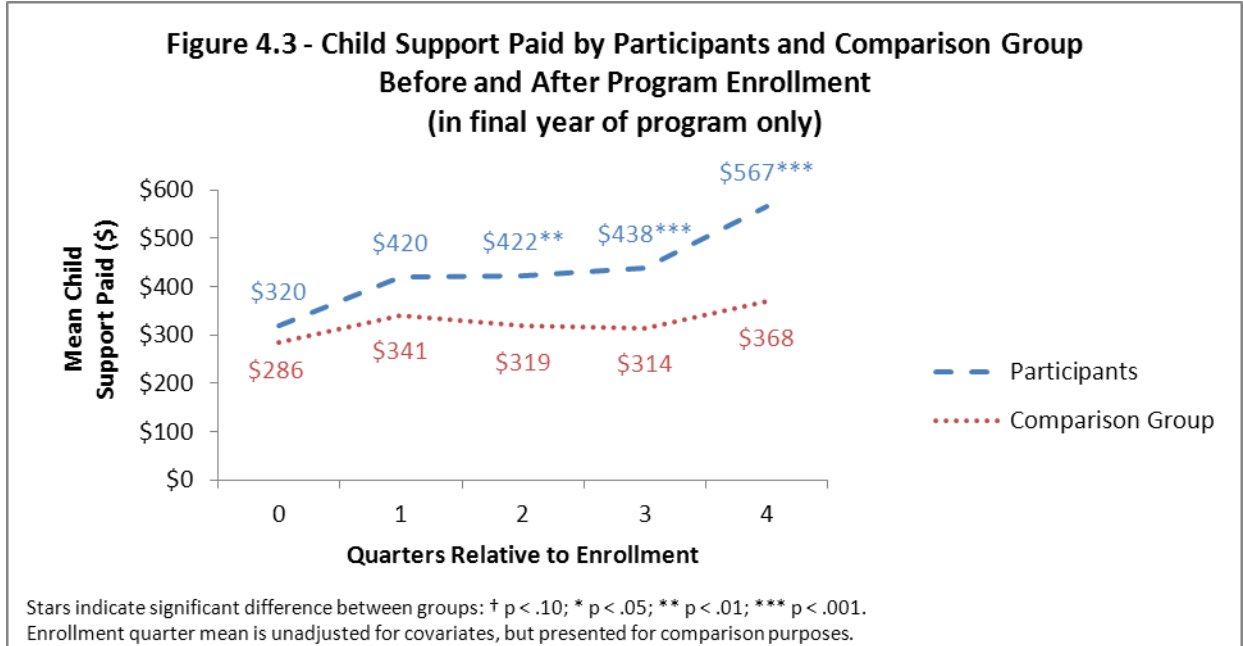
**Table 4.3: Comparison of Child Support Outcomes, Final Program Year**

|  | Participants  |           | Comparison Group |           | Difference | p-value | % change |
|--|---------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|------------|---------|----------|
|  | Adjusted mean | Robust SE | Adjusted mean    | Robust SE |            |         |          |
| <b>Current support paid after enrollment</b>     |               |           |                  |           |            |         |          |
| 1 quarter after                                  | \$420         | \$44      | \$341            | \$31      | \$79       | ns      | 23%      |
| 2 quarters after                                 | \$422         | \$30      | \$319            | \$21      | \$103      | **      | 32%      |
| 3 quarters after                                 | \$438         | \$29      | \$314            | \$20      | \$123      | ***     | 39%      |
| 4 quarters after                                 | \$567         | \$39      | \$368            | \$27      | \$198      | ***     | 54%      |
| Entire year                                      | \$1,847       | \$88      | \$1,343          | \$68      | \$504      | ***     | 38%      |
| <b>Any current support paid after enrollment</b> |               |           |                  |           |            |         |          |
| 1 quarter after                                  | 50.3%         | 1.5%      | 41.8%            | 1.3%      | 8.4%       | ***     | 20%      |
| 2 quarters after                                 | 52.2%         | 1.7%      | 44.0%            | 1.5%      | 8.2%       | ***     | 19%      |
| 3 quarters after                                 | 52.5%         | 1.6%      | 43.1%            | 1.6%      | 9.5%       | ***     | 22%      |
| 4 quarters after                                 | 54.5%         | 1.7%      | 44.7%            | 1.6%      | 9.8%       | ***     | 22%      |
| Entire year                                      | 74.8%         | 1.4%      | 61.2%            | 1.4%      | 13.6%      | ***     | 22%      |

