

Responsible Parenting for Fathers with a History of Incarceration

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Encouraging Responsible Parenting among Fathers with Histories of Incarceration

Activities and Lessons from Six Responsible Fatherhood Programs

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Importance of Parenting Activities for Fathers with Incarceration Experiences

The massive growth in incarceration rates in the United States has had significant consequences for families. Over the past four decades, incarceration rates have more than quadrupled (Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014). In 2007, the most recent year for which national statistics are available, an estimated 53 percent of the more than 1.5 million individuals incarcerated in state and federal prisons were parents of minor children (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). As of 2012, between 5 and 10 million children in the United States had lived with a parent who had been incarcerated at any point in the child's life (Murphey and Cooper 2015; Schirmer, Nellis, and Mauer 2009). Given that rates of incarceration are higher among nonwhites than whites, a higher percentage of minority children, particularly black children, have experienced parental incarceration in their life. Approximately 7 percent of all children in the United States have had a parent spend time in prison or jail, ranging from 6 percent of white children to nearly 12 percent of black children (Murphey and Cooper 2015). Similarly, children from economically disadvantaged families are more likely to experience parental incarceration than those from families of higher socioeconomic status (Murphey and Cooper 2015).

Children left behind because of parental incarceration experience worse life outcomes relative to their peers, including economic hardship caused by the loss of a parent's income (Phillips et al. 2006), residential instability (Geller et al. 2009), academic difficulties (Parke and Clarke-Stewart 2003), mental health problems (Murray and Farrington 2008), and behavioral problems (Dannerbeck 2005; Murray, Farrington, and Sekol 2012; Wildeman 2010).

BACKGROUND

With funding from the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation contracted with the Urban Institute to conduct an implementation evaluation of OFA's Community-Centered Responsible Fatherhood Ex-Prisoner Reentry Pilot Projects ("Fatherhood Reentry").¹ Six organizations were funded to implement a range of activities intended to help stabilize fathers and their families, help move fathers toward economic self-sufficiency, and reduce recidivism. The following organizations received funding and were included in Urban's evaluation:

- **Kanawha Institute for Social Research and Action, Inc. (KISRA)**, headquartered in Dunbar, West Virginia, which called its program the West Virginia Pathways to Responsible Fatherhood Initiative²
- **Lutheran Social Services (LSS)**, headquartered in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, which called its program Fatherhood and Families
- **New Jersey Department of Corrections' (NJDOC) Office of Substance Abuse Programming and Addiction Services**, headquartered in Trenton, New Jersey, which called its program Engaging the Family
- **PB&J Family Services, Inc. (PB&J)**, headquartered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which called its program the Fatherhood Reentry Program
- **The RIDGE Project, Inc. (RIDGE)**, headquartered in McClure, Ohio, which called its program TYRO
- **Rubicon Programs, Inc. (Rubicon)**, headquartered in Richmond, California, which called its program Promoting Advances in Paternal Accountability and Success in Work

As required by the authorizing legislation, each organization provided activities in three areas: responsible parenting, healthy marriage, and economic stability.³ The activities in the three areas were implemented in collaboration with various nonprofit and government agencies. As a complement to the OFA-funded activities authorized by legislation, the organizations helped participants address their reentry and fatherhood needs by using external referrals to nonprofit and government agency partners and internal referrals to services supported by non-OFA funding streams. This brief describes the range of services available to Fatherhood Reentry project participants during the evaluation period.

A note on language: the authorizing legislation uses the term "healthy marriage" as one of the three core activities. Throughout this brief, we use the term "healthy relationship," which represents one aspect of the authorized healthy marriage service provision. As made permissible by the authorizing legislation and discussed throughout this brief, the programs primarily provided healthy relationship classes and services within the healthy marriage activity area and characterized their programs as such.

The Fatherhood Reentry projects provided activities to fathers (and their families) in institutional settings as they were nearing release ("prerelease") and in their offices located in the community ("postrelease"). All six projects provided services in multiple institutional settings: federal prisons (KISRA), state prisons (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon), county/regional jails (KISRA, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon), and residential substance abuse treatment facilities (Rubicon). All projects provided services in their community-based offices for participants served by the program prerelease. With the exception of the NJDOC project, fathers who were formerly incarcerated could be enrolled and served in the community-based offices without having been served by the programs in the institutions.⁴ Four projects (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, and RIDGE) provided services in multiple communities across their respective states, and two (PB&J and Rubicon) provided services in one county.⁵ Five projects (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, PB&J, and RIDGE) were operational from September 2011 through September 2015, and the sixth (Rubicon) was operational from September 2012 through September 2015.

This brief, one of three in a series,⁶ focuses on the responsible parenting activities implemented by the projects. First, we provide context for the importance of responsible parenting activities for fathers who are incarcerated or were formerly incarcerated, highlighting studies that discuss the impact of parental incarceration on children, the challenges associated with family support and contact during incarceration, and the difficulties fathers face reengaging with their children upon returning to the community. We then discuss the key strategies the programs used to provide parenting activities to participating fathers and their families. We conclude with recommendations, based on the experiences of the Fatherhood Reentry projects, for practitioners seeking to implement parenting activities for the reentry population.

Although research suggests that maternal incarceration is more detrimental for children than paternal incarceration (Gabel and Johnston 1995; Dallaire 2007), the effects of paternal incarceration are farther reaching because 92 percent of incarcerated parents are fathers (Glaze and Maruschak 2008).

Parental incarceration also affects other family members, specifically intimate partners and caregivers, who may have to deal with a loss of income and/or other forms of emotional or material support that were provided by the incarcerated parent. The negative effects of parental incarceration on children and other family members, such as loss of contact or emotional support, are partly attributable to the barriers incarcerated parents face in trying to keep in touch with their children and families. These barriers range from the prohibitive cost of phone calls to incarcerated parents' feelings of shame, which can hinder communication and contact during their time in institutions and pose a challenge to family reunification once they are released to the community (Fontaine et al. 2012; Travis and Waul 2003).

Several obstacles prevent fathers from actively engaging with their children during incarceration. Often, parents are incarcerated far from their homes at distances difficult for children and other family members to travel (McKay et al. 2010). In other cases, facilities prohibit or heavily restrict visits (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, and Joest 2003; Lewis 2004). Some coparents or family members feel the correctional environment is too unwelcoming, and mutual feelings of shame can often hinder parent-child or parent-family contact during incarceration (Fontaine et al. 2012). Although parent-child contact visits, where children can interact with their parents without a glass barrier, can be therapeutic for parents and children (Johnston 1995), they are not widely offered in correctional facilities. Only 41 percent of fathers incarcerated in state prisons and 55 percent of those incarcerated in federal prisons report ever having a personal visit with their children while incarcerated (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Further, the conditions under which these visits take place can make them more traumatic to children than helpful (Murray 2005). It is not uncommon for children and caregivers to wait an hour or longer in waiting rooms that are not welcoming to children for a brief visit with their incarcerated family member. Fathers may be required to remain seated or have their mobility restricted, limiting their ability to interact with their children during their time together (Arditti 2005). For these reasons, many fathers try to maintain contact with their children through telephone calls, handwritten or typed letters, or videoconferencing, the latter of which has become an increasingly popular option (Arditti 2012; Hairston 1991; Murray 2005; Poehlmann et al. 2010).

Contact and communication between incarcerated parents and their children and families can be mutually beneficial. Fathers staying in contact with their children can mitigate the negative effects of parental incarceration on children. An evaluation of a therapeutic, prison-based fatherhood program found that weekly father-child contact visits helped fathers become more empathetic toward their children, decreased self-reported stress related to parenting and child behaviors, and decreased problem behaviors among children (Landreth and Lobaugh 1998). Maintaining contact with family members can also help incarcerated fathers successfully reintegrate into the community upon release (Dowden and Andrews 2003; La Vigne et al. 2008; Shollenberger 2009). Formerly incarcerated parents who have healthy relationships with their children have better employment and substance abuse

outcomes than incarcerated parents who do not have these healthy relationships (La Vigne, Shollenberger, and Debus 2009; Visher, Debus, and Yahner 2008). Therefore, activities that encourage incarcerated parents to stay in touch with their family members can help fathers successfully reintegrate into the community.

Fatherhood Reentry Programs' Approaches to Providing Parenting Activities

Responsible parenting activities were one of three core components of the Fatherhood Reentry projects.⁷ Although this brief is exclusively focused on parenting activities, the three project activities were intended to be complementary.

Case Management

Case management services were a central part of all six programs' responsible parenting services. Case managers served participating fathers and their families, providing one-on-one coaching and counseling; assessing their needs; and making referrals, connections, and links to services offered through their Fatherhood Reentry program or through external partners. Case management activities were intended to help fathers address their parenting needs and goals and help them reunify with and support their children and families. Case management was not a structured service with mandatory weekly or biweekly meetings; instead, case management was an individualized service provided to fathers based on their specific needs and the needs of their families.

Three programs (LSS, PB&J, and RIDGE) structured their case management services so that the same staff member worked with the participating father on all three of the core components: responsible parenting, healthy marriage, and economic stability. In these three programs, case managers worked with fathers to help them achieve their parenting, relationship, and economic stability goals through activities provided by the programs and by their external partners. The other three programs (KISRA, NJDOC, and Rubicon) assigned participants two case managers, one focused on parenting and relationships and a second focused solely on their employment goals.

Case management functioned as a conduit for fathers to access the programs' parenting services and resources in the community. Case managers collected information from fathers upon their entry into the program and through one-on-one meetings to learn about their children and their custody and child support issues, family living arrangements, level of contact with their children, and quality of their relationships with their children. All the programs administered intake assessments or surveys with questions about participants' children (e.g., number, age, and relationship with the father), level of involvement, living arrangements, and child support obligations. Case managers used this information to connect fathers to various services and opportunities, including parenting classes, support groups, and family and child visits. Case managers also connected fathers to local child support agencies to help

them modify their child support obligations and resolve additional issues regarding paternity, child support arrears, and driver's license reinstatement.

In conjunction with—and often through—the case management services offered in institutions and the programs' community-based offices, parenting activities were intended to strengthen the relationship between fathers and their children by

- building and **developing knowledge** of parenting and child development among fathers through the facilitation of curriculum-based parenting classes and support groups;
- increasing and improving **parent-child contact and communication** through family contact visits, video diaries, and special events; and
- **removing or reducing barriers** to family stability and reunification by helping fathers with child care and child support modifications and payments.

