

PARENTS TO **WORK!**

Program Outcomes and Economic Impact



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Arapahoe County Department of Human Services
Division of Child Support Enforcement

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Executive Summary

Parents to Work, a program to secure jobs for unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents (NCPs) with open child support cases involved the Arapahoe Division of Child Support Enforcement (CSE), Arapahoe/Douglas Workforce Center (A/D Works), and the Arapahoe District Court/18th Judicial District. Conducted from August 2008 to March 2010, Parents to Work involved:

- Specialized, co-located child support and workforce personnel;
- Identification of nonpaying obligors by child support workers, court records and staff outreach using an automated listing of potentially eligible cases;
- Referrals of these obligors for on-the-spot screening and assessment by workforce personnel;
- A customized menu of employment-focused services and access to supportive services including transportation assistance; and
- Communication between project personnel and the magistrate who hears child support matters for the county.

All eligible cases were randomly assigned to an experimental and comparison group consisting of 601 and 349 NCPs, respectively. The evaluation data came from intake forms and assessments completed by project staff, information on child support payments drawn from the automated system, and employer-reported wage data for the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system supplied to the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment. During the time when the earliest (August 2007) and final (November 2010) employment and child support outcomes were measured, the unemployment rate in Arapahoe County rose from 3.9 to 8.6 percent.

Key Findings

- **Participants Faced Serious Barriers to Employment.** Participants were educated to the high school level, and racially and ethnically diverse who were delinquent in court-ordered child support payments. Nearly half reported having a criminal background and a quarter were on parole or probation. Many lacked good transportation.
- **Participants Engaged in Workforce Services at High Rates.** Nearly three-quarters of parents (69%) in the treatment group participated in workforce services, with 46 percent participating in three or more activities and 23 percent in one or two. Only 31 percent did not participate in any program services. The most common project activities were attending an intensive Job Club session (79%) and submitting job applications (40%). Half (54%) received bus tokens or a gas voucher, and 11 percent had their driver's license reinstated.
- **Participation Varied With Court Action and Reliable Transportation.** Participation was higher among parents who reported access to reliable transportation and those who experienced some form of court action. They also tended to be older, African American, educated to the high school level or higher, divorced rather than never married, and have relatively low prior earnings

- **Participants Had Higher Rates of Earnings Post Enrollment.** The treatment group (70%) was significantly more likely than the comparison group (47%) to have UI earnings in the year following their enrollment. Among those with no earnings in the year prior to group assignment, 50 percent of the treatment group, but only 30 percent of the comparison group, showed post-program earnings, suggesting that outcomes were not due to pre-enrollment earnings.
- **Participants Experienced Less Economic Decline Due to the 2008/2009 Recession.** Although earnings activity dropped for all participants following project enrollment due to the economic downturn, the decline was significantly greater for members of the comparison group, with overall earnings activity for the two groups dropping 7 and 20 percentage points, respectively.
- **A Majority of Participants Found Jobs and Two-Thirds Retained or Replaced Them.** Based on program records, 65 percent of treatment group members found full-time jobs, while 22 percent were employed part time and 12 percent obtained subsidized jobs. The average and median hourly wage for these jobs was \$10.95 and \$10.00, respectively. Although 55 percent left their position after becoming employed, 41 percent subsequently found a second job which translates into a job retention rate of 67.7 percent.
- **Participants Paid More Child Support.** In the year following program enrollment, the average percentage of owed child support that was paid rose significantly, from 36.6 to 41.3 percent in the treatment group but was unchanged for the comparison group (28.2% versus 27.5%). Members of the treatment group who made no payments in the three months prior to project enrollment went from paying 16 percent of what they owed to 33 percent, as compared with 15 percent to 23 percent for the comparison group.
- **Participants Paid Child Support More Regularly.** Payment regularity also improved significantly in the treatment group, rising from an average of 5.3 to 5.7 payments in a 12-month period of time versus 3.9 and 4.0 payments per month in the comparison group.
- **More Involved Participants Experienced the Best Earnings Outcomes.** Experimental group members who participated in the most workforce development activities were significantly more likely to exhibit post-program earnings (81%) as compared with their less involved (72%) and uninvolved (68%) counterparts. They also experienced a milder decline in earnings due to the 2008/2009 economic recession (4% versus 9% and 12%, respectively).
- **More Involved Participants Have the Strongest Child Support Payment Patterns.** Child support payment patterns increased significantly only for actively engaged project participants, with the percentage of owed support that was paid rising from 35.9 to 42.9 percent. Payment performance for modestly and unengaged parents remained 40 and 35 percent, respectively, before and after project enrollment.

Reactions of Project Staff, Child Support Workers, and the Court

- **Noncustodial Parents (NCPs) Are a Challenging Population to Serve.** In addition to lacking computer skills and the ability to do independent job searches, project staff viewed NCPs

as being difficult to engage relative to other workforce clients. Some did not like that a significant share of their earnings would be withheld to fulfill their child support obligation.

- **Co-Location of Child Support and Workforce Staff Was a Key to Program Success.** Co-location of child support and workforce staff and their team work were critical to program success. Many clients were able to get immediate, on-the-spot service.
- **Court Mandates and Sanctions Are Viewed as Keys to Program Success.** Participation rates were higher in cases with court involvement, and staff members felt that project outcomes could have been strengthened with more court involvement and sanction activity.
- **NCP Employment Programs Require Agency Flexibility.** To improve outcomes, child support needed to reinstate driver's licenses quickly and to speed up the modification process. The workforce program had to be upfront about child support garnishments so clients understood what would happen when their earnings increased.
- **Child Support Workers Support NCP Employment Programs.** Child support workers viewed the program as another "tool" they could use to help NCPs pay support, a way to differentiate between those who do and do not want to work, and an opportunity to create some good will toward the child support agency.
- **All Stages of Case Processing Are Appropriate.** Most workers believed that unemployed parents should be referred to an employment program at any stage of case processing.
- **Ex-Offenders Received Special Benefits.** NCPs on parole and probation obtained referrals to felon-friendly employers and participated more fully since it was a parole requirement.
- **NCP Employment Programs Require Special Communication Tools.** Because the workforce and child support agencies use separate computerized systems to track their actions with clients and outcomes, regular child support workers and attorneys were frustrated that they needed to contact project staff to verify client participation.
- **The 2008/2009 Economic Recession Affected Program Outcomes.** The most significant problems with Parents to Work were the economic downturn and the fact that unemployment rose in Arapahoe County from 3.8 to 8.6 percent over the three-year life of the project.

Economic Impact of Parents to Work

The benefits of Parents to Work on the local economy through business earnings, sales/revenue and job growth were also assessed. The benefits were measured using a methodology developed by A/D Works to assess the impact of all of its various workforce programs but the methodology used for this study considered the actual earnings of parents rather than their estimated earnings and differences between the treatment and comparison groups. CPR reached the following conclusions about economic impact of Parents to Work.

- **Parents to Work Creates Jobs.** The experimental group outpaced the comparison group in job creation by 135 jobs and in aggregate earnings by \$1,247,183 over 12 months. In all, Parents to Work contributed 149 additional jobs to the regional economy than the comparison group.

PARENTS TO WORK!

- **Parents to Work Generates Regional Earnings and Sales/Revenue Growth.** The experimental group contributed \$6,493,021 in earnings growth and \$11,492,647 in regional sales/revenue growth, which exceeded earnings and sales growth that could be attributed to the comparison group by \$2,232,458 and \$3,951,450, respectively.
- **Parents to Work Produces Extra Child Support Payments.** NCPs in the experimental group paid an additional \$311,163 in child support in the first 12 months after enrollment than the NCPs in the comparison group over a comparable time period.
- **Parents to Work is Cost Effective.** The cost-effectiveness ratio for the Parents to Work Program, which considers actual program expenditures and, child support collections were \$1.70 for the first post-enrollment year and \$5.09 after a three-year period of time, if one-year patterns of collection are sustained.
- **Parents to Work Has Substantial Impacts on the Regional Economy.** The Return on Public Investment for the Parents to Work Program was \$12.72 in regional earnings growth and \$22.51 in sales/revenue growth in the region. When adjusted for experimental-comparison group differences, the ROPIs are \$4.37 in earnings growth and \$7.74 in sales/revenue growth.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Like other “new generation” NCP employment programs, Parents to Work led to greater economic self-sufficiency on the part of noncustodial parents and greater child support payments for custodial parents. Even during the unprecedented 2008/2009 economic recession, NCPs who enrolled in Parents to Work participated in workforce development activities at higher levels, obtained jobs and earnings at higher rates, and made greater child support payments. Those who participated more wholeheartedly realized the greatest economic benefits. And even though the recession destroyed jobs and earnings for parents in both groups, parents in the treatment group fared better by not falling as low and by picking up employment more quickly. The program was highly efficient and contributed positively to the regional economy through job creation, regional sales, and earnings growth.

Future programs should adopt some key features of Parents to Work, the chief one being co-locating specialized child support and workforce personnel to facilitate client referrals and enrollment in workforce services. Co-location addresses some of the challenges observed in previous employment programs, including client failure to follow through with service referrals. Court-ordered participation and incentives and sanctions for nonparticipation are also cornerstones to an effective program. Finally, each partner agency — child support, workforce, and court—needs to utilize its core competencies and dispense with programmatic silos.

To further engage NCPs, child support agencies should explore ways to quickly lower support orders when earnings decrease and better compromise state-owed arrears so that they do not become a disincentive to increase earnings. Workforce and child support agencies need to move beyond telephone and email to communicate with one another about project participants and develop a shared, web-based database. Finally, to foster program development, employment activities must be considered eligible for federal matching funds and child support funding needs to be restored to pre-Deficit Reduction Act levels.

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Introduction

Parents to Work is an employment program conducted by Arapahoe County Department of Human Services, Division of Child Support Enforcement. The goal of the project is to promote employment among unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents (NCPs) with open child support cases to generate child support payments and maximize self-sufficiency among low-income households. The project partners are the Arapahoe Division of Child Support Enforcement (CSE), the Arapahoe/Douglas Workforce Center (ADW), and the Arapahoe District Court/18th Judicial District.

The project involves:

- Specialized, co-located child support and workforce personnel;
- Identification of nonpaying obligors by child support workers;
- Referrals of these obligors for on-the-spot screening and assessment by workforce personnel; and
- A customized menu of employment-focused services and access to supportive services.

The project also involves close communication between child support and workforce personnel and coordination with the court that has the flexibility to order noncustodial parents into the program, conduct periodic review hearings to monitor project participation, and impose appropriate incentives and sanctions.

To obtain an objective assessment of the program, Arapahoe CSE retained the Center for Policy Research (CPR) to conduct an analysis of the program impact on key outcome measures, and to study the implementation of Parents to Work. The program was evaluated from August 2008 to March 2010. In May 2009, CPR prepared a First Interim Report that presented information on project staffing, case recruitment, and the process of implementing the project. It also described the evaluation methodology and the various data collection forms used to capture various types of information. In October 2009, CPR prepared a Second Interim Report that explored preliminary patterns in case recruitment and enrollment, data quality, and characteristics of cases in the experimental and the comparison groups.

This report presents the results from the outcome analysis, comparing clients assigned to the program and a comparable group of clients not assigned to the program. Changes for those enrolled in the program were also measured prior to and following enrollment. The final outcome data used in the analysis was collected a maximum of 30 months following the start of the program. This report also updates the topics addressed in the First and Second Interim Reports.





Overview of Low-Income Noncustodial Parents

Programs like Parents to Work developed in response to data showing that the child support system is increasingly comprised of low-income, never-married families who desperately need, but fail to receive, child support because the noncustodial parent is unemployed, faces severe barriers to employment, and/or works at a low-paying job that does not allow him to pay child support. The Administration for Children and Families projects that 6.6 million, or 42 percent, of its 2009 child support enforcement caseload was comprised of never-married custodial parents (Johnson & O'Brien-Strain, 2000).

Child support is a powerful economic tool for low-income families. Researchers estimate that child support removes approximately one million people from poverty (Sorensen, 2010a; Wheaton & Tashi, 2008), and that next to mothers' earnings, it is the second largest income source for poor families. It comprises 30 percent of total family income among families below poverty and 15 percent for families between 100 and 200 percent of poverty (Turetsky, 2005). Despite its potential, child support frequently goes unpaid. In 2007, census accounts showed that only 39.6 percent of never-married parents received all the support they were due (Grall, 2009).

Never-married parents face a host of economic and employment problems that make compliance with the child support order difficult. According to Schroeder and Doughty (2009), the barriers to employment include limited education, limited work histories, mental health and behavioral issues, substance abuse, lack of transportation, criminal backgrounds, a decline in the manufacturing sector, and the movement of jobs out of the inner city. In addition to these barriers, low-income, never-married noncustodial parents often have child support obligations that are unrealistically high. Sorensen and Oliver (2002) note that in 1999, more than one-quarter of poor fathers who paid child support spent 50 percent or more of their personal income on child support, while only 2 percent of non-poor fathers spent that much.

The provision of financial and socio-emotional support to children by never-married fathers has been tied to a number of positive outcomes for children. For example, an early study by the Urban Institute found that the payment of child support was associated with positive child well-being outcomes, surpassing the same amount of income from other sources (Knox & Bane, 1994). A more recent meta-analysis of data on nonresidential father involvement with children found that involvement is associated with gains in children's academic achievement and declines in behavioral problems (Koball & Principe, 2002).

For these reasons, child support agencies have concluded that "the most challenging enforcement problems are found with the growing population of men who have never married, have irregular or erratic work habits, and have minimal legitimate income potential Their lives represent a tangle of complications, resistant to the usual sanction applied by court order" (Zingraff, 2007). There is growing sentiment that agencies need to go beyond traditional child support enforcement activities to increase compliance among low-income noncustodial parents. There is also growing momentum for child support agencies to collaborate with employment programs and other family support services to address the array of problems that many low-income noncustodial parents face in a more comprehensive manner.

Programs to enhance employment are central to all recommendations on how to help poor fathers meet their financial and emotional responsibilities to their children. As one professor of social work noted:

The economic capacity of a father is paramount, given that virtually all nonresidential fathers are expected to assume some financial responsibilities for their children. If a father can be a successful breadwinner, he can more easily be encouraged to become involved in other parental roles such as child raising and decision making (Dudley, 2007).

In addition to employment services, programs for low-income noncustodial parents often assist them with child support services to review and adjust child support orders that are too high and/or reinstate driver's licenses that have been suspended for non-payment of support; access and visitation services to assist with the development of parenting plans that specify how the child's time will be divided between the parents; parenting and fatherhood services to teach parents about child rearing and support fathers in their employment and parenting roles; and referrals to a variety of community-based organizations for help with substance abuse, housing, transportation, or legal problems.

The earliest programs to promote employment and father-engagement among low-income noncustodial parents were large-scale, national demonstration projects: Parents' Fair Share, Partners for Fragile Families, the Access and Visitation Program, and the Responsible Fatherhood Program. More recently, numerous states, and jurisdictions within states, in Colorado, Georgia, Kansas, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas have developed programs for nonresident fathers that address employment and parenting issues. Although the precise design of a successful program has not been fully identified (Waller & Plotnick, 1999), the literature on these programs reveals a variety of patterns and best practices.

Populations Served

Many pilot projects housed at the child support enforcement agency target low-income, noncustodial parents who fail to meet their child support obligations. Some programs specify what constitutes "low-income," such as the New York program, which requires that noncustodial parents must earn less than or equal to 200 percent of the federal poverty level (Sorensen, et al., 2009). Other programs merely require that the noncustodial parent be under employed or unemployed.

Because they are often funded by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement and/or administered by the local child support agency, many programs require that participants have active child support cases, whether for paternity, monthly support, or arrears. These programs also typically specify that the noncustodial parent must be in noncompliance with the support order. Some programs explicitly define this, such as SHARE (Perez-Johnson, et al., 2003), which serves parents who have not paid for 60 or more days, but many others let the referral source determine what constitutes "noncompliance." The funding source and administering agency also leads many, but not all, programs to restrict services to noncustodial parents with children currently or formerly receiving TANF.

Programs that do not focus on a child support population include the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Centers for Working Families (Annie E. Casey, 2010), which operate in more than 20 cities to help low-income adults and families cope with economic

challenges. Some programs target parents with certain age parameters. For example, the Parents' Fair Share sites were intended to serve fathers between the ages of 16 and 25 years, and a program operating in Indianapolis (Indianapolis Private Industry Council, 2010) set the target population at 15 to 24 years olds. Other programs allow noncustodial parents of all ages to participate, and some of those with restrictions expand the ages served to increase the number of clients served.

Although programs rarely make barriers to employment an enrollment requirement, nearly all participants in employment programs face barriers. For example, 67 percent of those who enrolled in Tennessee's Child Support Employment and Parenting Program (CSEPP) had trouble meeting their basic needs, 56 percent reported depression, 59 percent had transportation problems, 45 percent had legal problems, and 29 percent self-reported problems with anger management (Tennessee Department of Human Services, Child Support Division, 2005). Similarly, Texas NCP Choices (Schroeder & Doughty, 2009) noted that participants were typically poorly educated and had uneven work histories, few job skills, criminal records, and mental illness.