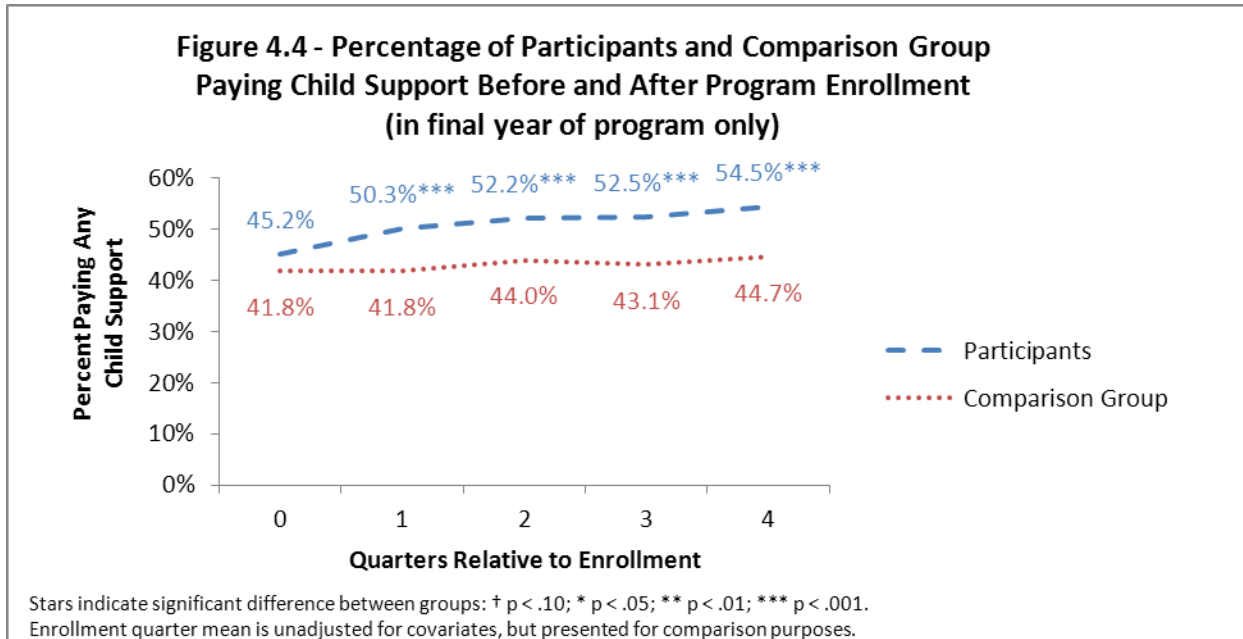
*Note:* Means reflect double-robust estimates of treatment effects, conditioning on matching variables and time and place dummies.

ns = nonsignificant; †  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Figures 4.3 and 4.4 illustrate the time path of responses for child support outcomes, with the simple mean in the quarter of enrollment serving as a comparison (as for the employment outcomes). Although child support payments among the comparison group increased slightly over the postenrollment period, payments among participants increased substantially more, with the upward trend continuing at the end of the follow-up period.



The percentage of participants paying current support showed a similar pattern, with the proportion of the comparison group who paid staying constant and the proportion of participants who paid increasing steadily.



## V. Conclusions

New York successfully reformed its welfare program and the New York Legislature wanted to extend that success to low-income noncustodial parents. In 2006, it enacted the Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative. Two policies that contributed to the success of welfare reform in New York were providing employment-oriented services to welfare recipients and expanding the state EITC to “make work pay.” The Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative extended these two policies to low-income noncustodial parents.

Prior to this initiative, low-income noncustodial parents did not receive much help in finding work or making work pay. The child support program tended to focus on traditional enforcement mechanisms to collect child support, which were not particularly successful among this population. Thus, low-income noncustodial parents tended to fall behind in their child support and their children lost out on a viable source of income. The purpose of the initiative was to find a better way. By offering employment-oriented services and a noncustodial parent EITC, the intent was to encourage low-income noncustodial parent to find work and pay their child support.

This study, which focuses on the employment-oriented programs, finds significant and positive evidence that this component of the initiative was successful. The pilot programs served 3,688 noncustodial parents over a three-year period (October 2006 to September 2009). These parents were typically unemployed, faced multiple employment barriers, and owed substantial amounts of back child support. The five pilot programs provided employment-oriented services and other services that helped parents find work and pay their child support. After participating in these programs, this study shows that participants increased their earnings by 22 percent and their child support payments by 38 percent compared with a comparable group of noncustodial parents who did not receive these services. The program therefore benefited the noncustodial parents themselves through increased earnings and their children through increased child support.