Knowledge Development

All six programs included activities intended to help develop and build fathers' knowledge of parenting and child development and reduce some of the informational barriers that may have prevented them from reunifying and connecting with their children. All six programs included **curriculum-based parenting classes**, and three programs hosted **support groups** for fathers. These activities were also intended to give fathers a safe space to discuss their concerns about parenting and their children, to connect fathers with similar experiences, and to provide information and resources.

CURRICULUM-BASED PARENTING CLASSES

All six programs provided structured parenting classes to participants in the correctional institutions and treatment facilities where they were located. The programs implemented curricula designed specifically for the incarcerated population. Four projects implemented name-brand curricula: Parenting Inside Out (KISRA and Rubicon), InsideOut Dad (LSS), and Active Parenting Now (NJDOC). Two projects developed and used their own curricula: RIDGE developed TYRO Dads, and Rubicon used Back to Family, developed by its core partner, Centerforce. PB&J augmented the InsideOut Dad curriculum with lessons from a curriculum it developed called Importance of Parents and Children Together (ImPACT). Parenting Inside Out was developed by Pathfinders of Oregon and consists of 12 modules designed to help fathers learn parenting skills. InsideOut Dad, developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative, focuses on topics such as the father's role in the family, coparenting and communication, creating a fathering plan, and talking with children about morals and values. Active Parenting Now includes three chapters taught over six weeks on parenting styles, teaching responsibility, and building courage and self-esteem in children. TYRO Dads includes 20 hours of curriculum and teaches fathers how to understand child development, communicate effectively with their children and coparent, and develop a new identity as a father (or parent). Back to Family teaches skills such as effective listening and empowered communication. PB&J's ImPACT curriculum included

the topics covered by InsideOut Dad and also covered child development, how to talk to children about incarceration, child safety, step-parenting, child discipline, and domestic violence.

All of the curricula were interactive, encouraged group discussion, and covered similar material, such as communication skills, parent and child roles, coparenting skills, and conflict resolution. The frequency and duration of classes ranged from one to two hours a day, one to five times a week, for 3 to 12 weeks. Rubicon's program included the most parenting class hours: fathers could receive 105 hours of Parenting Inside Out classes. LSS and NJDOC provided the fewest parenting class hours: fathers could receive 12 hours of InsideOut Dad through LSS or Active Parenting Now classes through NJDOC. Several factors affected when and how often classes were taught, including curriculum guidelines for the brand-name approaches, the length of the curriculum, correctional facility rules on how often and for how long classes could be taught, and the availability of space needed to facilitate classes. Program staff occasionally modified the structure of classes to make them more suitable for their program. For example, to minimize attrition in its classes and accommodate participants' short lengths of stay, Rubicon condensed its Parenting Inside Out curriculum in the county jail from 12 weeks to 7 weeks.

As part of its curriculum-based parenting activities, LSS also provided participants in institutions with informational packets on parenting upon enrollment in its program. These Dad Packets included general information about child support obligations, pamphlets on coparenting, tips for staying involved with children, a parenting handbook that discussed various topics (e.g., respecting children's feelings, getting along with children's caregivers, reuniting with children, regaining custody, and improving communication skills), blank greeting cards for fathers to send handwritten letters to their children, and a children's storybook fathers could read through their video diaries. The blank greeting cards and video diaries are discussed in more detail below.

In addition to their prerelease offerings, KISRA, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon also offered parenting classes in their community-based offices. Community-based parenting classes allowed fathers who missed some prerelease classes to complete the curriculum and allowed people who enrolled in the program in the community the opportunity to take the curriculum for the first time. The frequency and duration of classes offered in the community ranged from one to three times a week for four to six weeks. KISRA and Rubicon offered the most parenting class hours in the community: fathers could receive 24 hours of Parenting Inside Out through KISRA or Back to Family classes through Rubicon. PB&J provided the fewest parenting class hours in the community: fathers could receive 12 hours of InsideOut Dad classes.

Program staff employed several strategies to encourage participant engagement in classes and completion of the curriculum. All six programs offered certificates of completion when fathers finished the curriculum to provide a sense of accomplishment. RIDGE and Rubicon held special completion sessions in correctional facilities and in their communities to recognize dads who completed their curricula. RIDGE presented fathers with a TYRO pin after completing the TYRO curriculum. Encouraging participant engagement in communities was more difficult than in institutions. The programs recognized that fathers were more mobile after they were released from prison, and it

became particularly important to ensure that class materials were relevant to their postrelease lives and that class times accommodated their schedules as much as possible.

Most programs (KISRA, LSS, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon) provided incentives, such as bus tokens, gas cards, grocery cards, and hygiene kits, to encourage participation. KISRA gave participants \$10 a week to help with transportation costs and another \$25 for completing the parenting classes. LSS staggered their incentives: fathers received a “starter kit” upon release from prison that included basic supplies, such as hygiene products, bus passes (if needed), and two \$10 Walmart gift cards. Participants received an additional \$200–250 for job-related supplies once they found employment and a \$10 Walmart gift card each week for the first eight weeks they retained employment. PB&J provided participants with gas cards and bus vouchers, if necessary. RIDGE provided fathers with scholarships for transportation costs in the form of bus tokens, bus fares, or gas gift cards. Rubicon gave hygiene kits to fathers who completed the parenting classes and transit passes to travel to and from the classes, as needed.

Other programs incentivized attendance in parenting classes by linking fathers to the services they seemed more eager to engage. For example, PB&J offered paid employment opportunities in their workforce development center only to participants that completed or were currently enrolled in parenting classes. Similarly, KISRA required all participating fathers to complete the parenting curriculum before they could receive employment services such as subsidized employment opportunities and transitional jobs. RIDGE also made its postrelease parenting classes mandatory for fathers who wanted to receive additional services, such as welding or commercial driver’s license training. KISRA and RIDGE program staff believed that making the classes mandatory encouraged fathers to complete them.

SUPPORT GROUPS

To foster peer-to-peer exchanges and encourage fathers to interact with one another to discuss their parenting experiences, three programs (LSS, PB&J, and RIDGE) hosted weekly support groups for participating fathers. In the last year of the program, LSS launched a weekly support group called “Fatherhood Fridays,” an informal gathering where participants could discuss their children and their parenting challenges. LSS offered lunch during these groups. Once a father attended four Fatherhood Fridays, LSS provided incentives to fathers for their children. As a program support, PB&J offered weekly dinners at its offices for fathers, partners/coparents, and children to share a meal together. PB&J case managers then led separate group sessions for adults and children. Adult sessions were based loosely on the InsideOut Dad and ImPACT curricula, addressing topics such as communication and problem-solving, goal-setting, nutrition, child well-being, and financial stability. Children’s sessions used child-centered activities to give children an opportunity to discuss their experiences regarding their parents’ incarceration and return from incarceration. RIDGE encouraged fathers to establish TYRO Alumni Communities in correctional institutions and several communities throughout Ohio. Alumni communities offered fathers an opportunity to share their parenting experiences, provide emotional support for one another, engage in peer-to-peer mentoring, and hold each other accountable to TYRO values. RIDGE staff were invited to alumni meetings but not required to attend. Each alumni community was led by a board of TYRO alumni. Board members connected with fathers weekly and

helped them with their reentry needs (e.g., transportation, housing search assistance, connections to employers). Alumni communities also engaged in community service projects (e.g., cleaning parks and public spaces) and hosted events (e.g., community festivals).

Parent-Child Contact and Communication

All six programs engaged in activities intended to increase contact and communication between fathers and their children during incarceration and in the community. Three programs facilitated **family contact visits** and two facilitated **communication** through phone calls, video diaries, and letter-writing activities in institutions. Four programs hosted **special events** in their communities to facilitate family contact and communication. These activities gave fathers an opportunity to practice what they learned through the parenting curricula, to connect and interact with their children and families, to demonstrate to their partners and children that they wanted to be involved in their lives, and to improve their relationships with their families.

INSTITUTIONAL FAMILY CONTACT VISITS

Three programs (LSS, PB&J, and RIDGE) facilitated some form of family contact visits in the institutions. LSS hosted family activity days in all correctional facilities where its program was implemented. Family activity days were hosted quarterly and open to all inmates with minor children. Because of the early success of family activity days, the South Dakota Department of Corrections wanted all fathers, not only Fatherhood and Families participants, to be able to participate. At each family activity day, LSS staff provided snacks and brought games, puzzles, and crafts so children could play with their fathers. In the program's final year, corrections staff allowed children to take home the crafts they made with their father as a tangible memento from the visit. LSS also made visiting rooms in some state prisons more welcoming to children by supplying children's books and toys and painting murals on the walls.

PB&J facilitated family contact visits in the institutions where it was located. PB&J's case managers reached out to participants' children and their caregivers about the visits, acted as liaisons to help resolve conflicts where relationships were strained, and educated fathers and caregivers about the importance of visitation for parents and children. PB&J also communicated with correctional staff to secure approval for the visits and transported children to the facilities. Visits were held in a room at the jail and in a designated trailer at the prison with a living room, kitchen, bathroom, and play room. PB&J made the trailer more welcoming by painting murals on the walls and bringing in a television, furniture, books, and toys. At institutions where PB&J implemented its program, visits were between parents and children only, and other family members or caregivers were not present. PB&J case managers were present to monitor the visits. Parent-child visits lasted one hour in the jail and two hours in the state prison. Parents and children could openly interact with each other during visits, playing games or reading books. PB&J case managers also met with children and coparents/caregivers before the visits and debriefed with children and caregivers immediately after to ensure the experience was beneficial. Debriefs were intended to discuss and address any issues that may have come up during the visits.

RIDGE facilitated two types of family contact visits, Family Days and Time with Dad, in all correctional facilities where it was located. During Family Days, hosted annually, fathers and children

could visit different centers around the room to make T-shirts, build their “Lego-cy” (a model dream home), play games, get their faces painted, or read books. Time with Dad events were hosted monthly for two and a half hours. The structure of these visits varied across prisons because of differences in policies and available space. During Time with Dad events, family members interacted with each other, ate snacks, played games, and made crafts. The events also gave fathers an opportunity to help their children with homework.