Project Recruitment and Attrition

Programs use many techniques to recruit participants, including child support workers, courts, self-referrals, broadcast media, and outreach to community-based organizations. Research shows that court-based or court-affiliated programs are more effective than other referral sources in securing participants (Sorensen, 2010a). By involving the court, noncustodial parents are given the option of paying support on their own, facing the consequences of a contempt action, or enrolling in a program designed to address barriers to payment (Sorensen et al., 2009; Schroeder & Doughty, 2009.) The advantages of court involvement have led a number of jurisdictions to adopt "problem solving courts" or "fatherhood courts," which are directly involved in ordering participation in employment services and monitoring compliance (Rausch & Rawlings, 2008).

Although court referrals are more effective than other types of outreach, recruitment is challenging (Looney & Schexnayder, 2004). For example, SHARE noted that "the process of identifying eligible noncustodial parents and engaging them in SHARE was lengthy and often unsuccessful" (Perez-Johnson, et al., 2003). Similarly, the evaluation of the Texas NCP Choices program (Schroeder & Doughty, 2009) warned that:

...research does suggest that — excluding circumstances beyond programs' control (e.g., an economic downturn) — there are two fundamental challenges facing enhanced child support enforcement programs for noncustodial parents: difficulty implementing services as designed, and difficulty in recruiting, enrolling, and retaining participants.

The authors note that participation issues are far more complex and problematic than implementation issues, with a "disconcertingly" high proportion of cases in most programs either failing to enroll or dropping out. In a similar vein, the Tennessee CSEPP program reported that half of those who were referred to the program were terminated in the same month, generally due to a failure to appear for the intake (Tennessee Department of Human Services, 2005).

Because enrollment and retention are so challenging, some policy makers argue that work programs should be mandatory. According to one writer, employment barriers for low-

income noncustodial fathers stem not from unavailability of work or low skill-level, but from a lack of discipline to work. He suggests that child support programs should require that low-income noncustodial clients participate in employment programs “on pain of some sanction” (Mead, 2010).

Services Offered

Employment programs for low-income noncustodial parents typically include the use of job developers, job search training assistance, job clubs, résumé preparation, and job readiness classes (Sorensen, et al., 2009; Schroeder & Doughty, 2009). Some programs screen for barriers to employment and refer parents to community-based organizations for other forms of assistance. For example, the Tennessee CSEPP program screens its clients and sends the 17 percent who only need employment services directly to its Career Center. A comparable percent (18%) were believed to have such severe barriers to employment that initial referrals were made only to agencies for mental health counseling or substance abuse treatment. Most participants (64%) simultaneously received both employment and non-employment referrals, although some needed services were too costly or over-subscribed for project participants to access (Tennessee Department of Human Services, 2005).

Case management and case monitoring are common services accorded to parents in employment programs. Programs differ in the degree to which they deal with access and visitation issues, parenting, financial management, life skills, and legal issues. They also differ in the amount of financial assistance they provide for transportation or work-related costs. Those programs that are able to help participants by supplying funds for uniforms, union dues, and car repairs note that:

While vouchers are not a silver-bullet solution to joblessness and poverty, the ‘barrier busting’ focuses ... addresses a number of the issues that tend to derail young adults in their efforts to succeed (Indianapolis Private Industry Council, 2010).

Sorensen (2010b) argued that financial aid or other incentives are critical to operating an effective employment program for low-income parents. For example, the New York Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative found that incentives like transportation assistance, stipends, and gift cards helped with participant retention (Tannehill, O’Brien, & Sorensen, 2009). Wage subsidy incentives, in the form of transitional jobs or temporary stipends, are also helpful. Since low-income fathers typically face pressures to find immediate employment and pay child support, both programs and fathers tend to shy away from skill enhancement programs (Sorensen, 2010b).

Programs also vary in the degree to which they address child support problems. Some programs that are connected to child support agencies allow participants to review and adjust their orders, forgive some arrears in exchange for participation, or assist with driver’s license reinstatement (Perez-Johnson, et al., 2003). Outside the world of child support-funded and/or administered programs, child support is often a missing ingredient in the array of services offered. A study of 33 One-Stop Work Support Centers (Richer, et al., 2003) found that:

Child support stuck out as a work support with little connection to the one-stop centers we interviewed. In only three of the one-stops do staff make active referrals to an outside agency to assist with child support

applications. Thirteen states make only a passive referral, often merely providing the contact information for the District Attorney's Office. In 16 sites, child support appeared to be completely inaccessible. This was surprising, given the financial importance child support plays in single parents' lives Although a number of the directors we spoke with acknowledged that this [child support] was an area they had planned to work on, most had no idea how to pursue assisting such parents. Other directors appeared never to have considered assisting this population.

Outcomes Reported

Most pilot programs have tried to determine whether offering employment and other services to noncustodial parents leads to better employment, earnings, and child support payment patterns. However, determining program impacts is complicated by the lack of consistency in measures. For example, "payment of child support" may mean making any payment, making full payment, or making at least some payment in two out of three months. Similarly, improved employment may be measured by comparing the percentage of noncustodial parents with any employment pre- and post-program. Or it may be defined as holding a job for a minimum amount of time, such as three or six months.

Program evaluations also differ in which noncustodial parents they include in the treatment group. In a mandatory program, it may be defined as all parents assigned to the service group. Other programs may include only those who completed an intake or completed some percentage of services, or remained in the program for a specified amount of time.

In addition, most programs have problems finding strong comparison cases for those receiving program services. Often, program participation is, at least in part, chosen by the noncustodial parent. For example, some programs offered the noncustodial parent the choice of making an immediate child support payment or finding employment and paying on their own, or being ordered into program services. Those opting into the program arguably have fewer resources than do parents who choose to make immediate payments or parents who choose to find employment without help.

Perhaps due to these and other measurement and design issues, or perhaps due to real differences in outcomes, questions remain regarding how effective employment programs are in improving employment, earnings, and child support payments. One author concluded:

The outcomes or impacts from these projects were typically modest, generally resulting in only slight increases in earnings among participants and some gains in child support paid (Schroeder & Doughty, 2009).

While participants usually rate their experiences in programs favorably and credit them with helping them to learn better job readiness and job search skills (Tennessee Department of Human Services, Child Support Division, 2005), programs that measure employment and earnings generally show results that are more mixed. For example, the Texas NCP Choices program found employment impacts in the treatment group of 21 percent even after a year, but also reported lower earnings relative to the comparison group. In other words, more noncustodial parents in the treatment group were employed, but they earned less than the comparison group (Schroeder & Doughty, 2009). The Texas Bootstrap Program reported similar findings: higher rates of employment in the treatment

group, but lower earnings. The program evaluators speculate that this was the result of a greater number of treatment group participants finding employment, but frequently finding “entry-level jobs at lesser rates of pay” (Schroeder, et al., 2009).

Project SHARE also found that those who appeared at court and chose to participate in the program had comparable employment rates but lower earnings relative to those who appeared but chose not to participate. This may indicate that those who chose to seek employment without assistance had stronger work histories and greater skill levels (Perez-Johnson, et al., 2003). In the Parents’ Fair Share Demonstration Project, the evaluators concluded that the services did not have much effect on employment. Further, although earnings grew over time, they remained very low (Martinson, et al., 2007).

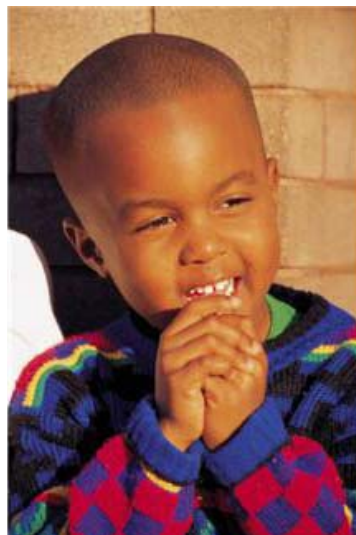
Child support outcomes are also mixed. Some programs report positive results. For example, the Texas NCP Choices program found:

Those ordered into NCP Choices were subsequently more likely to pay their child support obligations, paid more of it, and paid it more consistently over time. The increased payment of child support even persisted two to four years after NCPs were ordered into the program (Schroeder & Doughty, 2009).

Similarly, Prillaman & Tracy (2001) reported that the group receiving services paid at nearly twice the rate of those in the comparison group:

Prior to case management Barrier’s clients overall rate of payment was 6% of the monthly obligation plus arrears. This rate tripled to 17% while in the Project.

The Texas Bootstrap project also reported better child support payments in the experimental group, although “these collections are still infrequent in an absolute sense” (Schroeder, et al., 2009). On the other hand, project SHARE found no evidence of better payment among those who opted into and out of services (Perez-Johnson, et al., 2003) and the Tennessee CSEPP program reported that both prior to and following program participation, about a quarter of those who were enrolled paid no support (Tennessee Department of Human Services, 2005).



Parents to Work Overview

Parents to Work is designed to identify low-income, noncustodial parents in the child support system who are paying less than the average amount that parents in Arapahoe County pay on their child support orders and link them to specialized staff at the local workforce program for help with employment. The program incorporates lessons learned from earlier programs and adopted the following promising features:

Parents to Work is designed to identify low-income, noncustodial parents in the child support system ... and link them to specialized staff at the local workforce program for help with employment. The program incorporates lessons learned from earlier programs

- Specialized and co-located child support and workforce personnel who flag nonpaying NCPs and link them with workforce staff who perform immediate assessments;
- A customized menu of employment-focused services, including workshops, job development, and daily, intensive job club activities where NCPs participate in supervised job search;
- Immediate access to supportive services, including assistance with transportation, work clothes, and tools;
- Enhanced child support enforcement techniques that allow project participants to reinstate their driver's licenses, modify their child support orders to reflect their ability to pay, and suspend enforcement actions pending successful project participation;
- Extensive communication between child support and workforce program personnel to ensure rapid establishment of wage withholding orders and lifting imposition of enforcement actions and needed order modifications; and
- Close coordination with the court that has the flexibility to order NCPs into the program, conduct periodic review hearings to monitor project participation, and impose appropriate incentives and sanctions.

Referral Sources

Noncustodial parents are referred to Parents to Work through a master list of potentially eligible cases generated by automated methods, referrals by child support workers, and referrals by the court. The following describes each method of case referral.

- ASCES ad hoc Lists: On July 10, 2008, state programmers with the Automated Child Support Enforcement System (ACSES) generated two reports containing 1,700 Arapahoe County child support cases with obligors whose children were recipients of public assistance (TANF), as well as those whose children did not receive TANF. Cases had to have paid less than 90 percent of the child support they owed, and had a verified address in Colorado at some point. The project child support worker and a customer service worker who performs outbound calls reviewed cases on these lists and identified those that met project criteria for contact and possible enrollment.
- Worker Referrals: Establishment workers in Arapahoe County are asked to refer NCPs in new child support cases if the parent lacks employment, works part time,

or earns low wages that do not cover their expenses and impair their ability to pay child support. Enforcement workers and a criminal justice agency coordinator are also requested to refer NCPs in their caseloads who met the eligibility criteria. Some of these individuals may have already been identified on the ad hoc lists generated by ACSES, but duplicate referrals are eliminated.

- Court Referrals: The child support magistrate is invited to refer NCPs who appear in court for order establishment and/or matters pertaining to nonpayment of child support. The NCPs are referred to the child support worker for possible enrollment in the project.

Eligibility

All referred cases (and those generated on the ad hoc lists produced by ACSES) are screened for eligibility by the child support workers according to the following eligibility criteria:

- NCPs must be U.S. citizens or have obtained legal residency.
- NCPs must have had a verified Colorado address at some point, permitting contact by mail and/or telephone.
- NCPs must complete a program application, an employment-related assessment, and an Individual Responsibility Contract.

Cases are eliminated if they:

- Lack a child support order. New establishment cases identified on the ACSES ad hoc are not contacted because they typically lacked a child support order and a payment record that would indicate project suitability. Eligible establishment cases are referred to the project by workers during the process of establishing a child support order.
- Paid more than 66 percent of owed child support in the previous three months. Although CSE seeks to obtain full payment of child support orders, it was decided to limit project enrollment to those who paying below the state's performance goal for 2009.
- Were scheduled to be closed. CSE was interested in providing employment for NCPs with continuing monthly obligations, with the objective of increasing the receipt of support on a monthly basis. Cases that were about to be closed for a variety of reasons were of lesser importance to the agency.
- Had monthly support orders that exceed \$1,500. Monthly support orders are an indicator of NCP income levels. CSE and its workforce partner ADW do not feel that the workforce program can help very high-earning obligors find alternative employment in the current job climate, particularly if they are collecting Unemployment Compensation Benefits. In some instances, nonpayment among high-earning obligors may be due to voluntary unemployment or hidden assets that require enforcement remedies.

For cases referred by establishment, enforcement workers, or the court, the following additional eligibility criteria were established:

- NCP is employed part-time, seasonally, or unemployed and is not attending school.
- NCP does not earn a living wage or has another family to support and lacks income to meet his financial obligations.
- NCP does not receive TANF or have a physical or mental disability that limits his ability to work.
- NCP does not have a substance abuse problem that would limit his ability to work.

Program Services and Operations

Both CSE and ADW assigned specialized staff to Parents to Work. CSE increased the number of specialized staff it assigned to Parents to Work from one to two workers over the 30-month life of the project. Their job was to obtain and process referrals; assign cases to the experimental and comparison groups; enroll project participants; handle relevant child support actions for enrolled NCPs; and communicate with the workforce program, court, attorneys, and child support workers about the participation status of targeted participants.

ADW provided a variety of services to program participants to help them obtain employment following an initial assessment of their employment and educational needs

The employment vendor, Arapahoe/Douglas Workforce

Center (ADW), began the project with two FTEs and doubled its staffing level to four. Two of the employment specialists focused on assessing clients and managing their cases. The third workforce specialist focused on developing jobs, establishing work training and on-the-job training opportunities, operating an intensive job club, and providing workshops. The program coordinator did back-up support, communication with CSE, and service coordination.

ADW provided a variety of services to program participants to help them obtain employment following an initial assessment of their employment and educational needs. These services included:

- Individual employment plans;
- Job preparedness/readiness training;
- Application assistance/completion;
- Résumé preparation;
- Interviewing skills;
- Job referrals/placement;
- Business/employer recruitment and developing new business relationships, as well as maintaining existing relationships;
- Job fairs;
- On-the-job training or work experiences or customized training opportunities connected directly to employment;
- GED pre-classes, pre-testing, and testing; and

- Assistance with housing, transportation, work clothes, utilities, etc.

CSE and ADW personnel were co-located at CSE, enabling rapid communication about project referrals, client nonperformance, necessary agency actions, and court involvement. Project workers from the two agencies met weekly to communicate about project cases. Bimonthly meetings were held with line staff and managers of CSE and ADW, the evaluator, the magistrate, CSE attorneys, and other relevant project partners. These project meetings were used to:

- Develop the criteria for project participation;
- Develop random assignment procedures to ensure the generation of a comparison group that is equivalent to the experimental group and the collection of limited information on comparison group cases;
- Design and revise data collection forms to record information on the characteristics of NCPs being referred to the project, participation patterns, interventions by workforce staff, the delivery of supportive services, delinquency or other forms of non-participation, referral to court, and employment and child support outcomes;
- Develop procedures for CSE staff to immediately refer appropriate unemployed and under employed NCPs to specialized staff at ADW for assessment, development of an employment plan, and delivery of employment services;
- Develop procedures to convey information on program participation and/or delinquency in ADW to CSE for relevant child support actions and referral to court;
- Develop procedures to rapidly communicate changes in employment status from employment programs to CSE so wage withholding orders can be initiated;
- Develop procedures to rapidly initiate enforcement actions by CSE staff for NCPs who fail to cooperate, including referrals to court for expedited contempt actions; and
- Develop procedures to request that the court engage in various actions in response to NCP payment behavior and/or participation in ADW.

Arapahoe County District Court/18th Judicial District has a magistrate with a docket dedicated solely to CSE matters. The magistrate had the discretion to encourage, recommend, or require NCPs to participate in Parents to Work. In addition, the magistrate had the ability to:

- Sentence to ankle monitoring or jail NCPs who failed to comply with program requirements or pay their child support;
- Schedule and conduct review hearings to monitor NCP participation in Parents to Work; and
- Dismiss contempt charges for NCPs who successfully participate in Parents to Work and pay their support.

Evaluation Methodology

Generating Treatment and Comparison Groups

The evaluation of Parents to Work involved the generation of data for two groups: a group that received ADW services and a comparison group that was treated in the usual manner by the child support agency. To be eligible for either group, the NCP had to be:

- Underemployed, employed part-time, or employed seasonally, or employed at less than a living wage;
- Not attending school full-time;
- Not a current recipient of TANF;
- Without physical or mental disabilities that would limit employment; and
- Free from substance abuse problems that would prevent him from obtaining and keeping employment.

Potential project participants were generated from a variety of sources that included:

- A list of cases generated by ACSES programmers on July 10, 2008. The list consisted of 898 obligors whose children were receiving TANF when the list was generated and 1,993 obligors whose children were non-recipients but had paid less than 90 percent of the child support they owed in the three months prior to the generation of the list and had a verified address;

Table 1. Case Identification Source for Program Enrollment

	Experimental Group (N=601)	Comparison Group (N=349)
Enforcement worker	56%	44%
Court	12%	1%
Walk-in	2%	0%
Establishment worker	5%	2%
Criminal Justice referral	0.3%	0%
Ad hoc ACSES report	12%	52%
Other (e.g., customer service)	13%	1%

Differences are significant at .00.