We should note that our findings are based on non-experimental econometric methods rather than a randomized experiment. We employ a double-robust framework using propensity scores to match participants to a comparison group on a large number of pretreatment variables, including pre-program wages, child support, demographic characteristics, and location of participants. While it is possible that participants differed from the comparison group in ways that we did not observe, any alternative explanations for the observed program effects must involve variables other than these pretreatment variables. Therefore, the impact estimates discussed above are sound evidence that the pilot programs had a significant and positive effect.

These findings suggest that allocating new funding to the employment-oriented component of the Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative is worthwhile. In FY 2009, the New York Legislature allocated \$2.7 million of TANF funding for this initiative. Since then, no new funding has been forthcoming. The \$2.7 million of TANF funds have now been spent and the Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative no longer funds employment-oriented programs.

## The New York Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative

In 2010 and 2011, the New York Legislature expanded the authority of the family courts to refer unemployed noncustodial parents to employment-oriented programs at order establishment, order modification, and order enforcement hearings if an employment program is available.<sup>17</sup> However, no funding was included to operate the employment programs. The results of this impact analysis suggest that allocating funding for these types of employment-oriented programs makes sense.

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<sup>17</sup> A.8952/S.5570 was enacted in 2010; A.7794A/S.4091B was enacted in 2011.

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## **Appendices**

**Appendix Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Participants, Nonparticipants, and Comparison Group in Child Support Match**

| Variable                            | Participants | Non-participants | t-test  | Comparison | t-test  |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------------|---------|------------|---------|
|                                     | [1]          | [2]              | [1]-[2] | group      | [1]-[3] |
|                                     | Mean         | Mean             | p-value | Mean       | p-value |
|                                     | (SD)         | (SD)             |         | (SD)       |         |
| Quarterly wages before enrollment   |              |                  |         |            |         |
| at enrollment                       | \$633        | \$3,805          | ***     | \$603      | ns      |
|                                     | (\$1,503)    | (\$5,945)        |         | (\$1,326)  |         |
| 1 quarter prior                     | \$928        | \$4,058          | ***     | \$904      | ns      |
|                                     | (\$1,913)    | (\$6,214)        |         | (\$2,310)  |         |
| 2 quarters prior                    | \$1,444      | \$4,158          | ***     | \$1,346    | ns      |
|                                     | (\$3,179)    | (\$6,281)        |         | (\$3,158)  |         |
| 3 quarters prior                    | \$1,582      | \$4,112          | ***     | \$1,529    | ns      |
|                                     | (\$3,114)    | (\$6,178)        |         | (\$3,478)  |         |
| 4 quarters prior                    | \$1,749      | \$4,153          | ***     | \$1,684    | ns      |
|                                     | (\$3,167)    | (\$6,197)        |         | (\$3,972)  |         |
| Percent employed before enrollment  |              |                  |         |            |         |
| at enrollment                       | 34.3%        | 40.8%            | ***     | 34.4%      | ns      |
|                                     | (47.5%)      | (42.8%)          |         | (47.5%)    |         |
| 1 quarter prior                     | 36.1%        | 43.8%            | ***     | 35.6%      | ns      |
|                                     | (48.1%)      | (44.6%)          |         | (47.9%)    |         |
| 2 quarters prior                    | 42.2%        | 44.9%            | ns      | 42.2%      | ns      |
|                                     | (49.4%)      | (44.8%)          |         | (49.4%)    |         |
| 3 quarters prior                    | 41.8%        | 45.3%            | *       | 42.7%      | ns      |
|                                     | (49.4%)      | (44.9%)          |         | (49.5%)    |         |
| 4 quarters prior                    | 44.2%        | 46.1%            | ns      | 46.7%      | ns      |
|                                     | (49.7%)      | (45.1%)          |         | (49.9%)    |         |
| Quarterly wages, among employed     |              |                  |         |            |         |
| at enrollment                       | \$1,847      | \$8,505          | ***     | \$1,750    | ns      |
|                                     | (\$2,087)    | (\$7,037)        |         | (\$1,762)  |         |
| 1 quarter prior                     | \$2,569      | \$8,385          | ***     | \$2,542    | ns      |
|                                     | (\$2,434)    | (\$6,938)        |         | (\$3,295)  |         |
| 2 quarters prior                    | \$3,418      | \$8,389          | ***     | \$3,186    | ns      |
|                                     | (\$4,146)    | (\$6,902)        |         | (\$4,215)  |         |
| 3 quarters prior                    | \$3,782      | \$8,225          | ***     | \$3,584    | ns      |
|                                     | (\$3,857)    | (\$6,787)        |         | (\$4,584)  |         |
| 4 quarters prior                    | \$3,954      | \$8,198          | ***     | \$3,609    | ns      |
|                                     | (\$3,737)    | (\$6,826)        |         | (\$5,187)  |         |
| Highest % chg. in wages, prior year | 58.5%        | 36.7%            | ***     | 59.5%      | ns      |
|                                     | (46.2%)      | (38.6%)          |         | (46.3%)    |         |
| Percent in each racial category     |              |                  |         |            |         |
| Black                               | 57.3%        | 36.7%            | ***     | 59.3%      | ns      |
|                                     | (49.5%)      | (48.2%)          |         | (49.2%)    |         |
| Hispanic                            | 19.3%        | 31.3%            | ***     | 17.4%      | ns      |
|                                     | (39.5%)      | (46.4%)          |         | (37.9%)    |         |
| White, Asian, or Native American    | 11.5%        | 10.2%            | ns      | 11.5%      | ns      |
|                                     | (32.0%)      | (30.3%)          |         | (32.0%)    |         |
| Missing race                        | 11.8%        | 21.8%            | ***     | 11.8%      | ns      |
|                                     | (32.3%)      | (41.3%)          |         | (32.3%)    |         |