PRERELEASE COMMUNICATION

LSS encouraged fathers to communicate with their children through written letters and video diaries using items that were provided to them through the Dad Packets upon enrollment. LSS institutional case managers worked with fathers to write letters to their children and with correctional staff to ensure these letters were mailed. LSS case managers also helped fathers create and send video diaries to their children. Fathers recorded themselves reading books, singing songs, or delivering a message. LSS provided the DVD, case, and postage to mail the videos to the fathers’ families. Fathers were allowed to make as many videos as they wanted. Video diaries allowed children to get to know the voice and face of a parent who they may not have remembered, had not seen for a while, or may have never met.

Following the parenting classes, NJDOC staff allowed participants to make coached phone calls for free to their children and other important adults in their children’s lives, such as caregivers, day care workers, teachers, and doctors. This activity was helpful because fathers often struggled to make phone calls because of limited free time, long wait times for available phones, screening rules, and expensive call fees. The coached phone calls helped fathers stay connected with their families, especially if the family lived far away. NJDOC program staff provided guidance to fathers before and during the calls to ensure that interactions between fathers and children were positive and mutually beneficial. Case managers then talked with participants afterward about how the calls made them feel.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Four programs (KISRA, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon) hosted Father’s Day events and several other special events in the community for participants and their families. KISRA held Calling All Dads miniworkshops for fathers and children that included parenting tips for fathers and parent-child activities such as laser tag. PB&J held “bring your kid to work days” for fathers working in one of its small business workshops, which allowed children to see their fathers working, and designed hands-on, on-site projects for fathers, such as washing cars and painting birdhouses with their children. PB&J started an alumni club in the final year of the program and hosted a monthly barbecue for participants and their families to recognize participants who found employment after their time at the workforce development center. RIDGE hosted Catch with Dad, a day when participants attended a professional baseball game and played catch with their children on the field before the game. Rubicon hosted a holiday cookie-baking night, barbecues, a Halloween movie showing and costume event, and fishing trips. Rubicon also organized outings to professional football games for participants and their children. These events gave fathers and their children opportunities to apply and practice the parenting and communication skills they learned in the parenting classes.

Barrier Removal

To help fathers overcome barriers to reentry that interfered with their ability to parent their children, all six programs provided **assistance with child support services** by helping fathers modify their child support orders and get their driver's licenses reinstated if they were suspended because of child support arrears. Two programs (KISRA and RIDGE) also provided **assistance with child care** or help paying for child care. Managing child support obligations and arrears can be one of the more difficult challenges returning fathers encounter. Connecting fathers with child support services was intended to reduce the barrier to child reunification and connection that child support obligations may have caused. Child care assistance was intended to help fathers attend parenting classes or other program and nonprogram activities, such as going to work or other important appointments.

CHILD SUPPORT ASSISTANCE

All six programs provided assistance with child support, at minimum by developing partnerships with local child support agencies to provide information and resources to participating fathers. The Fatherhood Reentry programs helped fathers navigate child support obligations and arrears and address child support as a barrier that could impede their ability to find work or financial stability (through suspensions on their state-issued licenses and income withholding). Building strong partnerships with child support agencies was essential to offering these activities.

All the programs offered educational workshops where child support representatives explained their agency's rules and processes. Rubicon hosted child support representatives at their offices to meet with participants in one-on-one sessions to discuss the circumstances of their cases and allow fathers to apply for child support modifications at their offices instead of traveling to child support offices. All the programs regularly helped participants apply for child support modifications. Three programs (LSS, PB&J, and RIDGE) worked closely with child support agencies to lift holds on participants' driver's licenses that were suspended because of outstanding child support payments. LSS case managers coached fathers through the child support process, helped participants complete applications for child support modifications and wrote accompanying letters of support, and occasionally worked with child support agencies in other states when participants had children living outside of South Dakota. In some cases, program staff went to court to advocate for participants summoned for child support-related reasons. PB&J and Rubicon also worked with participants to regain visitation rights. PB&J identified participants' custody and visitation issues when developing Individual Family Service Plans during program enrollment. Using the Individual Family Service Plan as a guide, case managers provided services to help fathers address these needs. PB&J also referred participants to the Child Support Enforcement Division's Prisoner Outreach Program, which employed a case manager to work with fathers in institutions to review their parental rights. Rubicon conducted legal assessments for participants out of their community-based offices. Assessments helped Rubicon's legal staff determine whether participants needed referrals to child support, housing, or employment. If a father needed legal services for custody or divorce proceedings, Rubicon referred them to a family law facilitator and the administrative court office.

CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE

KISRA and RIDGE offered child care assistance so fathers could attend program activities or go to work. KISRA's main office location in Dunbar, West Virginia, had a Child Development Center available to Pathways participants and other KISRA clients. The Child Development Center charged \$50 a week per child and could serve 60 children of kindergarten age or younger. For children in first through fifth grade, KISRA offered an after-school program that served up to 50 children and cost \$100 a month per child. RIDGE provided fathers with money to help pay for child care costs. The rate of the subsidy was \$2–6 an hour per child.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The Fatherhood Reentry programs implemented several activities in the institutions and communities where they were based to help fathers reunify with their children and their families. These activities were primarily focused on building fathers' knowledge of parenting and child development, increasing contact and communication between fathers and their children, and removing barriers to successful family reunification. Across the programs, more parenting activities were provided in institutions than in community-based offices. Participating fathers in communities faced several competing demands on their time and resources that made it difficult to routinely participate in parenting activities. Fathers had to contend with fluctuating and unpredictable schedules and time commitments (e.g., work and family obligations, community supervision requirements) and meeting needs that they did not have while incarcerated, such as finding employment and housing. It was also difficult for many fathers to get to and from the community-based offices where activities were offered. Because of some of the difficulties keeping fathers engaged in program activities in the community, program staff prioritized working with fathers individually on meeting their immediate needs (e.g., employment and housing) so they could then focus on reunifying with their children.

The Fatherhood Reentry programs successfully implemented a wide array of parenting activities in correctional institutions (and treatment centers) and communities. Program staff developed strong partnerships with government agencies, such as child support agencies and state corrections agencies.

The following recommendations are drawn from the experiences and lessons learned of the Fatherhood Reentry programs and are intended for practitioners seeking ways to foster parenting activities that help fathers returning from incarceration reunify and connect with their children:⁸

- ***Leverage the opportunities present in the prerelease and postrelease environments.*** Engaging fathers in prerelease and postrelease environments presents both opportunities and challenges. Parenting classes were better attended in institutions because there were fewer activities and obligations competing for fathers' time and attention than there were in the community. Correctional institutions provide a unique opportunity for program staff to connect with fathers for a substantial period of time, mostly without their children or caregivers present. However, there are greater logistical hurdles in correctional institutions and rules and procedures that preclude certain social activities. In their community-based offices, the

programs could more easily implement a greater variety of social activities with fathers and their families, such as barbecues and sports outings, that were simply not possible in correctional facilities. Given the opportunities and challenges presented by the two distinct environments, programs that operate in both settings can build a comprehensive program that uses the opportunities present in each context in complementary ways.

- ***Use a range of parenting activities that give fathers several tools to help reunify with their children.*** The Fatherhood Reentry programs used classes to teach parenting skills but also used letters, video diaries, coached phone calls, parent-child contact visits, and family activity days to create opportunities for fathers to engage with their children in the institutions and in the communities. These activities also incorporated coparents/caregivers whenever possible. Because fathers may be at different levels of readiness for reunification with their children (and their coparents), they may benefit from a variety of tools for reconnecting. Coparents or other caregivers may be hesitant to allow fathers back in their children's lives immediately, and fathers may face several reentry barriers that divert their focus from reconnecting with their children immediately. Some fathers may feel shame about the criminal activity that led to their incarceration, limiting their willingness to reunify with their children. Using a variety of tools allows programs to work with fathers at all levels of readiness for reunification to help them overcome these emotional, psychological, or economic barriers and approach improving relationship dynamics with patience. Providing an array of activities allows programs to work on family reunification when fathers are ready, recognizing that coparents and children may also have different levels of readiness. The more tools programs offer, the more choices fathers will have to use the appropriate ones to reunify with their children and families.
- ***Address fathers' economic stability needs as part of the child/family reunification process.*** Once released from incarceration, fathers feel pressure to address their economic stability needs, such as housing and employment, as well as needs for food and clothing. Meeting these immediate needs can consume much of their emotional and physical energy. Programs may want to work with participants to ensure that these needs are being met and help them achieve a level of economic stability. This will enable fathers to commit more energy, time, and resources to reconnecting with their children and being a successful parent. For example, LSS believed it was important to help fathers address their needs for employment and housing first to allow them to focus on parenting activities. To identify fathers' needs, LSS developed a checklist based on the Hierarchy of Needs, a questionnaire that asked fathers about their needs for housing, employment, obtaining identification cards or birth certificates, substance abuse treatment, and help modifying their child support order or navigating the child support system.⁹ LSS case managers administered the checklist to participants upon their release from prison so they could prioritize the services fathers needed immediately in hopes that fathers would be able to devote more time and energy to reconnecting with their children.
- ***Cultivate child/family-friendly environments in institutions by establishing strong relationships with correctional staff.*** The Fatherhood Reentry programs were able to implement parenting

activities in institutions by communicating to correctional staff the importance of each program and its goals. Coordinating a visit involving children, correctional staff, and coparents/caregivers required that programs advocated for the importance of the visits and managed the logistics carefully while ensuring appropriate security measures were still in place. Program staff may need to convince correctional staff (and sometimes coparents/caregivers) of the importance of allowing children to have contact with their fathers during incarceration. There are varying approaches to promoting the importance of family contact visits and ensuring they are enjoyable for everyone involved, including creating a welcoming physical environment where family members can interact, preparing families for visits, transporting families to correctional facilities, and debriefing with them after visits.

The experiences of the Fatherhood Reentry programs offer various lessons for practitioners who wish to work with fathers who are incarcerated or were formerly incarcerated. Strengthening and preserving relationships between children and their fathers is important, as incarceration can strain family relationships. The incarceration of a parent can have significant repercussions for children and families. By working to help fathers maintain contact during incarceration and reconnect in the community, programs can potentially mitigate trauma and promote healthier parent-child relationships.