- Enforcement workers at Arapahoe County who were encouraged to refer non-paying and unemployed clients in their caseload to the project; and
- Other referral sources that could include the court, walk-ins to the child support agency, customer service workers, establishment workers, and criminal justice workers.

Given that all cases had to meet the same eligibility requirements, the expectation was that cases from each of the sources would be relatively comparable. As a result, a disproportionate number of comparison group cases were drawn from the ad hoc report. This allowed a greater percentage of cases that were referred by workers and the court to be assigned to the treatment group (see Table 1). This helped gain support for the program. When workers referred an NCP, they were assigned to the treatment or

comparison group based on the last digit of the NCP's Social Security number (SSN). NCPs with SSNs ending in 0 to 2 were assigned to the comparison group; NCPs with SSNs ending in 3 to 9 were assigned to the experimental group. A total of 950 individuals identified through all sources were determined to be eligible for the project.

Comparability of Treatment and Comparison Groups

Given the differences in referral sources, a few analyses were conducted comparing the two groups to determine whether there are pre-existing differences between the experimental and comparison groups that need to be considered during the outcome analysis.

Table 2. Age of Support Order at Program Enrollment		
	Experimental Group (N=601)	Comparison Group (N=349)
★Age of child support order at enrollment in Parents to Work:		
Mean	5.6	5.0
Median	4.7	4.1
Range	1-21.4	1-17.9
★Differences between experimental and comparison group are statistically significant at .01.		

Although Table 2 shows statistically significant differences between the experimental and comparison groups with respect to the age of their orders at program entry, the practical differences appear to be slight. On average the

orders are 5.6 or 5.0 years old, respectively.

Table 3. Age and Marital Status, by Group		
	Experimental Group (N=601)	Comparison Group (N=349)
Age		
Mean	36.5	35.7
Median	36.0	35.4
Range	18-60	18-62
Relationship to other parent on target child support case		
Divorced	29%	26%
Never married	68%	73%
Married	3%	1%

Table 3 demonstrates that average ages of NCPs in both groups are very comparable. Both groups have average ages of approximately 36 years. In addition, the two groups are very equivalent in the relationship between the parents in the target child support case. In 68 percent of the experimental group and 73 percent of the comparison group, the parents were never married.

The child support situation of obligors in the experimental and comparison groups at project enrollment was fairly equivalent. Parents in both groups had an average of 1.4 to 1.5 child support cases, and most were at the enforcement stage.

There were some statistically significant differences between the two groups with respect to TANF status at project entry. However, the practical differences were small. Ten percent of the experimental group and 3 percent of the comparison group involved cases with children currently receiving TANF. However, two-thirds of both groups were comprised of parents whose children had never received public assistance.

There were some differences between the two groups in the incidence of orders established by default (*i.e.*, without the participation of the obligor). This was the case for 13 percent of parents in the experimental group but 25 percent of the comparison group.

Child support order levels were equivalent for parents in the two groups. While they ranged from \$20 to more than \$1,300 per month, the average order was \$307 and \$324, with half of obligors in both groups having orders that fell below \$300 per month. Obligor in the two groups also had equivalent amounts of child support debt at program entry, with average arrears balances standing at \$10,359 and \$9,083 for members of the experimental and comparison groups, respectively.

Table 4. Child Support Case Characteristics at Entry By Group

	Experimental (N=598)	Comparison (N=349)
Total number of cases on ACSES:		
Mean	1.5	1.4
Median	1.0	1.0
Range	1-9	1-9
Case status at program intake:		
Establishment	4%	3%
Enforcement	96%	97%
★ TANF status on target case:		
Currently receives TANF	10%	3%
Formerly received TANF	28%	33%
Never received TANF	62%	64%
★ Order establishment method:		
Default	13%	25%
Stipulation	42%	33%
Court	44%	42%
Other	1%	0%
Current MSO:		
Mean	\$324	\$307
Median	\$294	\$273
Range	\$20-\$1,330	\$32-\$1,283
Total amount due per month (MSO+MAD):		
Mean	\$361	\$353
Median	\$321	\$325
Range	\$22-\$1,330	\$44-\$1,540
Total arrears owed on the case:		
Mean	\$10,359	\$9,083
Median	\$5,044	\$3,837
Range	\$1-\$142,778	\$50-\$84,133
★ Combined MSO owed on all cases:		
Mean	\$380	\$326
Median	\$342	\$295
Range	\$20-\$1,356	\$30-\$1,060

★ Differences between experimental and comparison groups significant at .01 or less.

The proportions with earnings in the year prior to group assignment were 77 percent for the treatment group and 67 percent among the comparison group.¹ Relative to the treatment group, the comparison group paid a smaller percentage of its child support obligation in the three months prior to group assignment, and was more likely to have paid nothing. These differences in the percentage showing earnings and the child support payment patterns are statistically significant and potentially important factors to consider when analyzing the outcome data.

Table 5. Employment Characteristics of Participants in Parents to Work at Entry, by Group

	Experimental Group (N=601)	Comparison Group (N=349)
★Percentage with earnings reported in the year prior to enrollment	77%	67%
Earnings in the 12 months prior to program entry (CDLE data)		
Mean	\$11,409	\$11,081
Median	\$8,643	\$7,260
Range	\$39-\$56,260	\$35-\$69,347
★Percentage paying "0" towards MSO over previous 3 months	44%	58%
★Percentage of MSO due that was paid over the previous 3 months:		
Mean	30%	19%
Median	14%	0%
Range	0-100%	0-100%

★Differences between experimental and comparison group are statistically significant at .01.

Data Sources for the Evaluation

CSE and ADW personnel used a comprehensive set of data collection forms, some of which were designed by the Center for Policy Research, for evaluation purposes. They include the following:

- Child Support Application Form: Completed by the specialized child support worker in the first meeting with the NCP, the form collects information on the employment status, earnings referral source, and child support case history of the noncustodial parent. The form has a place for the NCP to sign, stating his agreement to participate in the Parents to Work program.
- Child Support Update/Outcome Form: This form is completed by the specialized child support worker once the case is closed. A case is considered closed if the client has dropped out of the project or has been employed and making child support payments for three consecutive months. The form details NCP compliance with the project and any enforcement actions taken on the case if noncompliant. It also tracks if the client has re-entered the project and the final outcome of the case.

¹ All earnings reports are based on quarterly wage reports filed by employers with the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment.

- Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Initial Assessment: The WIA application is completed by the workforce specialists at their initial meeting with the NCP. The application collects detailed demographic and background information on the NCP.
- WIA Individual Employment Plan: The employment plan is also completed by the workforce specialist at the initial meeting with the NCP. This form collects detailed work history, barriers to employment, and support services needed by the NCP to secure successful employment.
- WIA Exit/Follow-Up Program Plan: Completed by the workforce specialist, the follow-up program plan is a brief form detailing program completion and follow-up steps to be taken with the NCP once he has completed the Parents to Work program.
- Workshop Plan/Checklist: The checklist is completed by the workforce specialist once the NCP has completed/dropped out of the program. This checklist tracks the NCP's activities at the workforce center, including the number of intensive job clubs attended and interviews and job applications completed. The checklist also tracks all job search activities the client participates in, number of workshops attended, and all other workforce center activities.
- Quick Fact Sheet for Project Cases: The fact sheet is completed by the specialized child support worker based on information from the workforce specialist on the client's participation in the program. The form is then shared with the child support attorneys when the case is scheduled for court to substantiate any request for action by the court. If the NCP has been noncompliant, the specialized child support worker fills out information on the date of the NCP's noncompliance with the program, his history of participation in the project, reason for the CSE request from the court typically based on NCP's noncompliance with the program, and the actions CSE is requesting on the case. There is also a place for the child support attorneys to record the date of the hearing and actions taken by the court at the hearing.

After three months of participation in the workforce program, all forms collected on the case were sent from ADW to the specialized child support worker. Once the child support worker completed all project forms and put them together with the forms from ADW staff, they were sent to CPR to be entered into a database and analyzed.

In addition to these forms tracking the progress of cases enrolled in the project, CPR developed a tool to help child support workers select appropriate cases:

- Checklist for Child Support Establishment Workers: This brief checklist provided a quick reference to child support establishment and enforcement workers to determine if the NCP was eligible for Parents to Work.

CPR also developed a tool to guide the specialized child support worker in the selection of cases off the ACSES ad hoc report for the generation of a comparison group:

- Excel Spreadsheet for Case Selection: The spreadsheet calls for the worker to enter limited details on comparison group cases drawn from the ad hoc report. This included case identifiers, the date the case was identified for enrollment in the comparison group, and custody arrangement. This allowed CPR to locate and gather payment data on cases in the comparison group from the Automated Child Support Enforcement System at the conclusion of the project.

CPR developed letters to be sent to NCPs who failed to respond to overtures by project staff and to notify them that they had been dropped from the project. Noncompliant NCPs were sent the following communications:

- Notice of Noncompliance: This letter was sent after several attempts to reach the NCP had been made and the NCP failed to appear for the meeting with ADW staff. The letter warned the NCP of the consequences of noncompliance and gave him a second chance to come in and meet with ADW staff.
- Final Warning Letter: This letter was sent after numerous attempts had been made to reach the NCP, the NCP failed to appear at any meetings or workshops with ADW staff, and there was no response to the first letter about noncompliance.

Employment activity, earnings, and child support payment behavior was tracked in several different ways: employment verification letters, records of wage withholding orders, and child support payments as recorded on ledgers maintained on the Automated Child Support Enforcement System (ACSES). ACSES programmers generated an automated extract that included information on monthly payments due and paid during the 24 months preceding and following enrollment in Parents to Work. The information was gathered for all cases in the experimental and comparison groups. The extract also included information on order dates, order levels, arrears balances, modification activity, and the incidence of multiple cases for NCPs in the experimental and comparison groups.



Noncustodial Parents in Parents to Work

Enrollment in Parents to Work

Staff began enrolling participants in Parents to Work in August 2008 and continued through March 2010. Enrollment activity got off to a good start throughout the first six months of project operations and picked up significantly in January 2009, with 131 obligors enrolling in the experimental group in the first quarter of 2009. Enrollments remained steady throughout the remainder of the project, peaking at the end of 2009, with 146 obligors enrolled in the experimental group in the last quarter of 2009. Project enrollments wound down in the first quarter of 2010, with the last enrollments occurring in March 2010.

Enforcement workers at Arapahoe County confirm that they were encouraged to refer nonpaying and unemployed clients in their caseload to the project and that they viewed the project as “another tool” that they welcomed being able to use with obligors. As one worker explained, “It’s a great tool. For years people say that there aren’t any jobs. And this type of referral separates out those who want to work from those who have no intention of working.” Establishment workers reported that project staff did less outreach to them about making referrals and that clients were often less inclined to respond to an offer for employment help at that stage because they were often receiving unemployment compensation benefits or could not be pressured to participate because they were not yet delinquent in payments. As one worker explained, “They didn’t have a job but often they weren’t interested until the enforcement remedies started to happen.”

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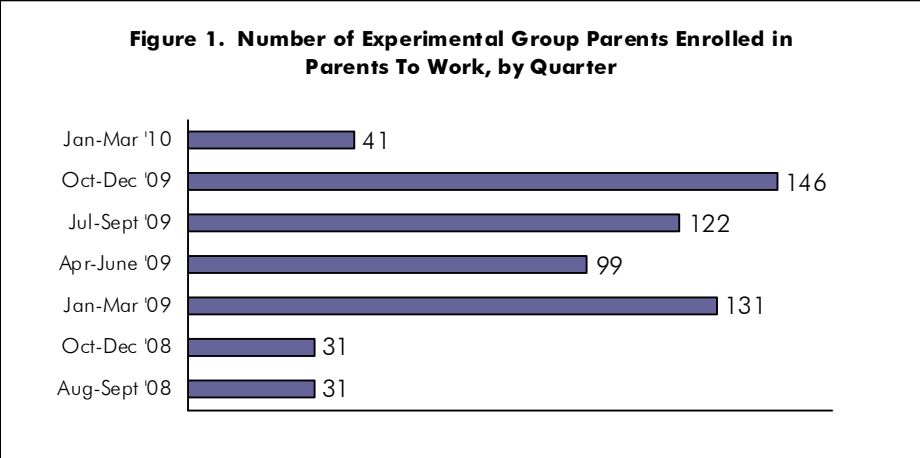


Table 6. Demographic Characteristics of Experimental Group Participants in Parents To Work (n=60)

Sex:	Male	94%
	Female	6%
Race:	American Indian	4%
	Hawaiian/Pacific Islander/Asian	1%
	White	31%
	Black	46%
	Hispanic	15%
	Other	3%
Highest level of education completed:	Less than high school	17%
	High school/GED	83%
Cohabitation with other parent on target child support case:	Percentage never lived with other parent on target child support case	43%
	Lived with other parent	57%
	Number	(358)
In past 6 months, how often NCP has seen the child(ren) on the target case:	About once per week or more	36%
	About 1-2 days per month	9%
	Every few months	8%
	A few days per year	8%
	Never	27%
	Other	12%

Characteristics of Program Participants

Table 6 presents a summary picture of the parents who were assigned to and enrolled in the experimental group for Parents to Work. They were primarily male (94%) and educated to the high school level (83%). They were racially and ethnically diverse, with 46 percent characterizing themselves as African American, 31 percent classifying themselves as White, and 15 percent classifying themselves as Hispanic.

Although none of the project participants lived with their children when they enrolled in the project and all had been ordered by the court to pay child support, most noncustodial parents who

enrolled in the project (57%) had lived with the parent of their children at some time in the past. Many noncustodial parents also reported substantial levels of contact with their children. More than a third (36%) said they saw their children at least once a week, and another 9 percent reported visiting once or twice a month. On the other hand, more than a third reported that they never see their children (27%) or see them only a few days per year (8%).

Work History and Barriers to Employment at Program Entry

Parents to Work connected nonpaying obligors with workforce services to help them obtain employment and become better positioned to meet their child support obligations. Most participants came to the project because they were delinquent in payments and were told by their child support workers that they could avoid stringent enforcement actions by enrolling and trying to get a job. The first step in the project for participants was to meet with project staff members who assessed their employment status and provided an introduction to workforce center services.

Table 7. Employment History Reported by Participants in Parents to Work at Program Entry

		(N=569)
Percentage currently unemployed		82%
Reasons last job ended:		
Employer closed business		5%
Substantial layoff of workers		30%
Self-employed, business failed		4%
Terminated		23%
Voluntarily left job		11%
Incarcerated		8%
Other		19%
Longest length of time ever worked for one employer, in years:		
Mean		5.3
Median		4.0
Range		Less than 1-27
Percentage of NCPs with no work history in past 5 years		3%
Length of employment at most recent job, in years:		
Mean		2.2
Median		8 months
Range		Less than 1-25 years
Number of hours worked per week at most recent job:		
Mean		38.9
Median		40.0
Range		3-84
Number		(416)
Hourly wage at most recent job:		
Mean		\$12.53
Median		\$11.25
Range		\$2-35
Number		(419)

Table 7 summarizes the employment status and history of participants at project enrollment. It shows that nearly all parents who enrolled were unemployed (82%) and only a few (11%) had left their last job for voluntary reasons. Most lost their jobs because of large-scale layoffs (30%), business closures (5%), or self-employment failures (4%). Nearly a quarter (23%) reported that they had been terminated, and another 8 percent lost jobs due to incarceration.

Parents who enrolled in the project were fairly experienced in the world of work. Only 3 percent reported no work activity in the past three years. To the contrary, participants reported impressive levels of tenure at their most stable job, with the number of years worked ranging from one to 27 years, the average being 5.3 and the median being 4.0. Tenure at their most recent job was somewhat less, with the average being 22 months and the median being only eight months. The median number of hours worked at recent jobs was 40 hours per week, and the median wage was \$11.25 per hour.