**Appendix Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Participants, Nonparticipants, and Comparison Group in Child Support Match (continued)**

| Variable   | Participants           | Non-participants       | t-test  | Comparison             | t-test  |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|
|  | [1]                    | [2]                    | [1]-[2] | group                  | [1]-[3] |
|  | Mean<br>(SD)           | Mean<br>(SD)           | p-value | Mean<br>(SD)           | p-value |
| Age of NCP   | 35.2<br>(7.3)          | 42.5<br>(10.0)         | ***     | 35.1<br>(8.7)          | ns      |
| Number of child support cases, prior year                  | 1.9<br>(1.3)           | 1.4<br>(0.7)           | ***     | 1.9<br>(1.6)           | ns      |
| Number of child support orders, prior year                 | 1.2<br>(0.9)           | 0.8<br>(0.6)           | ***     | 1.2<br>(1.0)           | ns      |
| Number of children   | 2.7<br>(2.0)           | 2.0<br>(1.4)           | ***     | 2.7<br>(2.4)           | ns      |
| Age of youngest child                                      | 7.4<br>(5.2)           | 13.2<br>(7.2)          | ***     | 7.5<br>(5.6)           | ns      |
| Current support paid, prior year                           | \$1,067<br>(\$1,912)   | \$1,921<br>(\$3,300)   | ***     | \$874<br>(\$1,838)     | †       |
| Percent with current support paid, prior year              | 56.0%<br>(49.7%)       | 49.9%<br>(47.3%)       | ***     | 54.5%<br>(49.8%)       | ns      |
| <i>Current support paid among those paying, prior year</i> | \$1,904<br>(\$2,220)   | \$3,665<br>(\$3,858)   | ***     | \$1,604<br>(\$2,244)   | †       |
| Arrears paid, prior year                                   | \$294<br>(\$991)       | \$512<br>(\$1,443)     | ***     | \$320<br>(\$1,556)     | ns      |
| Percent with arrears paid, prior year                      | 36.1%<br>(48.1%)       | 35.4%<br>(41.2%)       | ns      | 35.4%<br>(47.9%)       | ns      |
| <i>Arrears paid among those paying, prior year</i>         | \$926<br>(\$1,227)     | \$1,416<br>(\$2,393)   | **      | \$923<br>(\$2,506)     | ns      |
| Current support due, prior year                            | \$2,507<br>(\$2,886)   | \$2,781<br>(\$4,312)   | †       | \$2,542<br>(\$10,807)  | ns      |
| Percent with current support order, prior year             | 85.3%<br>(35.4%)       | 66.4%<br>(45.3%)       | ***     | 86.3%<br>(34.4%)       | ns      |
| <i>Current support due among those owing, prior year</i>   | \$2,938<br>(\$2,915)   | \$4,150<br>(\$4,868)   | ***     | \$2,944<br>(\$11,580)  | ns      |
| Arrears owed, prior year                                   | \$13,263<br>(\$22,950) | \$10,361<br>(\$24,571) | **      | \$14,348<br>(\$31,388) | ns      |
| Percent with arrears owed, prior year                      | 90.3%<br>(29.6%)       | 67.0%<br>(43.6%)       | ***     | 91.7%<br>(27.5%)       | ns      |
| <i>Arrears owed among those owing, prior year</i>          | \$14,683<br>(\$23,713) | \$14,311<br>(\$27,844) | ns      | \$15,638<br>(\$32,461) | ns      |
| Percent interstate receiving, prior year                   | 11.5%<br>(32.0%)       | 12.8%<br>(33.2%)       | ns      | 11.9%<br>(32.5%)       | ns      |
| Percent with wage withholding, prior year                  | 24.9%<br>(43.3%)       | 36.4%<br>(44.6%)       | ***     | 23.6%<br>(42.5%)       | ns      |
| Percent with a custodial parent on TANF, prior year        | 28.0%<br>(44.9%)       | 11.5%<br>(29.5%)       | ***     | 27.2%<br>(44.5%)       | ns      |