Notes

1. The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation and the Office of Family Assistance are both part of the Administration for Children and Families in the US Department of Health and Human Services.
2. KISRA was funded under a different funding opportunity announcement than the other five projects and served fathers who may not have had recent incarceration histories.
3. The Fatherhood Reentry projects were part of the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood initiative, a discretionary grant program originally authorized under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and reauthorized under the Claims Resolution Act of 2010.
4. Postrelease enrollment varied widely: LSS, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon enrolled fathers who had been released from incarceration in the past six months; KISRA enrolled formerly incarcerated fathers with no time limit on the recency of their last incarceration; NJDOC did not enroll any fathers in the community.
5. Additional information about implementation of the programs, including target populations, geographic locations, and partnerships can be found in a companion report (Fontaine et al. 2017).
6. Two other briefs in this series focus on economic stability (Fontaine and Kurs 2017) and healthy marriage (Fontaine, Eisenstat, and Cramer 2017).
7. The other two components were healthy marriage and economic stability activities. Additional Information about the healthy marriage and economic stability activities the Fatherhood Reentry programs implemented can be found in two companion briefs (Fontaine, Eisenstat, and Cramer 2017; Fontaine and Kurs 2017).
8. These recommendations include suggestions for service provision that are not allowable by the authorizing legislation that funded the Fatherhood Reentry projects.
9. The OFA-funded Fatherhood Reentry projects were not permitted to use grant funds for child support payments.



Supporting Healthy Marriages among Fathers with Histories of Incarceration

Activities and Lessons from Six Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Jocelyn Fontaine, Josh Eisenstat, and Lindsey Cramer

February 2017

OPRE Report #2017-03

Importance of Strengthening Family Relationships for Fathers with Incarceration Experiences

Both the removal and release of a loved one because of incarceration are important stressors to a family unit. Aside from the emotional stress felt by the person actually experiencing incarceration, incarceration affects the family members left behind, including spouses, intimate partners, coparents/caregivers, and children. Family members of the person incarcerated may have to deal with the loss of various forms of emotional and/or material support that the family member who is incarcerated provided, which is associated with several adverse consequences. Relative to their peers, children whose parents are incarcerated are more likely to experience economic hardship (Phillips et al. 2006), residential instability (Geller et al. 2009), academic difficulties (Parke and Clarke-Stewart 2003), and mental health and behavioral problems (Dannerbeck 2005; Murray and Farrington 2008; Murray, Farrington, and Sekol 2012; Wildeman 2010). As a result of the loss of support and other factors, episodes of major depression are more common among partners of incarcerated men (Wildeman, Schnittker, and Turney 2012), and feelings of grief surrounding the incarceration of a loved one can be particularly painful because of the stigma, shame, and disappointment of having a family member incarcerated (Arditti 2005; Fontaine et al. 2012). Once a person is released from incarceration, family members typically provide a range of resources to assist in their community reintegration, placing further stress on the family, who may already face resource limitations and have their own service needs (Fontaine et al. 2015; Shollenberger 2009).

BACKGROUND

With funding from the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation contracted with the Urban Institute to conduct an implementation evaluation of OFA's Community-Centered Responsible Fatherhood Ex-Prisoner Reentry Pilot Projects ("Fatherhood Reentry").¹ Six organizations were funded to implement a range of activities intended to help stabilize fathers and their families, help move fathers toward economic self-sufficiency, and reduce recidivism. The following organizations received funding and were included in Urban's evaluation:

- **Kanawha Institute for Social Research and Action, Inc. (KISRA)**, headquartered in Dunbar, West Virginia, which called its program the West Virginia Pathways to Responsible Fatherhood Initiative²
- **Lutheran Social Services (LSS)**, headquartered in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, which called its program Fatherhood and Families
- **New Jersey Department of Corrections' (NJDOC) Office of Substance Abuse Programming and Addiction Services**, headquartered in Trenton, New Jersey, which called its program Engaging the Family
- **PB&J Family Services, Inc. (PB&J)**, headquartered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which called its program the Fatherhood Reentry Program
- **The RIDGE Project, Inc. (RIDGE)**, headquartered in McClure, Ohio, which called its program TYRO
- **Rubicon Programs, Inc. (Rubicon)**, headquartered in Richmond, California, which called its program Promoting Advances in Paternal Accountability and Success in Work

As required by the authorizing legislation, each organization provided activities in three areas: responsible parenting, healthy marriage, and economic stability.³ The activities in the three areas were implemented in collaboration with various nonprofit and government agencies. As a complement to the OFA-funded activities authorized by legislation, the organizations helped participants address their reentry and fatherhood needs by using external referrals to nonprofit and government agency partners and internal referrals to services supported by non-OFA funding streams. This brief describes the range of services available to Fatherhood Reentry project participants during the evaluation period.

A note on language: the authorizing legislation uses the term "healthy marriage" as one of the three core activities. Throughout this brief, we use the term "healthy relationship," which represents one aspect of the authorized healthy marriage service provision. As made permissible by the authorizing legislation and discussed throughout this brief, the programs primarily provided healthy relationship classes and services within the healthy marriage activity area and characterized their programs as such.

The Fatherhood Reentry projects provided activities to fathers (and their families) in institutional settings as they were nearing release ("prerelease") and in their offices located in the community ("postrelease"). All six projects provided services in multiple institutional settings: federal prisons (KISRA), state prisons (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon), county/regional jails (KISRA, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon), and residential substance abuse treatment facilities (Rubicon). All projects provided services in their community-based offices for participants served by the program prerelease. With the exception of the NJDOC project, fathers who were formerly incarcerated could be enrolled and served in the community-based offices without having been served by the programs in the institutions.⁴ Four projects (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, and RIDGE) provided services in multiple communities across their respective states, and two (PB&J and Rubicon) provided services in one county.⁵ Five projects (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, PB&J, and RIDGE) were operational from September 2011 through September 2015, and the sixth (Rubicon) was operational from September 2012 through September 2015.

This brief, one of three in a series,⁶ focuses on the projects' efforts to support the marital, romantic, and/or coparenting relationships of program participants.⁷ In addition to serving fathers, the Fatherhood Reentry projects included several activities to strengthen the relationships between fathers and their partners/coparents and to encourage coparenting and family reunification. This brief first provides a review of the literature on the importance of strengthening such relationships for fathers who are incarcerated or were formerly incarcerated. This brief then describes the healthy relationship activities provided by the Fatherhood Reentry programs in detail. A conclusion section includes recommendations intended for practitioners implementing family-focused programming for fathers impacted by incarceration and their partners/coparents based on the experiences of the Fatherhood Reentry projects.

Indeed, the economic and emotional hardships experienced by all parties affected by an incarceration can strain the entire family unit and their relationships with one another (Fontaine et al. 2012; Shollenberger 2009). In addition, people recently released from incarceration are often not in the best position to build or repair their family relationships because of issues that might contribute to relationship conflict, such as histories of domestic violence, substance abuse and dependence, and mental health issues (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Furthermore, not all fathers had strong relationships with their partners/coparents before incarceration (Turanovic, Rodriguez, and Pratt 2012), and economic instability, which is extremely common among the reentry population, contributes to relationship instability (Carlson, McLanahan, and England 2004).

Though it may be difficult, and families vary in their willingness to focus on these issues, there is a significant need for activities that encourage family members to build or repair relationships that may have been fractured by incarceration. In general, a supportive family environment is critical to the development of children and the well-being of parents. Children who grow up in families with conflict or families characterized by unsupportive relationships are more likely to have a host of mental and physical health problems (Repetti, Taylor, and Seeman 2002). Relationship conflict can have an impact on couples' mental health, which can in turn affect their parenting styles and the well-being of their children (Krishnakumar and Buehler 2000).

In particular, activities that help fathers who are incarcerated or have been recently released maintain, build, and repair relationships with their families have the potential to improve outcomes for fathers, their children, and entire families. Indeed, increased communication and contact with children during incarceration has been shown to lead to improved father-child relationships (Arditti 2005; Landreth and Lobaugh 1998). Maintaining contact with family members during incarceration also helps fathers reunify with their families and reintegrate successfully into the community upon release (Dowden and Andrews 2003; La Vigne, Davies, and Brazzell 2008; Shollenberger 2009). And formerly incarcerated parents with supportive family relationships have better reentry outcomes than parents without these relationships (La Vigne, Shollenberger, and Debus 2009; Visher, Debus, and Yahner 2008). Furthermore, services targeted directly to children of parents who are incarcerated or were formerly incarcerated and partners/caregivers have significant potential to help repair family relationships and reduce trauma (Peterson et al. 2015).

Fatherhood Reentry Programs' Approaches to Providing Healthy Relationship Activities

Healthy marriage activities, which included healthy relationship education and activities, were one of three core components of Fatherhood Reentry projects.⁸ Though this brief focuses on the healthy relationship activities within the healthy marriage component, the three activity areas were intended to be complementary. The healthy relationship activities focused on strengthening and building the relationship between the father and the father's spouse/romantic partner and/or parent(s) of his children, with whom he may or may not have been in a romantic relationship. For the purposes of this

brief, we describe these people as the participating fathers' partners/coparents. The activities were generally relevant to both fathers who were in intimate relationships and those who were not.

Case Management

Case management was a central part of all six programs' healthy relationship services. To facilitate family reunification, effective coparenting, and healthy relationships, case managers worked with fathers and their partners to provide coaching and counseling services and referrals to additional resources provided by the program and other community-based organizations. All the programs structured case management so that the same case manager working with the father was also assigned to work with his partner/coparent. For the most part, case management services for partners/coparents consisted of meeting with partners/coparents as needed. Two programs (NJDOC and PB&J) provided service referrals for fathers' partners/coparents: NJDOC provided services to fathers' partners/coparents, including job training, job search assistance, vocational training opportunities, case management, life skills coaching, and GED classes. PB&J similarly provided participating fathers' partners/coparents with direct services, such as referrals to health and mental health treatment, domestic violence services, job readiness and placement services, housing, and tattoo removal.

In conjunction with—and often through—the case management services offered in institutions and the programs' community-based offices, healthy relationship activities were intended to help stabilize fathers and their families and facilitate family reunification by

- **strengthening relationships and encouraging effective coparenting** between fathers and their partners/coparents by providing curriculum-based classes on healthy relationships and parenting, encouraging couple/family interaction through activities, and assisting fathers with child support obligations; and
- **preventing domestic violence** by providing domestic violence assessments and screenings, domestic violence programming, and referrals to domestic violence treatment agencies.