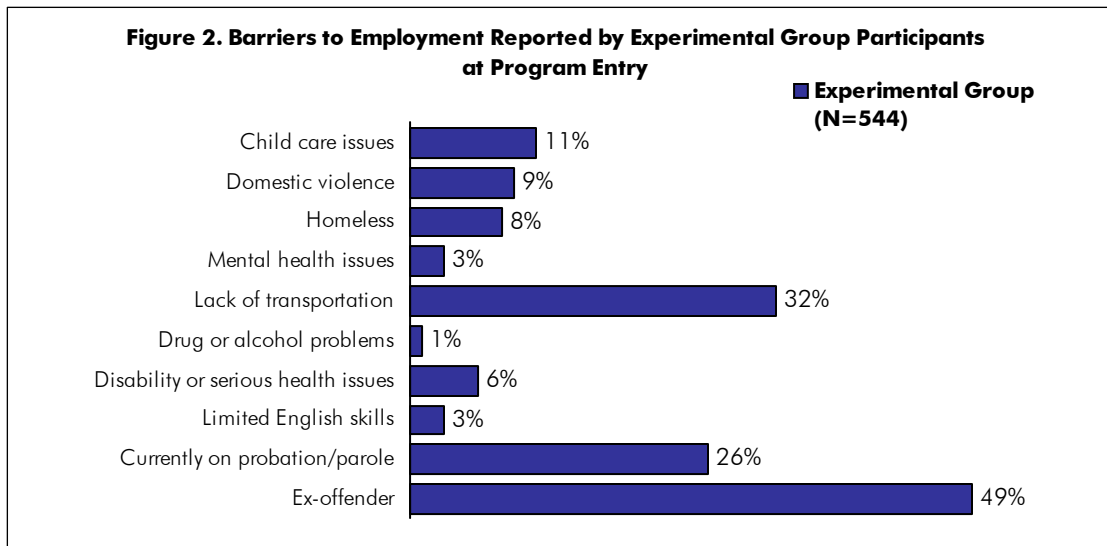
Unemployment is the biggest barrier to paying regular child support, and a project that aims to assist noncustodial parents with obtaining employment has to address the barriers to gainful employment that this population faces. Figure 2 shows that the list is extensive and complex. The most common is a criminal background, which was cited by 49 percent of project participants. More than a quarter of the NCPs (26%) were on parole or probation when they enrolled. Criminal backgrounds create serious obstacles to securing employment and reduces wages, weeks worked, annual earnings, and upward mobility. Indeed, a recent report shows that serving time reduces hourly wages for men by

Unemployment is the biggest barrier to paying regular child support, and a project that aims to assist noncustodial parents with obtaining employment has to address the barriers to gainful employment that this population faces

approximately 11 percent, annual employment by 9 weeks, and annual earnings by 40 percent (Pew, 2010).

The second most commonly cited barrier to employment for Parents to Work participants was a lack of transportation, which was cited by 32 percent of project participants. In addition to having their driver’s license suspended for nonpayment of support, noncustodial parents frequently lack a reliable vehicle or live far from public transportation.

Other barriers to employment that participants mentioned less frequently were: lack of child care (11%), domestic violence (9%), homelessness (8%), disability or serious health issues (6%), mental health issues (3%), limited English skills (3%), and substance abuse problems (1%). Some of these problems might have been under-reported by noncustodial parents at program entry. For example, an assessment of 1,491 noncustodial parents who enrolled in responsible fatherhood programs in seven states seeking help with employment and parent-child contact found that 67 percent had a criminal history, 20 percent lacked a permanent address, 19 percent lacked reliable transportation, 42 percent had no valid driver’s license, 14 percent wanted help with substance abuse, 15 percent wanted help with anger management, and 16 percent wanted help with health care (Pearson, et al., 2003).



Service Needs Identified and Provided by Staff

Upon enrollment in Parents to Work, project staff at AD Works assessed participants for various service needs. Table 8 shows that project staff thought that at least 90 percent of participants needed help with transportation and job searches. Given the strong project emphasis on finding a job and paying child support, it is not surprising that relatively few project participants were classified as needing GED preparation or other types of education and training.

The service needs identified for project participants matched the specialized and non-specialized services that A/D Works was able to provide. The main intervention was an intensive job club that A/D Works staff offered to everyone enrolled in the experimental group. It consisted of a daily, exclusive, three-hour session for project participants on job searches, held in a private room at the workforce center. Participants were instructed to

attend the intensive job club, unless they had already found a job or had a conflicting interview or other job-related activity. A career counselor led the intensive job club. There were also computers available to facilitate the search process. Project participants could also attend a variety of other programs at the workforce center that were offered to the general public. This included help with job applications, résumé writing, and computer-based job searches. A/D Works hosted hiring events, career fairs and placed participants directly in contact with employers. In addition, A/D Works offered participants career assessment tests to identify their job skills, abilities, and deficits. Finally, A/D Works offered project participants and the general public workshops on cover letter and résumé writing, workforce dress and behavior, and retention and advancement in the work place.

Table 8. Service Needs Identified for Project Participants by Staff at Program Entry

	(N=571)
Transportation help (gas voucher, bus pass, car insurance)	96%
Job search	90%
Job referrals	74%
Case management	44%
Job readiness	43%
Reinstatement of driver's license	38%
Job development	30%
Job coaching	24%
Recommended child support debt forgiveness	23%
Help buying work supplies/clothes	22%
Rental assistance	17%
Short-term job training	16%
Other supportive services	16%
Career assessment	16%
Basic skills/pre-GED or GED preparation	14%
Utility assistance	13%
Help with access and visitation	12%
Longer term vocational training	9%
Professional license fees paid	9%
Tuition and school fees	8%
Apprenticeship	7%
Vocational rehabilitation	3%
English as a Second Language	2%
Child care	2%
Other	2%

Staff at A/D Works had information on the activities pursued by 486 members of the experimental group during their enrollment in Parents to Work. The other 115 individuals without information appear to have enrolled in the project but did not engage in any recorded activities. Table 9 shows that three-quarters of active experimental group participants (79%) engaged in at least one intensive job club session, with half attending

more than 3.5. Indeed, on average, participants attended 7.5 intensive Job Club sessions, with one individual attending 67!

According to staff records, nearly half of active project participants (44%) completed at least one job application, with the average being 22.7 and the median being 5.5. The range in applications completed was quite broad, with one individual completing 279 during project enrollment.

A similar proportion of project participants (40%) attended at least one job interview with the average being 2.9 and the median being 2.0. As noted in the section on service needs, very few project participants participated in on-the-job training or subsidized employment experiences (3%).

Table 9. Selected Services Received by Participants as Reported By Project Staff		(N=486)
Percentage participated in Intensive Job Club		79%
Number of times participants attend Intensive Job Club:		
	Mean	7.5
	Median	3.5
	Range	1-67
Percentage completing at least one job application		44%
Number of job applications completed:		
	Mean	22.7
	Median	5.5
	Range	1-279
Percentage attending at least one job interview		40%
Number of job interviews attended:		
	Mean	2.9
	Median	2.0
	Range	1-30
Percentage participating in job search activities		58%
Type of job search activities participated in:		
	Job search process	52%
	On-the-job training	3%
	Work training experiences	3%
	Hiring event	32%
	Veterans' representative	4%
	Other	42%
Percentage participated in career assessment		6%
Number of career assessments attended:		
	Mean	2.5
	Median	1.5
	Range	1-8
Percentage participated in soft skills workshop		58%
Number of soft skills workshops attended:		
	Mean	3.3
	Median	3.0
	Range	1-18
Percentage participated in career pathways		25%
Number of career pathways attended:		
	Mean	2.0
	Median	2.0
	Range	1-8

In addition to offering parents services pertaining to work development, Parents to Work attempted to address at least some of the barriers to employment that parents faced through the delivery of relevant supportive resources and/or referral to appropriate community-based organizations. Table 10 shows that approximately half (54%) of the parents in the experimental group received at least some supportive service. The most common service received was transportation assistance, which typically consisted of bus tokens or a voucher for the purchase of gas. The next most common type of assistance also pertained to transportation and involved the reinstatement of a driver's license that had been suspended for nonpayment of child support. This occurred for 11 percent of project participants. Other types of assistance dealing with housing, mental health services, and child care were rarer, but generally were consistent with the fact that relatively few parents indicated a need for help in these areas.

Table 10. Supportive Services Received, Reported by Project Staff

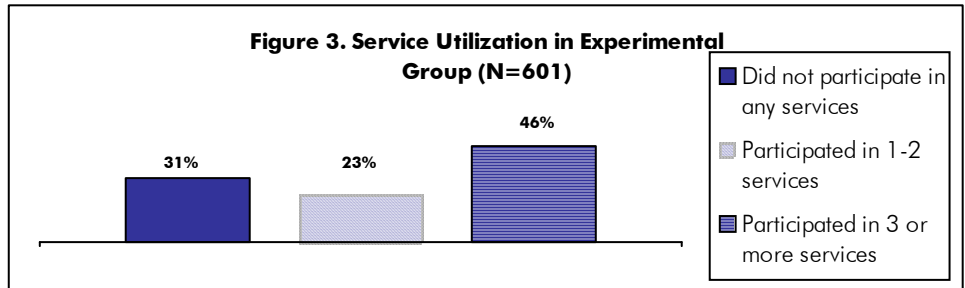
	(N=576)
Percentage of participants receiving any supportive services	54%
Mental health services	2%
Transportation assistance	92%
Housing	5%
Child/elder care assistance	1%
Driver's license reinstatement	11%
Clothing/work tools and supplies	5%
Rental assistance	6%
Utility assistance	2%
Other	3%
Number	(311)



Client Participation in Workforce Services

One of the goals of Parents to Work was to get eligible noncustodial parents into workforce development services so that they could improve their employment prospects. Accordingly, CPR was interested in examining whether enrollment in the program led parents to participate in workforce development, the scale of their participation, and the reasons why project involvement was more robust for some parents and not for others.

Figure 3 portrays client engagement in workforce activities among participants in the experimental group. Nearly a third (31%) did not participate in any services offered by A/D Works. This means that although they were nominally enrolled in the experimental group, they eluded participation in work development activities sanctioned by the project. Indeed, any and all job search activities they might have pursued were done independently, without the assistance of a workforce program. Nearly a quarter (23%) of project participants utilized a slim range of project services offered by the workforce program and participated in one or two activities. Finally, nearly a half (46%) were involved in a more wholehearted manner and participated in three or more workforce activities during their tenure in Parents to Work.



To better understand why some clients participated in workforce development services more fully than others, CPR researchers compared levels of participation for clients with different demographic characteristics and service experiences. These are summarized in Table 11. It shows that clients who participated more fully in the project tended to be older, African American, educated to the high school level or higher, and have a history of earnings that was somewhat lower than their counterparts who participated less enthusiastically. They were also statistically more likely to be divorced from the other parent, rather than never married.

To contrast, those who did not participate in any workforce activities were more likely to be younger, Hispanic or white, a high school dropout, never married to the parent of their children, and have a history of somewhat higher earnings in the 12 months prior to their enrollment in Parents to Work.

... clients who participated more fully in the project tended to be older, African American, educated to the high school level or higher, and have a history of earnings that was somewhat lower than their counterparts who participated less enthusiastically. They were also statistically more likely to be divorced from the other parent, rather than never married ...

Participation patterns did not vary for parents with different public assistance and child support histories. Thus, parents who participated fully and less fully were equally apt to have children with various public and non-public assistance backgrounds and to have established their child support orders using default, stipulation, and court hearings.

Those who participated fully and non-participants had statistically identical number of child support cases and average support obligations that ranged from \$314 to \$327 per month. They also had equivalent arrears balances that averaged \$8,816 to \$11,266.

Table 11. Selected Characteristics of Project Participants, by Level of Project Participation

	Average Age★			
Fully participated	37.3			
Partially participated	36.8			
No participation	35.1			
	Race★			
	White	African-American	Hispanic	Other
Fully participated	41%	51%	35%	55%
Partially participated	24%	22%	31%	12%
No participation	34%	27%	35%	32%
	Highest level of education completed★			
	Less than high school		High school/GED or higher	
Fully participated	38%		50%	
Partially participated	25%		22%	
No participation	37%		28%	
	Average earnings in the past 12 months reported by CDLE★			
Fully participated	\$11,136			
Partially participated	\$11,617			
No participation	\$11,681			
	Relationship to the other parent★			
	Divorced		Never Married	
Fully participated	52%		44%	
Partially participated	24%		23%	
No participation	24%		34%	
	TANF status on case			
	Never received TANF	Current TANF	Former TANF	
Fully participated	50%	44%	40%	
Partially participated	21%	21%	27%	
No participation	29%	35%	33%	
	Method of child support order establishment			
	Default	Stipulation	Court	
Fully participated	38%	51%	47%	
Partially participated	27%	22%	20%	
No participation	35%	27%	33%	
	Average number of child support cases on ACSES			
Fully participated	1.4			
Partially participated	1.5			
No participation	1.4			
	Average current MSO			
Fully participated	\$326			
Partially participated	\$314			
No participation	\$327			
	Average arrears owed on case			
Fully participated	\$11,266			
Partially participated	\$8,816			
No participation	\$9,194			

Barriers and resource shortages can limit client participation in workforce services, so CPR examined whether this was the case for Parents to Work. Table 12 shows that:

- Clients who reported that they lacked access to reliable transportation were significantly less likely to fully participate in the project and attended few or no workforce development activities.
- Those who reported having reliable transportation succeeded in participating in multiple intensive job club sessions and other activities.
- There were no statistically significant differences in participation behavior for other barriers to employment reported by project participants, including criminal history, mental health problems, and homelessness. Project clients who disclosed a prior criminal history, mental health issues, and/or homelessness participated at approximately the same level as those who failed to disclose these issues.

Table 12. Selected Barriers to Employment Reported by Participants, by, Level of Project Participation

	Ex-offender	
	No	Yes
Fully participated	48%	42%
Partially participated	22%	24%
No participation	30%	35%
	Disability or serious health issues	
	No	Yes
Fully participated	45%	48%
Partially participated	22%	29%
No participation	32%	23%
	Lack of transportation★	
	No	Yes
Fully participated	50%	38%
Partially participated	20%	27%
No participation	30%	35%
	Mental health issues	
	No	Yes
Fully participated	45%	59%
Partially participated	23%	24%
No participation	33%	18%
	Homelessness	
	No	Yes
Fully participated	46%	45%
Partially participated	22%	24%
No participation	32%	31%

★Chi square is significant at .03 or less.

Table 13. Court Action On Case, by Level of Participation in PTW (N=601)

	Court Action on Case★	
	No Court Action	Court Action
Fully Participated	43%	63%
Partially Participated	23%	22%
No Participation	34%	15%

★Chi square is significant at .00.

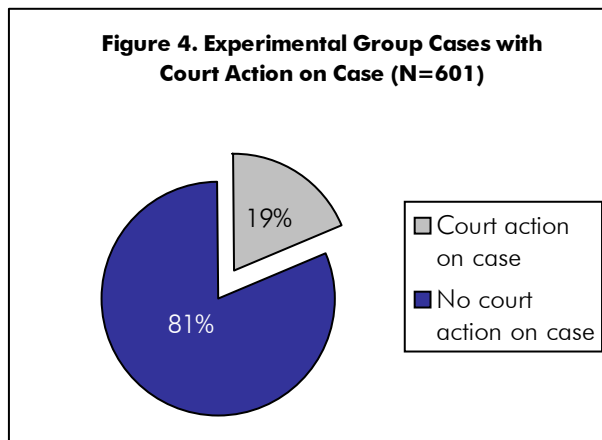
A final aspect of project treatment that CPR researchers examined to better understand client participation dealt with court activity. As Table 13 shows, full participation patterns were significantly higher among clients who experienced some form of court action. Indeed, while nearly two-thirds of participants who experienced court action (63%)

attended multiple intensive job clubs and other workforce development activities, this was the case for less than half (43%) of those with no court action.

The 69 percent of parents in the experimental group for Parents to Work who used at least one workforce service is lower than the 83 percent of noncustodial parents in the Texas NCP Choices program who participated in a workforce development activity as a result of program enrollment. One possible explanation for this is the role of the court in the two programs. NCP Choices involved more aggressive court-ordered participation and sanctions for nonparticipation. Indeed, the cornerstones of the program were being ordered to participate coupled with the threat of jail time for noncompliance.

Court participation in Parents to Work was more nuanced. Although the Arapahoe District Court supported the project and partnered with child support and the workforce program, records indicate that only 19 percent of the cases in the experimental group involved any court action. This fell below the 31 percent of parents in the group who failed to engage in any workforce development activities despite their referral to A/D Works and their enrollment in the project.

Figure 4. Experimental Group Cases with Court Action on Case (N=601)



The magistrate who handled child support matters in the 18th Judicial District during most of the project's life (January 2009-December 2010) expressed strong support. On a scale of 1 to 10, he rated the program a "10," said it was "terrific," and confessed to being a "big believer." He took the initiative to visit A/D Works in order to see what services they actually provided so that he could do a better job of trying to motivate noncustodial

parents in his courtroom to attend. And he definitely appreciated the “hands-on” assistance the project staff provided. As he noted, “They show people how to do things. Without it, they wouldn’t get individual attention. These clients are like children. They wouldn’t know how to begin. They aren’t skilled at finding jobs or answering questions about being out of the labor force or being in prison. It is a very needed resource.”

Nevertheless, the magistrate rarely ordered parents to go to the project or to sanction them harshly for failing to participate and neglecting to pay support. Instead, he typically told parents that he would “weigh their participation heavily” and scheduled them to appear for a review hearing within a short period of time. He did not want program resources wasted on “unmotivated” participants, he did not feel sanctions were appropriate if money was “flowing” or a parent lived too far away or lacked transportation and could not get to the workforce center, and he did not want to issue a blanket penalty for non-participation. As he put it, “I didn’t want to say, ‘you are going to get a thumping’ if you don’t go. It has to be fact based.” He also takes issue with punitive sanctions. “If you put them in jail, they aren’t going to pay. And ankle monitoring costs \$7 per day or \$200 per month. Shouldn’t that be going for support?”