**Appendix Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Participants, Nonparticipants, and Comparison Group in Child Support Match (continued)**

| Variable  | Participants     | Non-             | t-test           | Comparison         | t-test          |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
|   | [1]              | participants     | [1]-[2]          | group              | [1]-[3]         |
|   | Mean             | Mean             | p-value          | Mean               | p-value         |
|   | (SD)             | (SD)             |                  | (SD)               |                 |
| Child support paid before enrollment              |                  |                  |                  |                    |                 |
| at enrollment                                     | \$115<br>(\$333) | \$215<br>(\$355) | ***              | \$90<br>(\$278)    | ns              |
| 1 month prior                                     | \$98<br>(\$225)  | \$220<br>(\$362) | ***              | \$116<br>(\$677)   | ns              |
| 2 months prior                                    | \$106<br>(\$285) | \$221<br>(\$364) | ***              | \$80<br>(\$290)    | †               |
| 3 months prior                                    | \$126<br>(\$392) | \$216<br>(\$361) | ***              | \$190<br>(\$2,294) | ns              |
| 4 months prior                                    | \$107<br>(\$293) | \$220<br>(\$365) | ***              | \$73<br>(\$198)    | *               |
| 5 months prior                                    | \$120<br>(\$306) | \$225<br>(\$372) | ***              | \$91<br>(\$289)    | †               |
| 6 months prior                                    | \$130<br>(\$544) | \$220<br>(\$367) | ***              | \$92<br>(\$249)    | †               |
| Percent with child support paid before enrollment |                  |                  |                  |                    |                 |
| at enrollment                                     | 32.1%<br>(46.7%) | 44.9%<br>(44.8%) | ***              | 30.7%<br>(46.2%)   | ns              |
| 1 month prior                                     | 30.2%<br>(45.9%) | 45.0%<br>(44.7%) | ***              | 29.6%<br>(45.7%)   | ns              |
| 2 months prior                                    | 32.3%<br>(46.8%) | 45.2%<br>(44.6%) | ***              | 30.4%<br>(46.0%)   | ns              |
| 3 months prior                                    | 31.0%<br>(46.3%) | 45.0%<br>(44.5%) | ***              | 28.9%<br>(45.4%)   | ns              |
| 4 months prior                                    | 31.4%<br>(46.5%) | 45.0%<br>(44.4%) | ***              | 30.2%<br>(45.9%)   | ns              |
| 5 months prior                                    | 33.9%<br>(47.4%) | 45.2%<br>(44.3%) | ***              | 32.0%<br>(46.7%)   | ns              |
| 6 months prior                                    | 33.1%<br>(47.1%) | 44.8%<br>(44.0%) | ***              | 32.6%<br>(46.9%)   | ns              |
| <b>Total in category</b>                          | 703              | 189,377          | *** <sup>a</sup> | 703                | ns <sup>a</sup> |

Notes: Values for nonparticipants are weighted so each noncustodial parent has equal weight across years. Prior year refers to the year before enrollment.

ns = nonsignificant; †  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

<sup>a</sup> This row provides the  $p$ -value of a Hotelling test for equality of distributions across all the variables.