Relationship Strengthening and Effective Coparenting

To strengthen relationships between fathers and their partners/families, the programs provided curriculum-based classes to fathers and partners/coparents and encouraged couple/family interaction through various activities. Curriculum-based classes were intended to provide fathers and their partners with the skills and knowledge to communicate effectively, manage stress, resolve conflicts, and build a supportive relationship. By encouraging couple/family interaction, the programs provided families with a way to work on their relationships and stay in contact during the father's incarceration and once he returned to the community. Helping fathers manage their child support obligations was also a focus, intended to encourage active coparenting.

CURRICULUM-BASED CLASSES

Five of the six programs (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, RIDGE, and Rubicon) provided healthy relationship classes to participants in correctional institutions and treatment facilities. These healthy relationship classes were distinct from the parenting classes that all the programs provided; healthy relationship classes focused specifically on the relationship between fathers and their coparents or romantic partners. The curricula used for healthy relationship classes covered topics such as effective communication skills, empathy, and stress management. The frequency and duration of classes varied across programs from one to eight hours a day, one to four times a week, for one to six weeks. KISRA's program included the most healthy relationship class hours: fathers could receive 26 hours of Within My Reach/Within Our Reach classes. Rubicon provided the fewest hours: fathers could receive 8 hours of the Couples Enhancement curriculum. Three programs (NJDOC, RIDGE, and Rubicon) invited fathers' partners/coparents to attend healthy relationship classes in the correctional institutions and in the community.

KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, and RIDGE used curricula developed by an external organization; Rubicon used a curriculum developed by program staff. KISRA used the Within My Reach (for single people) and Within Our Reach (for couples) curricula delivered in 13 two-hour classes over six and a half weeks. LSS used the Walking the Line curriculum delivered in 15 one-hour classes over three and a half weeks. NJDOC used the Married and Loving It! curriculum delivered in 6 two-hour classes over five to six weeks. RIDGE used the Couple Communication I and II curricula delivered in 2 four-hour classes over two weeks or 4 two-hour classes over four weeks. Rubicon's staff-developed Couples Enhancement curriculum was a single eight-hour class. Though the specific topics varied, all the curricula covered topics such as respectful and effective partner communication, anger/stress management, and conflict resolution.

Three programs (KISRA, RIDGE, and Rubicon) offered healthy relationship classes in the community after fathers were released from jail or prison. The frequency and duration of classes offered in the community also ranged from one to two times a week and over one to six weeks. KISRA's program included the most healthy relationship class hours (26 hours of Within My Reach/Within Our Reach classes). Rubicon provided the fewest healthy relationship class hours (8 hours of the Couples Enhancement curriculum). All three programs used the same curricula postrelease as they did prerelease. KISRA offered the Within My Reach/Within Our Reach relationship classes two times a week for two hours each to program participants only. RIDGE and Rubicon offered their curricula postrelease but modified the class requirements and structure when delivering their classes in the community. For RIDGE participants, the class schedule was truncated and offered in eight hours, usually over a single weekend. RIDGE participants' partners/coparents were invited to attend the Couple Communication class in the community. For Rubicon participants, partners/coparents were required to attend the postrelease classes, which was different from the prelease class expectation.

Three programs (NJDOC, RIDGE, and Rubicon) used specific strategies to encourage partner participation in the classes. NJDOC, for example, held its parenting, relationship, and financial literacy classes at night, after normal business hours, to make it easier for partners to participate. NJDOC case managers also worked closely with fathers' partners/coparents and state prison staff to ensure partners

were approved visitors and to minimize challenges they might face when entering institutions to attend classes. Both RIDGE and Rubicon provided incentives to partners. RIDGE provided child care, bus tokens, gas cards, and child care reimbursement to both participants and their partners as incentives for participation in its Couple Communication I and II classes. To offset the cost of securing child care and attendance, RIDGE provided fathers and partners \$2–6 an hour per child as well as gas reimbursement. Rubicon offered participants a gift card to encourage attendance for the Couples Enhancement workshop.

In addition to the specific, curriculum-based healthy relationship classes, all the programs had curriculum-based parenting classes that included sections on effective coparenting intended to strengthen relationships. As discussed in more detail in the companion brief on parenting activities, all curriculum-based parenting classes included sessions on effective coparenting techniques, communication, problem-solving, and parenting styles. Although the parenting classes were focused primarily on parenting topics, they also taught skills and techniques for building healthy relationships between fathers and their partners/coparents. For example, the InsideOut Dad curriculum used by LSS and PB&J included a chapter on coparenting and communication that discussed parenting differences and effective communication with partners. The curriculum developed by RIDGE, called TYRO Dads, included topics on coparenting and developing healthy communication with partners and children. The programs also fostered effective coparenting among participating fathers by providing assistance with navigating child support issues.

COUPLE/FAMILY INTERACTIONS

To support fathers' relationships during their time in institutions and following their release, all the programs offered formal and informal opportunities for program participants and partners/coparents to interact. These activities were offered in addition to the interactions provided through the healthy relationship class activities. These opportunities often included children, allowing couples to practice their relationship and coparenting skills. LSS, NJDOC, and RIDGE offered these opportunities in the correctional institutions where their program was offered. RIDGE also offered these opportunities in the community, as did KISRA, PB&J, and Rubicon. Two programs (LSS and RIDGE) facilitated family activity days, and five programs (KISRA, NJDOC, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon) offered other opportunities, such as coached telephone calls or special events, to foster couple interaction.

LSS and RIDGE hosted family activity days in the institutions and NJDOC facilitated telephone calls between participants and their family members during incarceration. LSS held quarterly family activity days at each of the five correctional facilities where the program was implemented. The LSS family activity days were an opportunity for children, relatives, and partners/coparents to visit fathers and engage in activities such as making crafts. RIDGE hosted two different types of family activity days: one called Family Days, held annually, and another called Time with Dad. RIDGE staff set up stations where fathers could make T-shirts, build a model dream home, play games, read books, play with puppets, or get their face painted with their kids, families, and partners/coparents. Time with Dad visits were monthly two-and-a-half-hour visits between participating fathers and their families. Time with Dad visits were group based and included a variety of structured and unstructured activities. NJDOC facilitated couple/family interaction by providing coached telephone calls. Although these calls often

occurred between fathers and their children, fathers could also call other significant adults in the child's life, such as the father's coparent or romantic partner. The calls helped participants practice their communication skills and stay engaged with their families and partners/coparents. Participants could request to make calls as they deemed necessary, and program staff provided guidance to participants before and during the call and debriefed with them after to discuss how the participant felt about the call.

Four programs (KISRA, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon) provided opportunities in the community for participants to interact with their partners. These programs held special events, such as family barbecues, sporting outings, Father's Day events, a holiday cookie-baking night, and a Halloween movie showing and costume event. These events allowed fathers to practice and apply the communication, coparenting, and conflict resolution skills they learned in the healthy relationship classes with their partners. As a program support, PB&J provided weekly support groups and family dinners at its offices, where fathers, partners/coparents, and children could share a meal together. After dinner, the group divided into separate activities: children engaged in activities that helped them process their parent's incarceration and return from incarceration while case managers facilitated a parental discussion about topics such as communication, anger management, coparenting, problem-solving and goal-setting, healthy living and nutrition, addiction, child well-being, and financial stability.

ASSISTANCE WITH CHILD SUPPORT OBLIGATIONS

All six programs worked with fathers to navigate their child support issues as a way to help them reengage and improve their relationships with their partners/coparents and children. The programs partnered with local child support agencies to provide educational sessions to fathers and be a resource for their questions about navigating child support.⁹ Further, three programs (LSS, PB&J, and Rubicon) connected fathers to local child support agencies to help them modify and manage outstanding child support orders. LSS partnered with the Division of Child Support within the South Dakota Department of Social Services to provide child support counseling and education, help reinstate suspended licenses, and modify outstanding child support orders. PB&J partnered with the New Mexico Child Support Enforcement Division to help fathers modify support orders, develop payment plans, and reinstate driver's licenses that had been revoked because of child support noncompliance. Rubicon partnered with the Contra Costa County Department of Child Support Services to inform program participants about child support procedures, help modify support orders, and discuss cases in one-on-one sessions. Additionally, NJDOC partnered with the New Jersey Office of Child Support Services and referred fathers to the office when necessary. The state of New Jersey also partnered with a separate Responsible Parenting Program run by NJDOC that provided assistance modifying child support orders in addition to an eight-week parenting class. Engaging the Family and the Responsible Parenting Program jointly provided funding for a child support case manager that regularly attended Engaging the Family classes and helped participants pay and modify their child support orders.

In addition to these activities focused on strengthening relationships between fathers and their partners/coparents, the programs engaged in a host of parenting activities that helped fathers build and repair their relationships with their children. These activities are discussed in detail in the companion brief on parenting activities. Beyond the curriculum-based parenting classes facilitated by all six

programs, parenting activities included parenting support groups and child care services. Collectively, parenting activities were intended to build fathers' knowledge of parenting and child development, increase and improve parent-child contact and communication, and remove and reduce barriers to family stability and reunification. Although the primary focus of these activities was to strengthen and support the parent-child relationship, the activities were also intended to strengthen and repair the entire family unit, including the relationship between fathers and their partners/coparents.