Table 14. Court Actions Taken at First Hearing	
	(N=93)
Actions taken:	
Recommended/Encouraged Parents to Work	12%
Ordered Parents to Work	13%
Dismissed contempt	1%
Scheduled review hearing	91%
Sentenced, ankle monitor	1%
Sentenced, jail	4%
Other	15%

Table 14 shows the actions that the magistrate took in nonpayment cases that involved parents in the experimental group. It confirms that the magistrate almost always opted to try to motivate parents to participate in the project by scheduling those who appeared in his court to return for a review hearing. It was extremely rare for the magistrate to make participation in Parents to Work

compulsory or administer consequences to those who refused to participate in program services. Ultimately, only five individuals were sentenced to jail and one was ordered to obtain ankle monitoring. Using the authority of the bench to ensure the delivery of workforce services is considered a key feature of effective employment programs for noncompliant parents in the child support program.



Program Outcomes

Employment and Earnings

Information on program outcomes was drawn from two sources: the Automated Child Support Enforcement System (ACSES) and quarterly wage reports filed with the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment by employers as part of the Unemployment Insurance system.

The computerized extract provided by ACSES programmers was generated in October 2010. It included child support payment activity for parents in both groups during the 12 months prior to and following their assignment to either the treatment or comparison group. Programmers also noted if there was any evidence of employment activity in the child support system. This would include evidence of a “verified employer” and/or a wage withholding order.

.... parents in the experimental group exhibited significantly higher rates of employment activity on every measure of employment and earnings following enrollment in or assignment to the Parents to Work project

Quarterly wage information was extracted in December 2010 by workers who did manual look-ups for all parents in the experimental and comparison groups. As with the ACSES payment records, wage information was extracted for the 12 months prior to and following enrollment in or assignment to both treatment groups.

Table 15 compares parents assigned to the treatment and comparison groups. The treatment group exhibited significantly higher rates of employment following enrollment in the Parents to Work project. According to ACSES, treatment group parents had higher rates of verified employment and higher rates of wage withholding than did the comparison group. According to quarterly wage reports, the treatment group was significantly more likely to have earnings in the year following their enrollment. Indeed, while only 47 percent of parents in the comparison group had employer-reported earnings in the 12 months following their assignment to the project, this was the case for 70 percent of parents in the experimental group.

Table 15. Employment and Child Support Case Outcomes, by Group

	Experimental (N=598)	Comparison (N=349)
★Percentage with verified employer at any time following enrollment in PTW	53%	39%
★Percentage with verified employer at extract	83%	69%
★Percentage with earnings reported by CDLE up to 1 year following enrollment	70%	47%
★Percentage with wage withholding order in effect any time following enrollment	55%	40%
★Percentage with wage withholding order in effect at extract	46%	32%
★ Chi square is significant between groups at .05 or less.		

The initial comparison of noncustodial parents in the treatment and comparison groups noted that more NCPs in the treatment group had earnings in the 12 months prior to program entry relative to the comparison group. To determine if the differences shown in Table 15 were merely an extension of that initial finding, post-program employment patterns were analyzed separately for NCPs with no earnings pre-program and those with earnings pre-program.

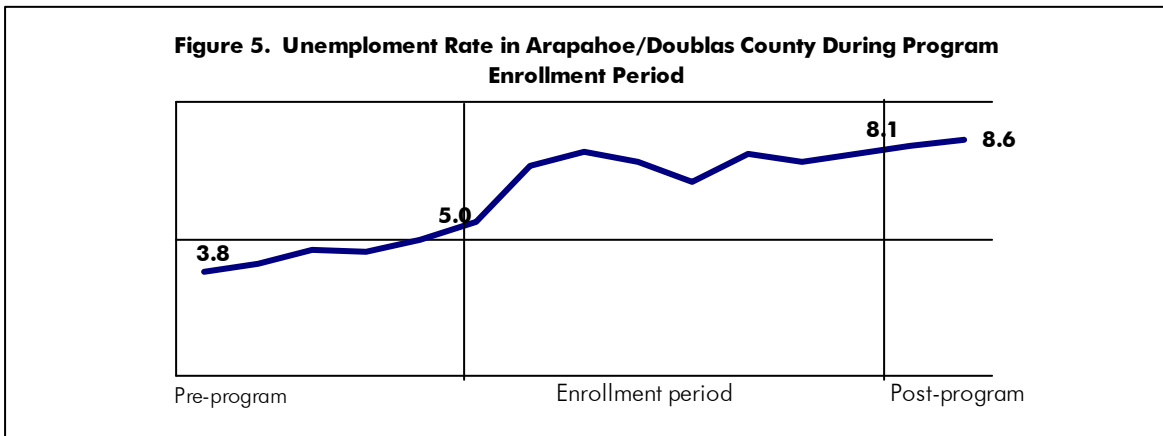
As Table 16 shows, even when controlling for the fact that the treatment group was more likely to show earnings in the months prior to group assignment, the post-program differences between the treatment and comparison groups persist. Among those with no earnings in the year prior to group assignment, 50 percent of the treatment group, but 30 percent of the comparison group, showed post-program earnings based on CDLE data.

Table 16. Employment and Child Support Case Outcomes, by Group Controlling for Earnings Pre-Program

	No Earnings in Year Prior to Group Assignment		Earnings in Year Prior to Group Assignment	
	Experimental	Comparison	Experimental	Comparison
Percentage with verified employer at any time following enrollment in PTW	40%	★ 28%	57%	★ 44%
Percentage with verified employer at extract	41%	★ 30%	58%	★ 46%
Percentage with earnings reported by CDLE up to 1 year following enrollment	50%	★ 30%	76%	★ 56%
Percentage with wage withholding order in effect at any time following enrollment in PTW	72%	★ 56%	87%	★ 75%
Percentage with wage withholding order in effect at extract	36%	★ 24%	49%	★ 36%

★ Chi square is significant between groups at .05 or less.

It is important to note that when the project began in August 2008, the unemployment rate in Arapahoe County was 5.0 percent and that 12 months prior to the start of the project, in August 2007, unemployment was only 3.9 percent. To contrast, unemployment was 8.2 percent when the last parents were enrolled in the project in March 2010, and the rate had risen to 8.6 percent by November 2010 when data on earnings and child support payments were collected for project participants. Looked at somewhat differently, the rate of unemployment more than doubled from the point of earliest measurement in August 2007 to November 2010 when the final look-ups were conducted.



Given the dramatic economic downturn, it is not surprising that all indicators of employment and earnings were stronger during the 12 months prior to project involvement for members of both the experimental and comparison groups. In the pre-program year, both groups were more apt to have some quarterly earnings, a greater number of quarters with earnings, and higher amounts of earnings. In the post-program year, both groups experienced significant drops in the incidence of earnings, the number of quarters of earnings, and the amount of earnings they realized.

One of the benefits of participating in Parents to Work was economic resiliency. While the percentage with earnings dropped by 20 percent among members of the comparison group, this was the case for only 7 percent in the experimental group. And while the average number of quarters with earnings dropped by .8 per quarter in the comparison group, it dropped by .5 among those targeted for project services. The difference in the median number of quarters with reported income for the two groups was even more dramatic. It went from 3.0 to 2.0 in the experimental group, as compared with 2.0 to 0.0 in the comparison group, meaning that half of all parents in the comparison group had no quarterly earnings in the year following their enrollment in the comparison group.

Declines in annual earnings were steeper for members of the experimental group than the control group. Although members of the experimental group had higher earnings than their counterparts in the comparison group in the year before they became involved in the project (\$13,068 versus \$11,485), their earnings dropped by 33.8 percent in the year following their enrollment, as compared with a drop of 27.1 percent for comparison group members.

Table 17. Earnings According to Department of Labor and Employment Records Pre- and Post- Program Enrollment, by Group

	Experimental Group ★		Comparison Group ★	
	Up to 1 Year Pre-	Up to 1 Year Post-	Up to 1 Year Pre-	Up to 1 Year Post-
Percentage with Earnings Reported	77%	70%	67%	47%
Number	(464)	(419)	(2322)	(165)
Number of quarters with earnings reported				
Mean	2.3	1.8	1.9	1.1
Median	3.0	2.0	2.0	0.0
<hr/>				
Annual Earnings				
Mean	\$13,068	\$8,657	\$11,485	\$8,377
Median	\$9,665	\$6,056	\$7,823	\$5,521
Range	\$43-	\$10-	\$60-	\$15-
	\$57,890	\$43,643	\$69,348	\$55,469
Number	(464)	(419)	(232)	(165)

★ T-tests of means pre- and post- enrollment are significant at .00 for all three variables.

The economic resiliency of the experimental group reflects the members' participation in workforce development activities and their success in obtaining employment. According to records maintained by A/D Works, more than half (54%) of clients in the experimental group obtained employment following enrollment, while 46 percent did not. Since 70 percent of the experimental group exhibited earnings in the year following project enrollment, one can infer that another 16 percent found jobs on their own and 30 percent were unemployed. CPR researchers lacked data on the utilization of workforce services among members of the comparison group, but it is relevant that only 47 percent had employer-reported earnings and 53 percent had none.

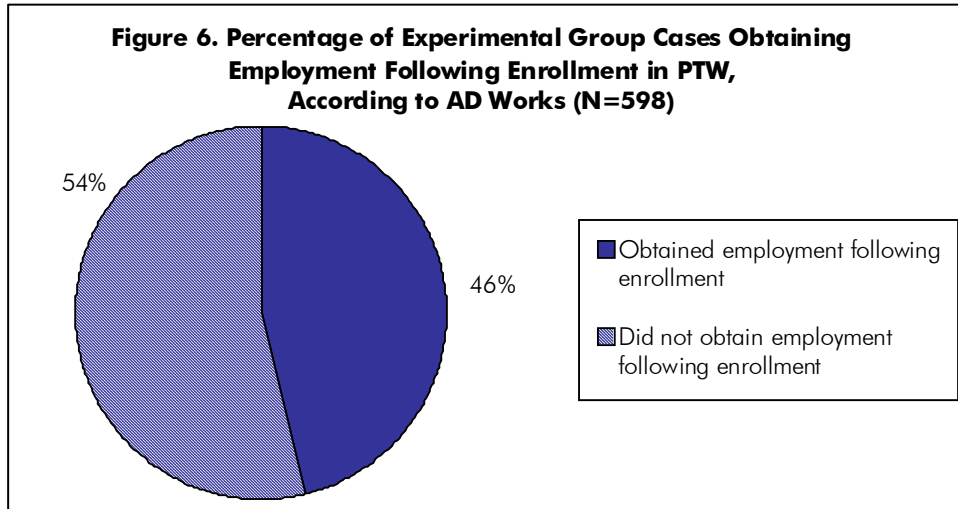


Table 18 describes selected job characteristics for members of the experimental group who obtained employment. Based on A/D Works records, 65 percent found full-time jobs, while 22 percent were employed part time and 12 percent obtained subsidized jobs. The average and median hourly wage for these jobs was \$10.95 and \$10.00, respectively. While more than half (55%) left their position after becoming employed, 41 percent subsequently found a second job which translates into a job retention rate of 67.7 percent.

Table 18. Selected Information on Job Characteristics of Project Participants Who Obtained Employment According to A/D Works

		(N=275)
Employment status:	Full-time	65%
	Part-time	22%
	Work Training Experience (WTE)	12%
	Hours vary	2%
Hourly wage:	Mean	\$10.95
	Median	\$10.00
	Range	\$6.50-\$25.00
Percentage that left position since becoming employed	Number	55% (151)
Of those that left job, reason:	Terminated or laid off	35%
	Voluntarily left job	38%
	Incarcerated	3%
	Other	37%
	Number	(124)
Percentage that found another job after leaving initial job	Number	41% (62)



Child Support Payments

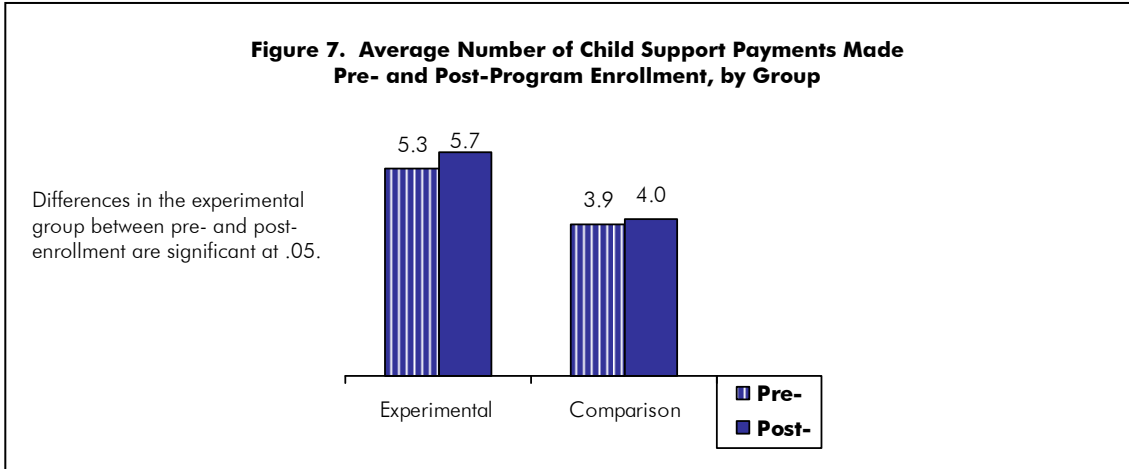
As a program funded by the Division of Child Support Enforcement, a key goal of Parents to Work was to increase child support payments. One key way of measuring payment performance is to compare the amount of child support due relative to the amount that was paid. The results of that analysis appear in Table 19. It shows that while payment performance improved significantly following program enrollment for members of the experimental group, it was unchanged in the comparison group. Thus, while the average percentage of owed child support that was paid rose from 36.6 to 41.3 percent in the experimental group, it stayed approximately the same at both points in time for the comparison group (28.2% versus 27.5%). Enrollment in Parents to work was associated with a 4.7 percent improvement in payment performance in the year after enrollment in the project, while the comparison group experienced an average decline of 0.7 percent.

Table 19. Child Support Payment Performance Before and Following Program Enrollment, by Group

	Experimental (N=598)		Comparison (N=349)	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Total amount of MSO due in the 12 months before and after project enrollment				
Mean	\$3,206	\$3,342	\$2,624	\$3,286
Median	\$2,826	\$2,977	\$2,196	\$2,970
Range	\$0-\$14,400	\$0-\$14,400	\$0-\$12,720	\$0-\$13,996
Percentage paying "0" MSO in the 12 months prior to and following enrollment in PTW	18.9%	15.8%	27.2%	28.2%
Percentage of MSO paid that was due in the 12 months prior to and following enrollment in PTW				
Mean	36.6% ★	41.3%	28.2% ★	27.5%
Median	30.0%	39.0%	21.0%	17.0%
Range	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%
Number	(545)	(545)	(315)	(315)

★ T-test between pre and post amount paid is significant at .09 or less.

Another way of assessing payment improvement is to gauge the frequency of child support payments during the 12 months prior to and following enrollment in the program or comparison group. Figure 7 shows that members of the experimental group made significantly more child support payments following enrollment in the program, with the average number made in a 12 month period of time rising from 5.3 to 5.7. To contrast, the comparison group made an average number of payments in both time periods that was almost identical: 3.9 versus 4. Unlike the experimental group, there was no increase in payment frequency following their assignment to the comparison group.



In the three months prior to group assignment, those who would compose the treatment group paid an average of 30 percent of the child support they owed. The comparison group, by contrast, paid only 19 percent. To ensure that it is not these preexisting differences between the groups that are being observed post-program, the data were analyzed separately for those who paid something pre-program and those who paid nothing.

Tables 20 and 21 present the results. When only those who made some payment in the three months pre-program are considered, the treatment group performs better post-program, but the comparison group does not.

When the analysis is limited to those who made no payments in the three months pre-program, both groups perform better at the follow-up, but the differences are greater for the treatment rather than the comparison group.

These analyses suggest that improvements in payment cannot be explained by pre-program payment alone. The post-program improvements are consistent and significant for the treatment group, but are not always present for the comparison group.

Table 20. Child Support Payment Performance Before and Following Program Enrollment, by Group, For Cases with Some Child Support Payments in the Three Months Pre-Enrollment

	Experimental Excludes those paying \$0 in the 3 months pre- (N=321) ★		Comparison Excludes those paying \$0 in the 3 months pre- (N=146) ★	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Average percentage of child support paid that was due	51%	46%	45%	33%

★ T-test between pre- and post- amount paid is significant at .00.

**Table 21. Child Support Payment Performance
Before and Following
Program Enrollment, by Group,
For Cases with No Child Support Payments in the Three Months Pre-Enrollment**

	Experimental Only those paying \$0 in the 3 months pre- (N=224) ★		Comparison Only those paying \$0 in the 3 months pre- (N=169) ★	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Average percentage of child support paid that was due	16%	33%	15%	23%

★ T-test between pre- and post- amount paid is significant at .00.

Outcomes by Level of Participation

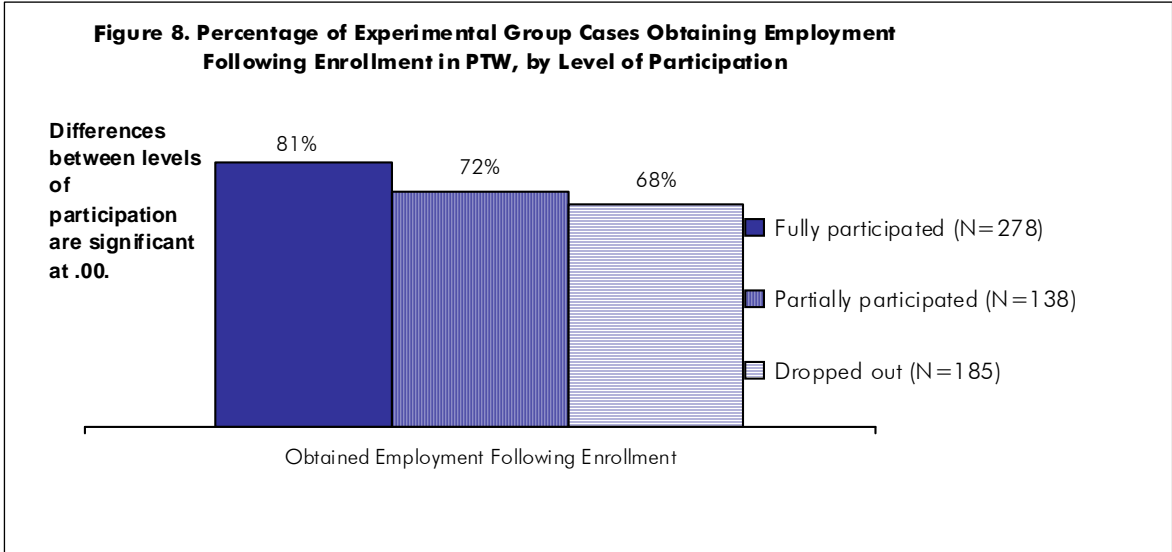
Parents to Work appears to have significant impacts on employment rates and child support payment patterns. Although the economic downturn resulted in reduced earnings for both groups, with the experimental group experiencing the most dramatic income losses, Parents to Work insulated noncustodial parents from the even more severe dislocations that their counterparts in the comparison group experienced. The wide range in participation that members of the experimental group demonstrated suggests that project impacts might even be more pronounced among the sub-group that engaged more thoroughly and took advantage of workforce development services. To test this possibility, CPR researchers compared project outcomes for members of the experimental group with different participation patterns.

Table 22 shows that there were statistically significant differences in employment among project participants with different levels of participation. Those who participated fully by attending multiple Job Club sessions and other events demonstrated more employment on all measures of job activity. Compared with their less-involved counterparts, they were the most apt to show a verified employer listed on the automated child support system following their enrollment in the project, employer-reported earnings, and a wage withholding order.

Table 22. Employment and Child Support Case Outcomes, by Group

	Fully Participated (N=278)	Partially Participated (N=138)	Dropped Out (N=182)
★Percentage with verified employer at any time following enrollment in PTW	59%	47%	51%
★Percentage with verified employer at extract	59%	48%	53%
★Percentage with earnings reported by CDLE up to 1 year following enrollment	76%	69%	62%
★Percentage with wage withholding order in effect at any time following enrollment in PTW	88%	82%	77%
★Percentage with wage withholding order in effect at extract	50%	38%	46%

★ Chi square is significant between groups at .09 or less.



These patterns are portrayed in Figure 8. It shows that while 81 percent of Parents to Work participants who were actively engaged in the project had some employment following their enrollment, this was the case for only 72 percent of those who participated less extensively and 68 percent of those who participated not at all. While many noncustodial parents find jobs on their own without the assistance of an employment program, they are significantly less successful than their counterparts who engaged in the program and participated in the activities that Parents to Work sponsored.

Actively engaged project participants also had the strongest patterns of earnings. Although earnings dropped following project enrollment for parents at every level of activity due to the deepening economic recession, those who were most engaged in Parents to Work exhibited the most modest drop-offs. Among this group of noncustodial parents, the percentage with employer-reported quarterly earnings dropped only 4 percent, the average number of quarters with earnings dropped from 2.4 to 2.0, and mean annual earnings fell by \$1,286. By contrast, those who participated in the project at modest levels showed a 9 percent drop in the incidence of any quarterly earnings, the number of quarter with earnings dropped from 2.3 to 1.7, and mean annual earnings fell by \$4,471. Finally, income declines were even steeper for members of the experimental group who dropped out of the project and failed to participate at all. The incidence of earnings among this group fell by 12 percent, while mean annual earnings dropped by \$6,544.

Table 23. Earnings According to Department of Labor and Employment Records Pre- and Post- Program Enrollment, by Level of Participation in the Experimental Group

	Fully Participated		Partially Participated		Dropped Out	
	Up to 1 Year Pre-	Up to 1 Year Post-	Up to 1 Year Pre-	Up to 1 Year Post-	Up to 1 Year Pre-	Up to 1 Year Post-
Percentage with Earnings Reported	80%	76% ♦	78%	69% ♦	74%	62% ♦
Number of quarters with earnings reported	★	★♦	★	★	★	★♦
Mean	2.4	2.0	2.3	1.7	2.2	1.5
Median	3.0	2.0	3.0	1.5	2.0	1.0
Mean	\$18,984	\$17,698	\$20,326	\$15,855	\$22,930	\$16,386
Median	\$17,386	\$18,539	\$20,426	\$15,910	\$20,116	\$17,032
Range	\$1,510-\$56,259	\$2,459-\$33,750	\$1,595-\$57,890	\$2,188-\$30,288	\$4,863-\$56,719	\$4,954-\$43,019
Number	(102)	(60)	(46)	(22)	(63)	(25)
Percentage with no earnings reported	21%	25% ♦	23%	31% ♦	27%	38% ♦

★ T-test of means pre- and post- enrollment are significant at .06 or less.

♦ Differences are significant between levels of participation at .05.

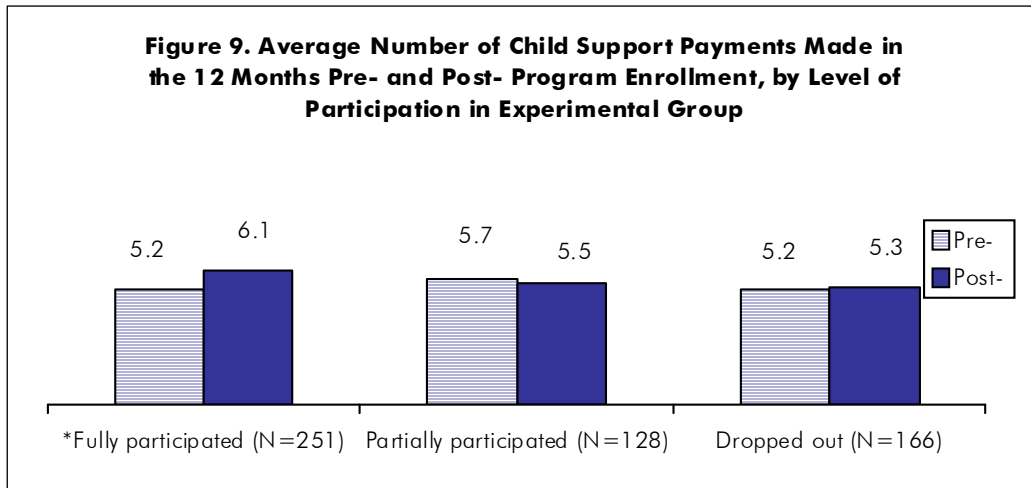
Child support payment patterns improved significantly following project participation only for members of the experimental group who were actively engaged in Parents to Work. Among this group of noncustodial parents, the percentage of owed support that was actually paid increased by 7 percent, from 35.9 to 42.9 percent. For the other two participation groups, child support payment patterns remained unchanged following project enrollment, with modestly engaged parents paying about 40 percent of what they owed and non-engaged parents paying about 35 percent of what they owed at both points in time.

Table 24. Child Support Payment Performance Before and Following Program Enrollment for Experimental Cases, by Level of Participation in PTW

	Pre-	Post-
Average percentage of child support paid that was due for project participants who fully participated in PTW (N=251)	★ 35.9	★ 42.9%
Average percentage of child support paid that was due for project participants who partially participated in PTW (N=128)	40.6%	39.2%
Average percentage of child support paid that was due for project participants who dropped out of PTW (N=319)	34.4%	38.6%

★ T-test between pre- and post- amount paid is significant at .00.

Payment regularity was also significantly better only among members of the experimental group who participated more fully in Parents to Work, with the average number of months of child support payments made during the year prior to and following enrollment in the project rising from 5.2 to 6.1.



Public Assistance Payments

It was expected that Parents to Work would lead to decreased TANF participation for the custodial parents (CP) and their children associated with NCPs in the project. Table 25 shows that TANF participation dropped for members of both the treatment and comparison groups following enrollment in Parents to Work, but that the drop was more extreme for the comparison group, which had a higher rate of TANF usage in the 12 months prior to assignment to the project. CPR’s outcome measure considers the proportion of CPs and children associated with NCPs in each group that received any public assistance in the 12 months prior to and following enrollment in the project. CPR researchers also provide total TANF outlays for families in the two groups.

Table 25 shows that TANF receipt dropped to nearly identical levels in both groups in the 12 months following project enrollment: 6.9 versus 6.6 percent. In the treatment group, this represented a 2.1 percent decrease, while in the comparison group TANF participation dropped 5.7 percentage points. Average annual grant amounts were higher in the treatment group at both points in time, as were total TANF outlays for families in the two groups.

These patterns run counter to those observed for the NCP Choices Program in Texas, which reported significantly higher drops in TANF receipt in the year after program enrollment, although its measure considers the percentage of time the CP received TANF benefits rather than the incidence of any TANF receipt during measurement years. One important difference between the two programs is that NCP Choices targeted NCPs whose children currently or previously had received TANF benefits. Parents to Work did not target these parents, and current TANF recipients comprised a small fraction of the population that was served. It is also relevant that the lower level of TANF receipt following program enrollment runs counter to national trends that showed an increase in the number of CSE families receiving public assistance in fiscal year 2009 (GAO, 2011). Thus, during a year of economic decline and national increase in TANF caseloads, Parents to Work participants and members of the comparison group exhibited substantial declines.

Table 25. TANF Receipt in the 12 Months Prior To and Following Enrollment in PTW, by Group

	Experimental (N=601)		Comparison (N=349)	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Percentage receiving TANF	9.0%	6.9%	12.3%	6.6%
Average TANF grant amount received in 12 months prior to and following enrollment in PTW	\$2,207	\$2,501	\$1,522	\$1,534
Total TANF grant paid in the 12 months prior to and following enrollment in PTW	\$139,769	\$119,226	\$101,860	\$57,291

Reactions of Project Staff and Child Support Workers

Project Staff

Parents to Work was designed by personnel at child support and the work force agency. Project architects at A/D Works reported that, while Parents to Work was their first project focusing on noncustodial parents, they drew extensively on their experiences with helping public assistance clients obtain employment when they designed the program. Based on their prior work, they focused on providing activities on job readiness and employability skills training with the objectives of achieving rapid attachment to the workforce, job placement, and overcoming the multiple barriers that clients often encounter.

The key components of the project were case management, job development, and Job Club. Personal, one-on-one attention was viewed as critical because noncustodial parents were seen as a “population with many barriers who do not have the skill set to do independent job searches.” Case management meant that a worker was able to call to see if an employer was still hiring and to help connect clients to opportunities. There was strong sentiment that “nothing works within the agency without job development.”

The high level of “skepticism” that most clients portrayed added to the difficulties of serving them. Some workers who had never had to look for work in a better economy were bitter about their dislocation, inexperienced in the job search process, and reluctant to get into the “mindset that no one will pay them the same rate that they used to get.” And with the prospect of an immediate garnishment for child support, staff discovered that they could not assume that clients were interested in working. As one staffer observed: “After having made up excuses for not paying [child support] for so long, many noncustodial parents are at the point where they feel it was not worth working.” Indeed, some clients with high arrears balances and a long history of noncompliance appeared to be “waiting for their kids to emancipate.”

NCP barriers were a huge surprise. The clients were predominantly men who spurned involvement in anything. They were not joiners, not quick to sign up. It will always be a struggle to engage them, get them hooked, and wear them down to where they will ask for help.

The project was perceived to fill a real need and produce effective results. A cornerstone of its success was the co-location of child support and A/D Works personnel and the high level of flexibility and communication that both agencies adopted. The collaborative relationship paid off. According to one administrator: “The strength of the program was the ‘Just Do It’ attitude. Problems would quickly be identified, agreed upon, and fixed.” Both agencies were viewed as vital to the success of the program and having the requisite skills for an effective “marriage.” “Each side does what they do well. They have specific skill sets and the marriage between the two agencies is perfect. If everyone focuses on what they do well, you get the best bang for the buck and the best benefit for the customer.”

Most staff members felt that outcomes could have been strengthened with more court involvement and the imposition of sanctions for nonparticipation. Unlike TANF clients who face a loss of public benefits for noncooperation, noncustodial parents faced no consequences for dilatory behavior.

Had courts been more willing to put people in jail, there would have been more compliance. There was little motivation for clients. They could go back to court with no consequences ... This contrasts with poverty prevention programs where the losses are more tangible, i.e., removal of food stamps. For NCPs you can't take anything else away from them.

On the other hand, there was ambiguity about whether the program was voluntary or compulsory. Although Parents to Work was officially termed a "voluntary" program, it was confusing to some clients since there were consequences for not enrolling and complying. One staffer termed program participants, "mandatory volunteers," since clients "received a strong push to enroll in order to avoid other things." Others felt that clients needed more requirements to participate, especially at the early stages of case processing when orders were just being established.

Both agencies had to make a variety of adjustments to serve noncustodial parents. Child support had to develop a mechanism to reinstate driver's licenses quickly so that NCPs could pursue job searches; workers had to "get into the mindset of giving back a driver's license just because the NCP participates in a program." The agency also had to speed up the modification process for clients who found new jobs that paid less than their old ones. A/D Works staff had to shift their thinking away from the assumption that "all men want to work," and be upfront about the child support obligations that clients faced and the fact that "garnishments were going to happen." When it became apparent that some project participants were using the program to obtain "handouts," personnel in both agencies had to become a little tougher about the distribution of transportation incentives and driver's license reinstatements. As one worker explained, "Clients took advantage of those benefits. There was motivation for clients to come in again and again to get extra benefits, without actually getting a job."

Child Support Workers

Child support workers viewed Parents to Work as another "tool" they could use to help noncustodial parents pay their child support. One worker whose job involves enforcing child support orders spoke for many when she observed:

For years we hear about how these noncustodial parents cannot get jobs and can't make payments. With Parents to Work, you have something to fall back on. You can find out whether these parents legitimately want to work or are just blowing smoke and have no intention of working. Some feel this is just a way to get enforcement off their back for a while, but for others it really makes a difference.

Despite the fact that most cases were referred at later stages of case processing, after enforcement remedies had "kicked in" and child support debts had begun to mount, workers who establish child support orders see value in offering project services to unemployed obligors early in the process, too. According to some, it makes noncustodial parents who do not have a job more willing to stipulate to child support orders. In general, workers felt that they should offer project services to anyone who is not employed at all stages of case processing and that no single group or type of case should be targeted.

Establishment workers typically have the most accurate information about the employment status of each parent because they ask about this when they schedule an establishment conference. As a result of Parents to Work, enforcement workers began asking noncustodial parents who phoned them about their employment status and referring the jobless to the project. They also made a conscious effort to provide referrals to noncustodial parents whose unemployment insurance benefits had been deactivated. Child support attorneys felt that the best time to tell NCPs about the program was when they were first in court for not having paid their child support and were being advised of their rights and the fact that they might be sentenced to jail if they were not paying support by the time of the next review hearing.

One group that was perceived to have benefited greatly from the program was noncustodial parents on probation and parole. They were viewed as being particularly motivated to participate because they obtained referrals to felon-friendly employers. In addition, project participation was mandatory for them. Their child support worker could contact their parole officer if they failed to participate in the program and they could return to jail. Unlike the rest of the noncustodial parents in Parents to Work, the parole/probation population faced a serious sanction for nonperformance.

One group that may have been reluctant to participate are noncustodial parents collecting unemployment since the benefits they are able to get exceed the amount they could earn working an \$8- or \$10-per-hour job. In general, parents who had worked in higher paying industries were reluctant to join the program once they “learned that most of the job connections available through A/D Works were for the \$8 to \$10 per hour job.”

Like project staff, child support workers appreciated having child support and workforce staff co-located at the child support agency. This meant that child support personnel could walk a suitable client right over to project staff people and some were able to get immediate, on-the-spot service. The on-site feature of the project made it accessible to noncustodial parents who have transportation problems. The familiarity of the child support building might also be an advantage, although workers admitted that they had to gain the noncustodial parent’s trust and convince him that the project was not a “sting operation.” According to workers, some noncustodial parents were afraid that if they came to the child support office for project services, they would get arrested for nonpayment of support.

Client feedback about the project was limited and tended to be restricted to those who had complaints. Staff members were not too concerned since “good people tend to disappear and when things go badly people want to complain.” Staff appreciated the fact that the project helped clients learn how to use a computer and write a résumé. As one worker explained, “A lot of our clients don’t have these skills and don’t know where to go to get them. They think you have to pay someone to do these things for them.” A few workers felt that the project had created some “good will” with noncustodial parents who harbor anger toward the child support system and feel as though it just wants to “punish them.”