Domestic Violence Prevention

To help prevent and address domestic violence issues, all six programs screened and assessed participants during intake to identify signs of domestic violence, provided domestic violence programming, and referred participants to domestic violence treatment agencies for additional services as necessary. As a stipulation of the authorizing legislation, all programs were required to describe how their proposed programs or activities would address issues of domestic violence and to consult with domestic violence experts or relevant community-based domestic violence coalitions to develop those programs and activities. Further, the funding opportunity announcement encouraged programs to provide domestic violence screening and services. Domestic violence services were designed to ensure participants and their partners were engaging in safe relationships and, if not, to provide treatment and support services. By identifying and addressing evidence of domestic violence, the programs provided couples with opportunities to work together to safely overcome challenges in their relationships. Alternatively, couples may have learned their relationships were not safe and received services to help them improve their coparenting relationships without being engaged in romantic relationships.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

All six programs conducted an assessment for evidence of domestic violence issues with each participant during intake. Five programs (KISRA, NJDOC, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon) incorporated questions related to domestic violence on their intake forms or during their intake interviews. These programs enlisted the help of domestic violence organizations to develop, customize, or review the questions. LSS used a specific tool called the Propensity for Abuse Scale to screen participants for domestic violence during intake.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES

Three programs (KISRA, LSS, and NJDOC) offered domestic violence services to participants, based on the level of need determined during their intake assessment, as a part of their internal program activity offerings. Although none of the programs formally reassessed participants' needs for domestic violence services, program staff monitored participants' needs during their enrollment and offered domestic violence services as necessary. KISRA developed its own domestic violence class, called Domestic Violence 101, in partnership with the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Kanawha County Family Court. Domestic Violence 101 was not intended as a batterer intervention program and instead focused on domestic violence awareness and prevention. The eight-hour class was facilitated by KISRA staff and included four modules. The class covered a number of topics, such as defining domestic violence, distinguishing physical abuse from emotional abuse, and discussing the

effects of domestic violence on children. KISRA referred participants to the class if risk factors were identified during the intake assessment, but participation was not limited to those in the fatherhood program. Men and women from the community could attend the class along with first-time and low-level domestic violence defendants referred by the Kanawha County Family Court.

LSS and NJDOC provided domestic violence classes using curricula developed by an external organization. LSS used the Moral Reconciliation Therapy-Domestic Violence curriculum as its domestic violence service. LSS case managers facilitated the weekly one-hour classes for 24 weeks, and participants could take the class concurrently with their parenting and relationship classes. NJDOC incorporated domestic violence education into its healthy relationships class, Married and Loving It! Using the Understanding Domestic Violence curriculum, case managers taught a two-hour lesson on the definition of domestic violence and the use of nonviolent methods to address challenges that may emerge in relationships.

REFERRALS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TREATMENT PROVIDERS

Four programs (LSS, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon) used the information gained through their domestic violence screening assessments to refer participants to their own domestic violence programming or to community-based organizations for domestic violence support services and case management. In addition to offering the Moral Reconciliation Therapy-Domestic Violence class, LSS partnered with the South Dakota Network Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault to educate case managers on the available domestic violence programs and services in the state. The Network also received referrals from LSS and connected participants to domestic violence service providers in the community. PB&J partnered with A New Awakening Counseling Services to provide fathers with a 52-week domestic violence program. A New Awakening waived its fees for fathers enrolled in PB&J's fatherhood program. RIDGE provided domestic violence services through its partnerships with several providers in Ohio. In the state's northwest region, RIDGE referred participants to the YWCA in Lucas County and Coleman Behavioral Health; in the northern region, they partnered with Every Woman House, the Domestic Violence and Child Advocacy Center, and the Stark County Prosecutor's Office; in the southern region, participants were referred to the Family Violence Collaborative and the Artemis Center. Rubicon partnered with STAND! For Families Free of Violence to provide domestic violence treatment classes to participants it assessed as needing additional treatment services.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The Fatherhood Reentry programs implemented several activities in the institutions and communities in which they were based intended to build stronger relationships between fathers and their partners/coparents. Relative to the other two components of the programs—economic stability and responsible parenting activities—the healthy relationship activities implemented by the programs were not as extensive. Nevertheless, the Fatherhood Reentry programs successfully implemented some healthy relationship activities in the correctional institutions and treatment centers and in communities.

The following recommendations are drawn from the experiences and lessons learned of the Fatherhood Reentry programs and are intended for practitioners seeking ways to help fathers returning from incarceration build healthy relationships with their partners/coparents and reunify with their families:¹⁰

- ***Make partner/coparent interaction activities a targeted and meaningful program component.*** Although healthy relationship activities were intended to be a core component of the six programs, in practice, they were a supplement to or an extension of the parenting activities. Efforts to facilitate strong, healthy relationships between fathers and their partners/coparents and efforts to develop fathers' parenting skills may be mutually reinforcing, but each deserves its own focus. A tense relationship between a father and his partner/coparent can be a major stressor within a family and can hamper positive father-child relationships. Parenting activities alone may not be sufficient to overcome tense or conflict-ridden relationships because their primary focus is often on the parent-child relationship. Indeed, parenting activities may not provide the father an opportunity to address a tense or conflict-ridden relationship directly. By providing healthy relationship activities and emphasizing their importance, fatherhood programs can strengthen the entire family unit. The Fatherhood Reentry programs demonstrated how these components could be complementary in practice, but more activities could have been implemented if there was equal emphasis on parenting and relationships (e.g., counseling sessions, couples retreats, etc.).
- ***Consider funding that provides services to address the needs of fathers' partners/coparents.*** The partners/coparents of currently or formerly incarcerated fathers have their own unique needs and priorities. For example, partners/coparents might struggle finding employment and maintaining stable housing or suffer from mental and physical health issues. Although the Fatherhood Reentry programs could not use OFA grant funds to provide services to fathers' partners/coparents, it is important to engage partners in healthy relationship activities alongside fathers. Programs should think creatively about funding sources or partnerships that allow them to address the needs of partners directly as part of a comprehensive approach to strengthening the family. Giving partners access to staff who can connect them to appropriate services is an important way of ensuring their needs are met. Satisfying partners/coparents' needs will free up time and resources they can devote to improving their relationships, thus removing stressors that can lead to relationship conflict or dissolution.
- ***Be willing to work with partners on family reunification as they are ready.*** Couples have different levels of readiness for reunification or engagement. Some partners/coparents have forged strong connections during incarceration and only need a small amount of support to continue a healthy relationship as spouses, intimate partners, or coparents. Other partners/coparents may have a more tenuous connection, perhaps because of a history of bad communication, mistrust, or even domestic abuse. Many fathers also have multiple partners/coparents (i.e., they have minor children with multiple women), and each partnership may be at a different level of readiness for coparenting. Healthy relationship programs can affect the relationship quality of

participants, but they are not the universal solution: programs should work with participants and partners where they are and only encourage reunification or engagement if both partners are interested and ready. Even if reunification is not possible, there are many intermediate and important goals, such as improving the coparenting relationship and decreasing anger or resentment, that can help strengthen a family.

The experiences of the Fatherhood Reentry programs offer various lessons for practitioners who wish to help partners/coparents of fathers with incarceration histories achieve family stability and family reunification. Building healthy relationships can provide a solid support system and foundation for children and has the potential to improve the reentry success of fathers.

Notes

1. The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation and the Office of Family Assistance are both part of the Administration for Children and Families in the US Department of Health and Human Services.
2. KISRA was funded under a different funding opportunity announcement than the other five projects and served fathers who may not have had recent incarceration histories.
3. The Fatherhood Reentry projects were part of the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood initiative, a discretionary grant program originally authorized under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and reauthorized under the Claims Resolution Act of 2010.
4. Postrelease enrollment varied widely: LSS, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon enrolled fathers who had been released from incarceration in the past six months; KISRA enrolled formerly incarcerated fathers with no time limit on the recency of their last incarceration; NJDOC did not enroll any fathers in the community.
5. Additional information about implementation of the programs, including target populations, geographic locations, and partnerships can be found in a companion report (Fontaine et al. 2017).
6. Two other briefs in this series focus on economic stability (Fontaine and Kurs 2017) and responsible parenting (Fontaine, Cramer, and Paddock 2017).
7. A note on language: throughout this brief, the words partner/coparent will be used to refer inclusively to both the romantic partners of program participants (who may or may not be the parent of their child), and/or their coparent (who may or may not be in a romantic relationship with the participating father). In practice, the programs had fathers choose which partner/coparent they wanted to participate in healthy relationship activities. Many fathers had multiple partners and/or coparents. Occasionally, we refer specifically to the “romantic partner” or “coparent” when a relationship was specified by the program.
8. The other two components were responsible parenting and economic stability activities. Additional information about the responsible parenting and economic stability activities the Fatherhood Reentry programs implemented can be found in two companion briefs (Fontaine, Cramer, and Paddock 2017; Fontaine and Kurs 2017).
9. The OFA-funded Fatherhood Reentry projects were not permitted to use grant funds for child support payments.
10. These recommendations include suggestions for service provision that are not allowable by the authorizing legislation that funded the Fatherhood Reentry projects.



Promoting the Economic Stability of Fathers with Histories of Incarceration

Activities and Lessons from Six Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Jocelyn Fontaine and Emma Kurs

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Importance of Economic Stability Activities for Fathers with Incarceration Experiences

People return from incarceration with limited resources, accumulated debt, weak employment histories, and no means of supporting themselves financially (McLean and Thompson 2007; Visser, Debus, and Yahner 2008; Visser, Yahner, and La Vigne 2010). For many of these people, their ability to achieve economic stability in the community is exacerbated by other reentry challenges they might face that may preclude or hinder their ability to find and maintain employment (La Vigne and Kachnowski 2005; La Vigne, Shollenberger, and Debus 2009; La Vigne, Visser, and Castro 2004; Visser and Courtney 2007; Visser et al. 2004, Visser, Yahner, and La Vigne 2010). Adding to the importance of their achieving economic stability, the majority of people returning to their communities after incarceration also have minor children and/or family members who rely on them financially and emotionally (Fontaine et al. 2015; Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Furthermore, the communities where people with criminal justice histories are concentrated are often economically disadvantaged (Fontaine et al. 2015; Lynch and Sabol 2004; Rose and Clear 1998).

Time spent in prison puts a sizable gap in a person's employment history and prevents them from developing marketable work skills and job networks (Holzer 2007). Stable employment is important; finding and maintaining employment can help returning people avoid reliance on earning illegal income, build prosocial connections and supportive networks, gain a sense of self-efficacy and a positive self-image, and establish a new set of roles, routines, and social supports to ease the transition from incarceration into the community (Graffam et al. cited in Duran et al. 2013; Solomon et al. 2004).