Having specialized workers at the child support agency and A/D Works to handle project participants is viewed as making good sense. Not only did the specialized worker relieve the regular worker of duties for project cases, thus ensuring that the project did not create “extra work” for regular workers, the specialized worker was better able to monitor client participation and compliance. At the workforce agency, having a specialized worker

assigned to project clients ensured that they received more customized services and did not get into the service pool with “regular clients.”

There were no transitional jobs available through Parents to Work and just a limited number of subsidized jobs aimed at fostering work experience. Although staff feels that the “immediate gratification” aspects of these types of program are appealing to clients, they worry about their sustainability once the subsidy is withdrawn.

According to child support workers, while communication was excellent between specialized child support and A/D Works staff members assigned to the project, it was less than optimal with regular agency staff. Establishment and enforcement workers felt as though they knew little about their client’s participation in the program and reasons for nonperformance. While A/D Works kept meticulous records of client participation in their database, it did not appear on the automated child support system. This meant that when some clients would call the child support staff and say that they had been promised some incentive or easement of an enforcement action by project staff, the worker needed to call project staff to verify their participation in the program and/or their entitlement to various actions and could not make these determinations using the child support computer system. Child support attorneys also wanted more accurate and up-to-date information about client participation when they appeared in court for review hearings. The consensus was that “the communication could have been better.”

Workers also wanted more regular updates about Parents to Work and more detail about client experiences so that they could do a better job selling the program to prospective participants in their caseload. A few workers felt that while the project had been mentioned at a couple of “team meetings,” they had been told to just refer people without being given “an explanation of what happened to them” once they enrolled. As one worker observed, “We should have done a cross training or gone out to A/D Works to see what the program looks like.”

In addition to improving communication, workers recommend that future employment programs have a more aggressive court component. In their view, it was “unfortunate” that the court did not sanction nonpaying noncustodial parents who failed to appear, participate, and try to get a job. They also saw it as problematic if the court treated NCPs as compliant if they procrastinated for three months and contacted project staff the “day before their review hearing.” Since “word of mouth spreads very quickly through the courtroom,” NCPs quickly learned that “nothing bad happens to the non payers.” They attributed the lenient climate in the 18th Judicial District during most of the project to the personal philosophy of the presiding magistrate who preferred to try to persuade parents to attend using positive techniques.

Perhaps the most significant problem with Parents to Work, however, was the recession. Given the economic downturn, many noncustodial parents cannot get a job no matter what services the project provides. Most workers wished that the program had been conducted a few years back, when the economy was stronger and the unemployment rate in Arapahoe County was an enviable 3.8 percent.

Economic Impact of Parents To Work

Background

The benefits of the Parents to Work program go beyond increased participants' earnings and child support collections. The increased earnings and child support received by families also benefit the local economy. Some of it is spent on goods and services obtained within the region. In turn, the increased consumption induces businesses to create more job positions that produce additional earnings and spending within the local economy including commerce among businesses. This section of the report considers program costs and benefits and calculates the return on public investment (ROPI). As such, it explores the overall economic impact of Parents to Work.

Methodology

This analysis builds from a preliminary analysis of the Parents to Work program in fiscal year 2008 that was part of Arapahoe/Douglas (A/D) Works' annual assessment of its entire workforce center operations (A/D Works, 2010). The key differences between this analysis and the preliminary analysis are that this analysis considers the entire period of project operations (August 2008 through February 2010), while the preliminary analysis only considered operations in fiscal year 2008; considers differences between an experimental and comparison group, while the preliminary analysis did not include a comparison group; and uses actual earnings of noncustodial parents rather than estimated earnings as the preliminary analysis did.

Nonetheless, this analysis generally follows the same step-by-step methodology of the annual assessment conducted by A/D Works. Those steps and CPR's departures from the A/D Works methodology are outlined below.

1. Data on the number of Parents to Work participants obtaining jobs was determined by counting those with any quarterly wages reported by employers to CDLE at any time in the first year following project enrollment through the third quarter of 2010. In the experimental group, 419 of 601 participants had some wage earnings following program enrollment. The comparable count for the comparison group was 165 out of 349 noncustodial parents. The counts are based on quarterly wage reports filed by employers with CDLE and exceed the number of placements known to A/D Works, which was the source of information it used for its preliminary analysis. The CDLE counts are larger and more accurate because participants are not required to report employment back to A/D Works, although some voluntarily do.
2. CPR measured actual earnings growth using CDLE quarterly wage data. This differed from the A/D Works study, where earnings were estimated by industry sector and labor category.
3. Because the experimental and comparison groups differed in size, the comparison group was weighted to be comparable to the experimental group. A weight of 1.72 is applied to the actual number of jobs, earnings, and collections realized by the comparison group because the experimental group is 172 percent larger than the control group (i.e., 601 noncustodial parents in the experimental group divided by 349 noncustodial parents in the comparison group is 1.72206).

4. CPR applied the earnings and sales/revenue growth multipliers identified in Table 27 of the A/D Works study to the actual earnings of the noncustodial parents.² Multipliers are used to capture the “ripple effect” from adding a job in the region to creating more (*i.e.*, multiplying) jobs, earnings, and sales/revenue within the region. The A/D Works study measured the sales/revenue and earnings multipliers of Parents to Work in FY2008 as 1.77 and 1.79, respectively.³ Similarly, CPR applied the jobs multiplier measured from the A/D Works’ study (1.74) to full-time equivalents with retained jobs.
5. Like the A/D Works study, CPR factored in job retention and temporary and part-time jobs when calculating the program’s impact on total regional job growth. This adjustment ensures that the jobs multiplier is only applied to full-time equivalents with retained jobs. This analysis assumed a 67.6 percent job retention rate, which was based on what was observed in the data and adjusted for those who did not retain their initial job but became employed a second time. While A/D Works used preliminary data indicating that 27 percent of participants had part-time jobs, CPR used final evaluation data showing that the part-time job rate among participants was 12 percent. While A/D Works used preliminary data indicating that 17 percent of participants who left their first job obtained a second, permanent job, CPR used the 41 percent rate observed in the final evaluation.
6. The cost of operating the Parents to Work program was obtained from the Arapahoe County Department of Human Services, Division of Child Support Enforcement, which reported total program operation costs of \$510,619.
7. The rate of return on public investment (ROPI) was calculated by dividing growth in collections, growth in regional earnings, and growth in regional sales/revenue by the operation costs. Two sets ROPI rates were developed: one considered collections, earnings, and sales growth for the experimental group, and the other considered the difference in collections, earnings, and sales growth between the experimental and comparison groups.

Impact of Parents to Work on Job Creation

Table 26 shows the number of participants in the experimental and comparison groups who exhibited wage earnings in the 12 months following enrollment in Parents to Work and their aggregate earnings. As previously noted, all figures for the smaller comparison

² Recalculating the multipliers was beyond the scope of the CPR study. Arapahoe/Douglas Works calculated the multipliers through the use of an input-output model developed by Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc. (EMSI). More information about how Arapahoe/Douglas Works calculated these multipliers can be found on page 6 of their report and from EMSI: <http://www.economicmodeling.com>.

³ The earnings multiplier suggests that for every \$1 increase in earnings from a Parents to Work participant, there is an additional \$0.79 paid out in wages, salaries, and other compensation through the indirect and induced effects of increased demand for goods and services in the local economy. When added together, the total impact on local earnings is \$1.79. The sales multiplier suggests that for every \$1 increase in total earnings (*i.e.*, direct, indirect and induced), there is \$1.77 increase in total sales/revenues among local businesses and industries. There is no reason to believe that these multipliers may have changed since FY2008.

group have been weighted to make them equivalent to the experimental group. The table shows that 135 more participants in the experimental group found jobs than those in the weighted comparison group. It also shows that the experimental group’s aggregate earnings were \$1,247,183 more than those of weighted comparison group over a 12-month period.

The last column of the table reports the number of additional jobs projected to have been added to the regional economy due to Parents to Work. It takes into account the observed 62 percent job retention rate for program participants and applies the jobs multiplier of 1.74 for full-time equivalents with retained jobs used by A/D Works in its analysis of program impacts during program year 2008 (A/D Works, 2010). As previously noted, the jobs multiplier considers the effect that adding a job in the region might have on the entire region. Based on these adjustments, the experimental group directly and indirectly generated 463 FTE jobs to the regional economy, as compared with 314 for the comparison group—a difference of 149 jobs.

Table 26. Economic Impact of Parents to Work Experimental Group Participants Following Enrollment in PTW

	Outcomes of Noncustodial Parents (NCPs)		Impact to Regional Economy
	Number with Jobs	Aggregate Earnings of NCPs	Retained FTE Jobs
Experimental Group	419	\$3,627,386	463
Comparison Group (weighted)	284	\$2,380,203	314
Experimental-Comparison Difference	135	\$1,247,183	149

Impact on Earnings, Sales, and Child Support Collections

In addition to the direct earnings that noncustodial parents in the project generated as a result of the jobs they obtained, the project is estimated to have generated additional earnings and business revenue in the local region. Table 27 shows the impact of actual earnings generated by noncustodial parents on the total growth in earnings and sales/revenue in the region. It is calculated by applying weighting factors to make the comparison group equivalent in size to the experimental group, and using multipliers developed by A/D Works (2010) for sales/revenue (1.77) and earnings (1.79), which are applied to the actual earnings generated by noncustodial parents in each group. The analysis shows that the experimental group generated \$6,493,021 in earnings growth and \$11,492,647 in regional sales/revenue growth. This exceeded earnings and sales/revenue that could be attributed to the comparison group by \$2,232,458 and \$3,951,450, respectively. In addition, noncustodial parents in the experimental group paid an additional \$311,163 in child support during the first 12 months following their enrollment in Parents to Work.

Table 27. Economic Impact of Parents to Work Experimental Group Participants Following One-Year After Enrollment in PTW

	Outcomes for Noncustodial Parents (NCPs)		Total Impact on Regional Economy	
	Actual Earnings	Actual Child Support Collections (up to 1 year after enrollment)	Earnings Growth	Sales/Revenue Growth
Experimental Group	\$3,627,386	\$886,691	\$6,493,021	\$11,492,647
Comparison Group (weighted)	\$2,380,203	\$555,528	\$4,260,563	\$7,541,197
Experimental-Comparison Difference	\$1,247,183	\$311,163	\$2,232,458	\$3,951,450

Return on Public Investment (ROPI) and Cost Effectiveness

The A/D Works FY2008 assessment found that Parents to Work achieved the second highest ROPI among all A/D Works programs (A/D Works, 2010). Over the first 11 months of project operations, Parents to Work directly and indirectly contributed to individuals having the equivalent of 156 full-time jobs, over \$6.8 million in increased regional earnings, and \$12 million in increased regional business sales/revenue. In terms of the ROPI, this translates to each \$1 spent on Parents to Work increasing earnings of regional business by an additional \$20.28 and sales/revenue of regional businesses by an additional \$35.90.

CPR calculated the ROPI for the Parents to Work program by using actual program expenditures of \$510,619 over the 30-month life of the project. The CPR analysis uses actual earnings, actual program costs, and actual child support collections for members of the treatment and comparison groups. As with all comparisons between the groups, the comparison group is weighted to match the larger size of the experimental group. The calculation does not include other public benefit costs including TANF, Medicaid, and Food Stamp (SNAP) expenditures.

Table 28 presents the results of these analyses. It shows that if the \$311,163 of extra child support collections realized in the first year following program enrollment are sustained over a three-year period, the collections differential between the two groups would amount to \$933,489. This translates into a cost-effectiveness ratio of \$1.70 during the first post-enrollment year and \$5.09 after a three-year period. The cost-effectiveness ratio of \$5.09 over three years is in line with the cost-effectiveness ratio of \$4.56 over three years that Texas reported for its NCP Choices program (Siemens, 2008). A key difference between the Parents to Work and NCP Choices measurements, however, is that Parents to Work operated in the height of the 2008-2009 economic recession while the time period considered for the NCP Choices program was generally before the economic recession began. This underscores that noncustodial work programs are cost effective regardless of prevailing economic conditions.

The difference in the cost-effectiveness ratio of \$1.70 during the first post-enrollment year and \$5.09 after a three-year period is understandable. Parents to Work costs are front-loaded since participants receive workforce development services immediately following their enrollment in the project. In contrast, while members of the comparison group might have accessed workforce services on their own, they did not generate any additional administrative costs for the workforce agency. To this end, Table 28 shows no program

costs for the comparison group and no cost-effectiveness ratios because a cost-effectiveness ratio cannot be computed when there is no cost. The last column of the table shows the marginal difference between the experimental and comparison group; that is, how much more is likely to be generated from Parents to Work, a specialized program for noncustodial parents, than if noncustodial parents were left to their own devices including the option of obtaining workforce agency assistance on their own. Even from this perspective, Parents to Work translated into an additional \$0.61 of child support collections during the first year following project enrollment and \$1.83 over a three-year period for each dollar in cost. This suggests that when the program is benchmarked against increased collections only, it will take more than one year to realize the return on investment from a specialized program for noncustodial parents.

Nonetheless, when the program is benchmarked against the overall benefit to the local economy, the ROPI calculations suggest that Parents to Work has an immediate positive and strong impact to the local economy. In the first year, every dollar spent on the Parents to Work program is estimated to increase regional earnings and sales/revenue by \$12.72 and \$22.51, respectively. When adjusted for the comparison group—that is, the fact that some participants would have found jobs without the assistance of the program— every dollar spent on the Parents to Work program is estimated to increase regional earnings and sales/revenue by \$4.37 and \$7.34, respectively.

Table 28. Cost Effectiveness of Parents To Work
Total Impact on Regional Economy

	Experimental Group	Comparison Group	Experimental-Comparison
Actual program costs and benefits:			
Total program costs	\$510,619	\$0	\$510,619
Total child support collections (within one year after enrollment)	\$866,691	\$555,528	\$311,163
Total child support collections (first year patterns projected over a three-year post-enrollment period)	\$2,600,074	\$1,666,585	\$933,489
Total regional earnings growth	\$6,493,021	\$4,260,563	\$2,232,458
Total regional sales/revenue growth	\$11,492,647	\$7,541,197	\$3,951,450
Return on public investment (ROPI) and cost-effectiveness ratios:			
ROPI/total child support collections growth — Year 1	\$1.70	N/A	\$0.61
ROPI/total child support collections growth — Years 1-3	\$5.09	N/A	\$1.83
ROPI/ regional earnings growth	\$12.72		\$4.37
ROPI/regional sales growth	\$22.51		\$7.74



Summary of Findings

Parents to Work, a program to secure jobs for unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents (NCPs) with open child support cases, involved the Arapahoe Division of Child Support Enforcement (CSE), Arapahoe/Douglas Workforce Center (ADW), and the Arapahoe District Court/18th Judicial District. Its chief features included:

- Specialized, co-located child support and workforce personnel;
- Identification of nonpaying obligors by child support workers;
- Referrals of these obligors for on-the-spot screening and assessment by workforce personnel;
- A customized menu of employment-focused services and access to supportive services including transportation assistance; and
- Communication between project personnel and the magistrate who hears child support matters for the county.

Conducted over a 30-month period, from August 2008 to March 2010, Parents to Work ultimately enrolled 601 and 349 NCPs in the experimental and comparison groups, respectively.

Noncustodial parents were referred to Parents to Work through a master list of potentially eligible cases generated by automated methods, referrals by child support workers, and referrals by the court. Given that all cases had to meet the same eligibility requirements, the expectation was that cases from each of the sources would be relatively comparable. As a result, a disproportionate number of comparison group cases were drawn from the ad hoc report. This allowed a greater percentage of cases that were referred by workers and the court to be assigned to the treatment group. However, it did create some pre-existing differences between the two groups that had to be considered in the analysis.

The goal of the evaluation was to identify changes in employment and child support payment that could be attributed to program participation. Another goal was to determine client participation in workforce development activities. Finally the evaluation sought to capture the reactions of child support, workforce, and judicial personnel who were exposed to the project and to identify best practices.

The data for the evaluation came from applications, intake forms, and assessments completed by child support and workforce staff. Through these various paper and automated documents, it was possible to obtain information on client demographics, participation in various workforce development and job search activities, the receipt of supportive services, barriers to employment, and court activity. Information on child support and earnings before and after enrollment in the treatment and comparison groups was drawn from the automated child support enforcement system and employer-reported wage data supplied to the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment as part of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system.

Although the goal of the random assignment process was to identify two comparable groups that differed only in their exposure to Parents to Work, this was not achieved entirely and in the year prior to enrollment the comparison group had a significantly lower rate of employment (as evidenced by UI earnings), and in the three months prior to

enrollment, lower child support payment. As a result, analyses of outcome data regarding employment and child support payment were examined for NCPs in both groups with similar patterns of pre-program earnings and child support payment.

Characteristics of Program Participants

- Most Parents to Work cases came from the pool of non paying and unemployed NCPs that enforcement workers have in their caseload.
- Parents to Work participants were primarily male, educated to the high school level, and racially and ethnically diverse. Most had lived with the parent of their children at some time in the past, and many reported substantial levels of contact with their children.
- While nearly all project participants were unemployed individuals who reported considerable prior work experience and had lost their jobs because of layoffs, nearly half reported having a criminal background and a quarter were on parole or probation when they enrolled. Another common barrier to employment cited by participants was a lack of transportation.

Client Participation in Workforce Services

- The main project intervention was a daily, three-hour job search effort supervised by project staff for project participants at the workforce center. In addition to this intensive Job Club, participants could attend other workforce development programs offered to the general public including help with job applications, résumé writing, computer-based job searches, career assessments, and job fairs.
- More than two-thirds of parents in the treatment group participated in workforce services. Nearly a half (46%) participated in three or more workforce activities during their tenure in Parents to Work, and 23 percent participated in one or two activities. Only 31 percent did not participate in any program services. The most common project activities were attending an intensive job club session (79%) and submitting job applications (40%). In addition 54 percent of parents in the treatment group received some supportive service—typically bus tokens or a voucher for the purchase of gas—and 11 percent had their driver’s license reinstated.
- Clients who participated more fully in the project tended to be older, African American, educated to the high school level or higher, divorced rather than never married, and have a history of earnings that was somewhat lower than their counterparts who participated less enthusiastically. Participants and nonparticipants had similar public assistance histories, support obligations, and arrears balances.
- Access to reliable transportation did affect participation rates with clients who reported that they lacked access to reliable transportation engaging in few or no workforce development activities. Disclosures of criminal history, mental health issues, and/or homelessness did not affect participation levels.
- Participation was higher among clients who experienced some form of court action. Overall, only 19 percent of cases in the treatment group involved any court action, which fell below the 31 percent of parents in the group who failed to engage in any workforce development activities despite their referral.

Employment and Earnings Outcomes

- The treatment group (70%) was significantly more likely than the comparison group (47%) to have UI earnings in the year following their enrollment. Among those with no earnings in the year prior to group assignment, 50 percent of the treatment group, but only 30 percent of the comparison group, showed post-program earnings. This suggests that the program conferred employment benefits that were independent of the pre-program employment status of participants.
- Due to the economic downturn, employment and earnings for both the treatment and comparison group were lower in the 12 months following program enrollment than they had been in the 12 months prior. The unemployment rate in Arapahoe County rose from 3.9 percent in August 2007, to 8.6 percent in November 2010, when the earliest and final employment and child support outcomes were measured.
- Although earnings activity dropped for all participants following project enrollment, the decline was significantly greater for members of the comparison group. While overall earnings activity dropped 7 percentage points for treatment group participants (77% to 70%), it dropped 20 percentage points for members of the comparison group (67% to 47%).
- Based on program records, 65 percent of treatment group members found full-time jobs, while 22 percent were employed part time and 12 percent obtained subsidized jobs. The average and median hourly wage for these jobs was \$10.95 and \$10.00, respectively. While 55 percent of those who obtained jobs were laid off or fired, 41 percent found new jobs which translated into a job retention rate of 67.7 percent.

Outcomes on Child Support Payments and TANF

- In the year following program enrollment, the average percentage of owed child support that was paid rose 4.7 percent, from 36.6 to 41.3 percent, in the treatment group but was approximately the same at both points in time for the comparison group (28.2% versus 27.5%).
- Payment regularity also improved significantly in the treatment group, rising from an average of 5.3 to 5.7 payments in a 12-month period versus 3.9 and 4.0 payments in the comparison group.
- Improvements in child support payments were not a function of pre-program payment behavior. Among those who made no payments in the three months prior to enrolling in the project, members of the treatment group went from paying 16 percent of what they owed to 33 percent, as compared with 15 percent to 23 percent for the comparison group.
- TANF payment levels dropped in the 12 months following project enrollment for families affiliated with noncustodial parents in both the experimental and comparison groups. This trend runs counter to the national pattern of increasing numbers of child support cases receiving public assistance.

Outcomes by Level of Participation

- Members of the treatment group who engaged more thoroughly in the project and participated in the most workforce development activities exhibited the biggest increases in employment and child support payments. They also were best insulated against the economic downturn.
- With respect to employment, parents who fully participated were significantly more likely to exhibit post-program earnings (81%), as compared with their less involved (72%) and uninvolved (68%) counterparts.
- Actively involved noncustodial parents experienced a 4 percent drop in employer-reported quarterly wages, as compared with a 9 and 12 percent wage drop, respectively, for modestly participating and uninvolved parents.
- Child support payment patterns increased significantly only for actively engaged project participants with the percentage of owed support that was paid rising from 35.9 to 42.9 percent. Payment performance for modestly and unengaged parents remained 40 and 35 percent, respectively, before and after project enrollment.

Reactions of Project Staff, Child Support Workers, and the Court

- Project personnel view noncustodial parents as a “population with many barriers who do not have the skill set to do independent job searches.” Adding to the challenges of serving them is their “perceived skepticism” and reluctance to engage. Some parents with high arrears balances and a long history of nonpayment were unwilling to work because of their child support obligation.
- A cornerstone of the project’s success was the co-location of child support and workforce staff and the pragmatic and “just do it” attitude of personnel in both agencies. Co-location meant that child support personnel could walk a suitable client right over to project staff people and some were able to get immediate, on-the-spot service.
- Although the magistrate who handled child support matters in the 18th Judicial District during most of the project’s life expressed strong support for it, rating it a “10” on a scale of 1 to 10, he rarely ordered parents to go to the project or sanctioned them harshly for failing to participate and neglecting to pay support. He opposed wasting program resources on “unmotivated” participants, issuing blanket penalties for nonparticipation, or spending money on jail or ankle monitoring that could go for support.
- Both the workforce and child support agencies needed to make a variety of adjustments to serve noncustodial parents. Child support had to develop a mechanism and mindset to reinstate driver’s licenses quickly so that NCPs could pursue job searches and to speed up the modification process for clients who found new jobs that paid less than their old ones. The workforce program had to revise its assumption that “all men want to work,” be upfront about the child support garnishments that clients faced, and become a little tougher about the distribution of transportation incentives and driver’s license incentives when it became apparent that some project participants were using the program to obtain “handouts.”
- Child support workers viewed the program as another “tool” they could use to help noncustodial parents pay their child support and a way of differentiating between

those who legitimately want to work and those who just want to get enforcement off their back for a while but have no intention of working.

- There are pros and cons to referring parents to an employment program at every stage of case processing, with most workers believing that it should be done at all stages.
- Noncustodial parents on parole and probation were perceived to have benefited greatly from the program because they obtained referrals to felon-friendly employers. Since program participation was a condition of their parole, their involvement in Parents to Work was mandatory and they faced a serious sanction for nonperformance.
- Child support workers appreciated the fact that the project helped clients learn how to use a computer and write a résumé. A few workers felt that the project had created some “good will” with noncustodial parents who harbor anger toward the child support system and feel as though it just wants to “punish them.” Child support workers had to convince noncustodial parents that the project was not a sting operation.
- There were no transitional jobs available through Parents to Work and just a limited number of subsidized jobs aimed at fostering work experience. Although staff feels that the “immediate gratification” aspects of these types of program are appealing to clients, they worry about their sustainability once the subsidy is withdrawn.
- While communication was excellent between specialized child support and workforce staff members assigned to the project, it was less than optimal with regular agency staff. Because both agencies use separate computerized systems to track their actions with clients and outcomes, regular child support workers and attorneys could not verify client participation in the programs without first contacting project staff.
- Most staff members felt that project outcomes could have been strengthened with more court involvement and the imposition of sanctions for nonparticipation. In their view, it was “unfortunate” that the court did not sanction nonpaying noncustodial parents who failed to appear, participate, and try to get a job. Since “word of mouth spreads very quickly through the courtroom,” NCPs quickly learned that “nothing bad happens to the non payers.”
- Perhaps the most significant problem with Parents to Work, however, is the economic downturn. Most workers wished that the program had been conducted a few years back, when the economy was stronger and the unemployment rate in Arapahoe County was an enviable 3.8 percent.

Economic Impact of Parents to Work

CPR followed a methodology developed by A/D Works to assess the benefits of Parents to Work on the local economy through business earnings, sales/revenue and job growth but made the following modifications. 1) CPR used actual earnings reported by employers for members of the treatment and comparison groups rather than using estimates by industry sector and labor category. 2) Considered the entire length of the program. 3) CPR included a comparison group and weighted it to make it equivalent in size to the experimental group. The results are as follows.

- Noncustodial parents in the experimental group paid an additional \$311,163 in child support during the first 12 months following their enrollment in Parents to Work.
- Despite operating in the midst and aftermath of the 2008-09 economic recession, Parents to Work had a large, direct impact. The experimental group outpaced the comparison group in the number of parents with jobs and in aggregate earnings. There were 135 more parents with jobs in the experimental group than the comparison group. The earnings difference was \$1.2 million over a 12-month period. (The counts include all employment with earnings regardless of the number of hours worked within the year following enrollment.)
- Besides the direct impact on program participants, their increased earnings and child support payments generated additional growth in the regional economy. This occurred through increased demand for goods and services. In all, earnings of Parents to Work participants is estimated to have generated a total economic impact that consists of an increase of \$11.5 million in regional sales/revenue supporting an additional 463 FTE-jobs with \$6.5 million in earnings. This outpaced the regional economic impact of the comparison group by \$4.0 million in sales/revenue growth, \$2.2 million in earnings growth, and 149 in FTE-jobs growth.
- When the only consideration is program costs and child support collections, the cost-effectiveness ratio of the Parents to Work Program was \$1.70 for the first post-enrollment year and \$5.09 after a three-year period, if one-year patterns of collection are sustained. This is comparable to what was realized by a similar Texas program before the recession began. The fact that Parents to Work and the Texas program have similar cost-effectiveness ratios when operating in vastly different economic times suggests that employment programs directed at noncustodial parents are cost-effective regardless in both a stable and poor economy.
- The cost-effectiveness ratios identified above are before consideration of the comparison group. Examining the differences between the experimental and comparison groups recognizes that some parents in the experimental group would have found jobs without assistance from the Parents to Work program. When the cost-effectiveness ratios are examined in light of this, the cost-effectiveness ratios are \$0.61 in the first post-enrollment year and \$1.83 after a three-year period. This reflects that the cost of Parents to Work services are incurred within the first year and that it takes more than one year for the gains to offset the cost. (Texas did not include a comparison group or consider multi-year differences.)
- When the total impact to the regional economy is considered, Parents to Work has a high return on public investment (ROPI). Every \$1 spent on the Parents to Work Program is estimated to generate \$12.72 in earnings growth and \$22.51 in sales/revenue growth in the region. When adjusted for experimental-comparison group differences, the ROPIs are \$4.37 in earnings growth and \$7.74 in sales/revenue growth.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Parents to Work compares favorably with other “new generation” NCP employment programs (CPPP, 2010). When the child support and workforce agency in Arapahoe County collaborated to link noncustodial parents with jobs, the result was greater economic self-sufficiency on the part of noncustodial parents and greater child support payments for custodial parents. Noncustodial parents who enrolled in Parents to Work participated in workforce development activities at higher levels, obtained jobs and earnings at higher rates, and made greater child support payments. Those who participated more wholeheartedly realize the greatest economic benefits. And even though the economic downturn destroyed jobs and earnings for parents in both groups, parents in the treatment group fared better by not falling as low and by picking up employment more quickly.

Like the Texas Non-Custodial Parent Choices (NCP Choices) project, it is associated with significant improvements in child support payments, although the two studies use different outcome measures, with the Texas program considering the frequency of any payment, while Parents to Work uses a more rigorous measure that compares the amount of due support that is actually paid. Evaluations of both projects found that the consistency of child support collection increased following program participation.

The impact of the project on NCP employment rates was more pronounced for the Colorado project. Overall, 23 percent more program participants showed earnings in the year after program enrollment in Colorado, as compared with 8 percent in Texas. Nor did Colorado project participants experience the decline in earnings relative to the comparison group that occurred in NCP Choices. While mean earnings for Texas project participants following enrollment were significantly lower than those in the comparison group, they were statistically equivalent in the Colorado project (\$8,657 versus \$8,377), although the treatment group experienced steeper declines relative to their pre-program earnings.

Parents to Work is a highly efficient program. Based on actual program costs and child support collections during the first year of project operations, it had a cost-benefit ratio of \$1.70. If first-year collections patterns are sustained over a three-year period, the cost-effectiveness ratio rises to \$5.09, which exceeded the ratio of \$4.56 the Texas reported for its NCP Choices program as of March 31, 2008.

Parents to Work also generated positively to the regional economy through job creation, sales/revenue growth, and earnings growth. Compared with the comparison group, the increased earnings of noncustodial parents in the treatment group generated a total economic impact on the region that consists of an increase of \$4.0 million in sales/revenue supporting an additional 149 FTE-jobs with \$2.2 million in earnings.

Given the mandatory nature of the NCP Choices program and the imposition of jail sanctions for those who fail to cooperate, it is perhaps not surprising that participation in workforce activities was higher in Texas than Colorado (82% versus 69%). Both programs found that participation rates vary with court activity and that they are higher in settings where the court establishes a climate of compliance. Those who participated more wholeheartedly in workforce activities realized the greatest economic benefits.

Co-locating specialized child support and workforce personnel to facilitate client referrals and enrollment in workforce services was a key to the program's success, which delivered services to 69 percent of targeted NCPs. Previous efforts to link child support clients to employment programs were frequently unsuccessful because many clients failed to follow through with service referrals (e.g., 5 to 70% in Parents Fair Share and 57% in the Employment Partnership Project in Tarrant County Texas, Pearson & Thoennes, 2006), and/or were discouraged by being told to "call a number" and being unable to get through to program staff (May 2004). Co-location addresses some of these challenges.

While some experts suggest that strong court involvement may be detrimental because it "erode(s) any trust that the state would like to develop with noncustodial parents in order to encourage their participation in employment and training programs" (May 2004), architects of the new generation of NCP employment programs underscore the importance of "court-ordered participation with the court. With swift and certain consequences for nonparticipation (CPPP, 2010), the rate of participation in Parents to Work was higher among those with court involvement; project staff believed that a stronger court role would have produced better outcomes.

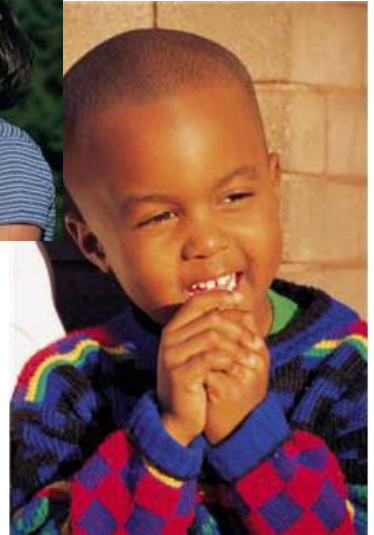
Still another critical feature of Parents to Work was the strong and distinct role of the program partners. Child support identified cases, set them for court, and monitored compliance. The workforce program did intake and employment assessments, operated an intensive Job Club for supervised job search, provided employment skills services, and attempted to address barriers by providing help with transportation and cultivating sympathetic employers. Although the court did not make the program compulsory or administer consequences for noncompliance, it strongly encouraged participation and scheduled frequent review hearings to monitor compliance. Each agency utilized its core competencies and adopted a pragmatic and energetic approach that overcame some programmatic silos.

To further engage NCPs and encourage their participation in workforce development activities, child support agencies should explore ways to extend more responsive policies to program participants. This might include ways to better accommodate fluctuations in employment status and modify child support orders quickly when earnings drop. Other needed child support interventions include granting minimum orders and/or holding enforcement actions in abeyance during successful project participation, and ways of compromising state-owed arrears in conjunction with project participation, employment, and payment of current support.

The new generation of employment programs for NCPs highlights the importance of improving interagency communication. While staff in small-scale programs can communicate about participants via telephone and e-mail, larger programs require a shared database. On point is the Choices On-Line Tracking System (COLTS), which is a web-based database developed for NCP Choices that allows both child support and workforce staff to track the progress of identified NCPs and securely exchange relevant information.

Finally, one can only expect program outcomes to improve once the economy rebounds. The year 2009 was the first time in the history of the child support program that child support collections decreased, as did the average amount of support collected per case and the amount of collections automatically withheld from wage withholding. (GAO, 2011). It is impressive that Parents to Work participants experienced measurable benefits

even during the unprecedented economic recession. One can only hope that the economic recovery will translate into more robust employment opportunities for NCPs, child support funding will be restored to pre-Deficit Reduction Act levels, that employment-focused programs will be considered allowable child support activity that is eligible for federal matching funds, and agencies will opt to make this important investment in employment programming.



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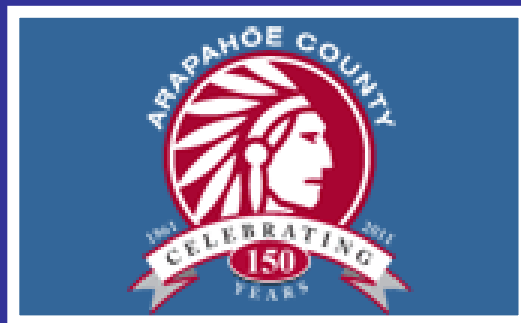
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