BACKGROUND

With funding from the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation contracted with the Urban Institute to conduct an implementation evaluation of OFA's Community-Centered Responsible Fatherhood Ex-Prisoner Reentry Pilot Projects ("Fatherhood Reentry").¹ Six organizations were funded to implement a range of activities intended to help stabilize fathers and their families, help move fathers toward economic self-sufficiency, and reduce recidivism. The following organizations received funding and were included in Urban's evaluation:

- **Kanawha Institute for Social Research and Action, Inc. (KISRA)**, headquartered in Dunbar, West Virginia, which called its program the West Virginia Pathways to Responsible Fatherhood Initiative²
- **Lutheran Social Services (LSS)**, headquartered in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, which called its program Fatherhood and Families
- **New Jersey Department of Corrections' (NJDOC) Office of Substance Abuse Programming and Addiction Services**, headquartered in Trenton, New Jersey, which called its program Engaging the Family
- **PB&J Family Services, Inc. (PB&J)**, headquartered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which called its program the Fatherhood Reentry Program
- **The RIDGE Project, Inc. (RIDGE)**, headquartered in McClure, Ohio, which called its program TYRO
- **Rubicon Programs, Inc. (Rubicon)**, headquartered in Richmond, California, which called its program Promoting Advances in Paternal Accountability and Success in Work

As required by the authorizing legislation, each organization provided activities in three areas: responsible parenting, healthy marriage, and economic stability.³ The activities in the three areas were implemented in collaboration with various nonprofit and government agencies. As a complement to the OFA-funded activities authorized by legislation, the organizations helped participants address their reentry and fatherhood needs by using external referrals to nonprofit and government agency partners and internal referrals to services supported by non-OFA funding streams. This brief describes the range of services available to Fatherhood Reentry project participants during the evaluation period.

A note on language: the authorizing legislation uses the term "healthy marriage" as one of the three core activities. Throughout this brief, we use the term "healthy relationship," which represents one aspect of the authorized healthy marriage service provision. As made permissible by the authorizing legislation and discussed throughout this brief, the programs primarily provided healthy relationship classes and services within the healthy marriage activity area and characterized their programs as such.

The Fatherhood Reentry projects provided activities to fathers (and their families) in institutional settings as they were nearing release ("prerelease") and in their offices located in the community ("postrelease"). All six projects provided services in multiple institutional settings: federal prisons (KISRA), state prisons (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon), county/regional jails (KISRA, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon), and residential substance abuse treatment facilities (Rubicon). All projects provided services in their community-based offices for participants served by the program prerelease. With the exception of the NJDOC project, fathers who were formerly incarcerated could be enrolled and served in the community-based offices without having been served by the programs in the institutions.⁴ Four projects (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, and RIDGE) provided services in multiple communities across their respective states, and two (PB&J and Rubicon) provided services in one county.⁵ Five projects (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, PB&J, and RIDGE) were operational from September 2011 through September 2015, and the sixth (Rubicon) was operational from September 2012 through September 2015.

This brief, one of three in a series,⁶ focuses on the economic stability activities implemented by the projects. Economic stability was a core focus of the Fatherhood Reentry projects based on the extant literature highlighting formerly incarcerated people's needs for assistance in achieving self-sufficiency to reach their reentry and family reunification goals. Incarceration is a risk factor for unemployment, and formerly incarcerated people have difficulty achieving economic stability for various reasons that encompass both personal challenges and systemic barriers. This brief provides a short overview of this literature, highlighting the importance of economic stability activities for fathers who are incarcerated or were formerly incarcerated, the barriers people face upon their return to the community, and how employment is associated with better outcomes among returning people, their families, and the community. We then include descriptions of the activities the Fatherhood Reentry projects used to foster economic stability for participating fathers and their families. We conclude with recommendations, based on the experiences of the Fatherhood Reentry projects, for practitioners implementing economic stability activities for the reentry population.

For fathers particularly, earning a wage also enables them to financially support their children and their families (Graffam et al. cited in Duran et al. 2013; Lippold et al. 2011; Solomon et al. 2004). Because studies have shown that recidivism rates are lower for people with jobs than for those without, the community also benefits from the resultant increased public safety (Uggen 2000; Visser and Courtney 2007; Visser, Debus, and Yahner 2008).

Unfortunately, there are personal and systemic barriers to economic stability for people who have been incarcerated. Following incarceration, individual-level barriers include a lack of work experience, limited hard and soft skills, and low education attainment (Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2003a; La Vigne and Kachnowski 2005; Visser, Debus, and Yahner 2008; Visser and Travis 2003). For example, based on a nationally representative sample of inmates in state and federal prisons, nearly 40 percent of fathers in state prison did not have a GED or high school diploma when they were admitted (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Many people who are incarcerated also have poor health (Maruschak, Berzofsky, and Unangst 2015), substance use and mental health issues (James and Glaze 2006; Karberg and James 2005), and problems with housing instability or homelessness (see Fontaine and Biess 2012 for review) that may hinder their ability to achieve economic stability, including finding, getting, and keeping a job (Bushway 2003; Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2003b; Solomon et al. 2004; Western 2002). These disadvantages are further compounded by less visible but equally problematic obstacles experienced by people returning to the community after incarceration, including obtaining identification, transportation, and child care necessary for getting and keeping a job.

There are also systemic barriers. Employment discrimination of those with incarceration histories has been well documented, directly challenging peoples' job prospects and economic stability upon release (Holzer 2007; Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2003a, 2003b; Pager 2003). Employers are often averse to hiring people who were incarcerated—they are even less likely to hire formerly incarcerated people than other stigmatized populations, such as welfare recipients (Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2003a; Pager 2003; Wallace and Wyckoff 2008). Some people face additional hurdles; for example, people with certain offense histories may face restrictions on where and among whom they can work (Berger and DaGrossa 2013; Dale 1976).

Programs that focus on employment or job readiness for people with histories of incarceration have been shown to help them secure jobs (Drake 2003; Fontaine et al. 2015; Northcutt Bohmert and Duwe 2012; Rossman and Roman 2003), earn higher wages (Drake 2003; Fontaine et al. 2015; Spaulding, Grossman, and Wallace 2009), and stay out of prison (Berk 2007; Drake 2003; Fontaine et al. 2015, Redcross et al. 2012; Rossman and Roman 2003; Uggen 2000; Visser, Debus, and Yahner 2008). Although literature on best practices in employment services for the reentry population is mixed, the emerging consensus suggests that programs should assess and tailor services to participants' level of job readiness and engage people during incarceration or shortly following their release, and that providing training in a particular industry or sector and job coaching for that industry helps people secure jobs in those sectors (instead of more general employment readiness training; see Duran et al. 2013; Northcutt Bohmert and Duwe 2012; Redcross et al. 2012; and Rossman and Roman 2003). It is also important for programs to

address barriers unrelated to skill building or development, such as mental health and substance abuse issues, before engaging people in workforce readiness services (Duran et al. 2013).

Fatherhood Reentry Programs' Approaches to Providing Economic Stability Activities

Economic stability activities were one of three core components of the Fatherhood Reentry projects.⁷ Although this brief focuses on economic stability activities exclusively, the three components were intended to be complementary.

Case Management

Case management services were a central part of all six programs' economic stability services. Case managers served participating fathers and their families, providing one-on-one coaching and counseling, assessing participants' needs, and making referrals, connections, and links to services offered through their Fatherhood Reentry program or through external partners. Case management activities were intended to help fathers address their self-sufficiency needs and to help fathers reunify and support their children and families. Case management was not a structured service with mandatory weekly or biweekly meetings; instead, case management was an individualized service provided to fathers based on their specific needs and the needs of their families.

Three programs (LSS, PB&J, and RIDGE) structured their case management services so the same staff member worked with the participating father on all three core components: responsible parenting, healthy marriage, and economic stability. In these three programs, case managers worked with fathers to help them achieve their parenting, relationship, and economic stability goals through activities provided by the programs and by their external partnerships. The other three programs (KISRA, NJDOC, and Rubicon) assigned participants an additional case manager who focused solely on their employment goals. This case manager worked with the fathers to develop career plans in addition to the case management services they received in other component areas.

Case management functioned as a conduit for fathers to access the programs' economic stability services and resources in the community. Case managers collected information from fathers upon their entry into the program and through one-on-one meetings to learn about their education level, career interests, and previous work experience. RIDGE used formal employment assessments such as the Online Work Readiness Assessment while fathers were incarcerated; other programs administered intake assessments or surveys with questions about fathers' job interests, employment barriers, and work histories. Informed by this individualized case management, case managers connected fathers to various services and opportunities, including workforce development programs, education and vocational training and tuition assistance, transitional employment, and employers. Case managers also discussed job leads with fathers and helped them with résumé writing, job searching, and interview skills.

The programs offering specific employment case management used a couple of different models. KISRA called its employment case managers job coaches. In the initial years of the grant, all KISRA participants were assigned a job coach. Over time, KISRA limited the job coaches to participants served at the Dunbar headquarters. At KISRA's seven other regional offices, case managers functioned as job coaches because KISRA program managers felt there were not sufficient jobs available in the community or staffing resources to warrant hiring a specific job coach for those offices. NJDOC contracted with three community-based organizations to provide employment case management services, including referrals and direct services, in three regions of the state. NJDOC's prerelease case managers referred fathers to the provider serving the region to which they would return. Rubicon's employment case managers—called reentry career coaches—were assigned to every father and began case management services once they returned to the community.

In conjunction with—and often through—the case management services offered in institutions and the programs' community-based offices, economic stability activities were intended to help fathers achieve economic self-sufficiency and facilitate family reunification by

- improving fathers' **employability** through curriculum-based workforce readiness classes and vocational training and certification services;
- increasing fathers' **financial literacy and improving their financial prospects** through curriculum-based financial literacy classes and assistance with building and managing their income and benefits;
- providing fathers with various **employment opportunities**, such as transitional job opportunities and positions within microbusinesses operated by the programs; program staff also engaged in employer networking and relationship building to increase employment opportunities for participants; and
- **reducing or removing barriers** to economic stability and self-sufficiency commonly experienced by the reentry population through referrals to substance abuse, housing, and legal assistance services, and the provision of workplace essentials (e.g., clothing, identification, and transportation).

Employability

To help fathers build their soft skills (e.g., interpersonal skills and professionalism) and hard skills (e.g., training in specific fields, such as welding and construction), all six programs implemented **curriculum-based workforce readiness classes** and **vocational training and certification services**.

CURRICULUM-BASED WORKFORCE READINESS CLASSES

All six programs delivered or referred fathers to curriculum-based classes focused on increasing their employability. These classes varied considerably in both substance and structure. Generally, classes integrated lessons on professionalism and interpersonal skills in the workplace with mock interviews and job preparation and search activities such as computer skills training, and cover letter and résumé

writing. The programs' curricula included discussion of reliability, timeliness, professionalism, interpersonal skills, team building, and job ethics as well as specific lessons for how participants could address their criminal histories in discussions with employers.

Although the six programs' curricula had the commonalities just described, the programs' implementation of workforce readiness classes differed. LSS, RIDGE, and Rubicon delivered a curriculum developed specifically by their program staff during the grant period for their participant population of people with incarceration histories, while KISRA delivered a curriculum developed by an external organization for a general audience of job seekers. Instead of using their program staff to deliver a curriculum, NJDOC and PB&J worked with their community-based partners to deliver training curriculum and services to its community-based participants.

KISRA used the *Getting the Job You Really Want* curriculum, delivered over 10 sessions for two hours in 10 weeks to participants in the institutions or in their community-based offices. LSS's workforce readiness curriculum, the Work Training Program, was delivered in 10 two-hour sessions in one week to eligible participants in the state correctional institutions and in LSS's community-based offices.⁸ RIDGE's curriculum, TYRO Job Ethics Training, was delivered in 16 hours over two days or 10 hours in one day to participants in the institutions and in RIDGE's community-based offices. Rubicon's curriculum, *The Academy*, was delivered in four-hour sessions over two weeks in their two community-based offices. In one of Rubicon's two community-based offices, participants could also attend a two-week computer literacy course offered by one of its partners. In addition to lessons on workforce readiness, Rubicon's *The Academy* incorporated presentations from local public agencies, such as the child support department, that could help fathers' self-sufficiency and family reunification goals. NJDOC referred participants to two of its three regional community-based employment partners for drop-in classes and workforce readiness services, and PB&J similarly referred participants to three classes developed and facilitated by one of its partners. The three classes that PB&J participants could attend—Pathways to Careers, Putting Your Best Self Forward, and a computer class—ranged in length. The Pathways curriculum was delivered in 12 hours over two sessions, Putting Your Best Self Forward curriculum was delivered in 15 hours over five days, and the computer classes were delivered from 2.5 to 3 hours over one to four weeks depending on the skills addressed.

Two programs (LSS and Rubicon) provided participant incentives for class attendance. LSS participants were paid \$8 an hour for each class they attended as part of the Work Training Program and an additional \$8 an hour for up to two weeks for any job-searching activities they completed after the program. Rubicon incorporated a web-based earning simulation into *The Academy* through which participants could earn virtual wages for attending the workshop and completing associated job tasks. The job tasks, such as creating a résumé or completing typing tests, had increasing levels of difficulty and were associated with different virtual wages to simulate a job environment and motivate participants and create accountability across participants.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION SERVICES

To provide fathers with specialized skills, all six programs connected fathers to vocational training services, which spanned several industries, in the community. RIDGE connected some of its participants to vocational training while they were incarcerated. KISRA and LSS referred participants to local community colleges and vocational schools to receive classes in construction, welding, forklift operation, manufacturing, green energy, home health care and nursing assistance, and food handling. PB&J provided its participants with construction training and occupational safety training at its community-based office through one of its program partners. Rubicon used its partnerships with local employers to host weekend trainings at its community-based offices where participants could earn certificates in occupational safety, forklift operation, and HAZMAT. Rubicon also connected participants to information technology training through a partnership with a local nonprofit. Each program provided resources—through either their fatherhood grant or other funds and agreements—to offset the costs of these trainings for participants.

Commercial driver's license (CDL) training was a common service and was included in five of the six programs (KISRA, LSS, PB&J, NJDOC, and RIDGE). KISRA provided funding for CDL training through one of its partners, a regional workforce investment board. LSS used its partnerships with local vocational schools to provide fathers with CDL training and also funded the training. NJDOC funded two of its three economic stability partners to offer fathers CDL training in addition to training courses in building maintenance; food service and food handling; forklift operation; masonry; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning; computer repair; and web design. PB&J also referred participating fathers to a local community college that offered CDL training.

RIDGE staff established an agreement with the state correctional department to provide CDL and welding training to participants while they were incarcerated. A driving school that RIDGE collaborated with offered the CDL training to RIDGE participants in two state prisons. The training included driving instruction in a semitruck that was leased to the prison facilities. Instructors from a local community college offered the welding training course at another state prison. A local community college donated equipment for the training, and the state correctional department invested \$25,000 to upgrade one of its classrooms to accommodate the equipment. RIDGE also permitted its community-based participants who did not receive CDL or welding training in these two institutions to work with one of its local community college partners for CDL or welding training and certification.

Financial Literacy and Financial Prospects

All six programs also offered services to increase fathers' financial literacy and improve their financial prospects. Five programs engaged fathers through **curriculum-based financial literacy classes**, and four programs improved fathers' financial prospects by helping them **build and manage their income and benefits**.

CURRICULUM-BASED FINANCIAL LITERACY CLASSES

Five programs (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, PB&J, and RIDGE) facilitated curriculum-based financial literacy classes for participants. The classes focused on money management, including managing cash flow and savings, avoiding debt, banking relationships, and consumer credit. KISRA used Financial Peace University, which covered a variety of topics, including credit, insurance, debt management, and wealth building, and discussed money with coparents and children. Financial Peace University delivered its course in 13 modules to participants in institutions and at KISRA's community-based offices. LSS offered participants a short, six-hour course focused on consumer credit issues called Credit Where Credit is Due that was delivered in institutions and in community-based offices. LSS also offered fathers who completed the Work Training Program described above a weeklong financial stability course largely based off the Money Smart curriculum developed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Company for low- and moderate-income people. NJDOC also offered Money Smart to participants in institutions in two-hour sessions once per week for approximately three weeks. NJDOC allowed participants' partners, such as the caregivers of their children or romantic partners, to attend these sessions, which were offered in the evenings in a group setting. PB&J worked with representatives from Wells Fargo to develop a financial literacy course based on the company's Hands on Banking curriculum and facilitated the course at PB&J's community-based office. Over the life of the program, the 20-hour course was provided in several iterations—at first weekly for 10 weeks and later monthly—to accommodate participants' schedules and interest. Wells Fargo representatives provided financial advice, such as how to write checks and balance a checkbook, use a debit card, and avoid overdrafts. RIDGE offered its TYRONomics curriculum, an eight-hour course delivered over one to two days in institutions and at its community-based offices. RIDGE developed TYRONomics to be responsive to the specific financial stability needs of people with incarceration histories. It developed the curriculum in partnership with a local financial literacy expert to cover basic personal finance issues and responsible financial habits.

KISRA, LSS, and PB&J also provided other services to help participants address their financial literacy needs. KISRA employed certified credit counselors that worked with fathers individually to avoid foreclosures and other issues involving credit. LSS gave participants a voucher to attend a session at its Center for Financial Resources, through which participants could receive assistance with individual budget counseling and debt management. At its participants' request, PB&J hosted Money Clubs at its community-based office, covering topics such as budgeting, financial literacy, home and business ownership, debt relief, and credit reports.

ASSISTANCE BUILDING AND MANAGING INCOME AND BENEFITS

Four programs (KISRA, NJDOC, PB&J, and Rubicon) partnered with organizations to help fathers build and manage their income and benefits by creating bank accounts, obtaining small loans, and/or connecting them with public benefits. KISRA offered participants Individual Development Accounts, special savings accounts designed to match fathers' deposits, which were intended to help fathers save money for a house, an education, or their own business. The program matched fathers' savings up to \$4,000. PB&J also offered Individual Development Accounts to a limited number of fathers. In conjunction with the Individual Development Account, these participants took a 10-week financial

literacy course. PB&J also partnered with Wells Fargo to send representatives to its community office and help fathers set up checking and savings accounts.

KISRA, NJDOC, and Rubicon also helped fathers determine their eligibility for public benefits to improve their financial prospects. KISRA referred fathers to a program run by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources that helped them apply for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Medicaid. One of NJDOC's economic stability services partners helped fathers apply for government benefits. Rubicon staff, after receiving training from the Contra Costa County Behavioral Health Department, conducted a public benefit screen on each participant to determine their eligibility for gaining or reinstating Social Security Disability Insurance, Medicaid, food stamps, and CalWORKs (cash aid and services) benefits.

Employment Opportunities

Beyond working with fathers to build their employability, financial literacy, and financial prospects, four programs (KISRA, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon) provided fathers with several employment opportunities through **transitional job opportunities** and **program-operated microbusinesses**. All of the programs engaged in various **employer networking and relationship-building** activities to encourage businesses to hire participants.

TRANSITIONAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Three programs (KISRA, PB&J, and Rubicon) offered paid transitional employment to participants. KISRA developed memoranda of understanding with local employers to hire program participants using a subsidized employment model. Under the model, KISRA subsidized fathers' salaries at \$8.25 an hour to the employer for up to eight weeks with the expectation that the employer would hire the participant full time following the transitional period (assuming satisfactory job performance). KISRA's job coaches supervised the program: coaches met with fathers to review their job skills and employment history, then developed a memorandum of understanding with the employer to hire the father in a transitional capacity. Coaches served as liaisons between employers and participants who could manage and support the program and make business owners more comfortable about employing participants. The employers KISRA worked with included department stores, local government agencies, hotels, retirement homes, and construction companies. PB&J offered participants subsidized employment at their microbusiness, Fathers Building Futures, and with other businesses in Albuquerque, New Mexico, such as warehouses and restaurants, for up to three months. PB&J paid for the first 20 hours of work each week at \$8.50 an hour, and participating employers agreed to pay for any additional hours worked. Employers agreed to provide feedback to PB&J on participants' performance and to serve as a future employment reference. Employers were also encouraged to hire fathers after the period of subsidized employment.

Rubicon offered some of its participating fathers transitional jobs at its Richmond, California, office. Participating fathers worked in a crew with other program participants and were trained in janitorial, maintenance, and landscaping skills for indoor and outdoor maintenance for three hours a day for 13 weeks. Participants were paid at minimum wage (\$8 an hour). Rubicon staff supervised the work crews and provided regular feedback to participants and their career coaches. Rubicon also offered fathers

transitional jobs with their community partners. Rubicon allocated wage subsidies (\$3,000–5,000) for a participant's first 480 days of work with one of several employers. Employers had contracts with a staffing agency to act as the employer of record and cover unemployment insurance and worker's compensation. Rubicon targeted fathers who lacked recent work history or skills for their transitional job program while keeping in mind potential restrictions on industry based on past criminal involvement: fathers who might be ineligible for indoor maintenance because of restrictions based on their conviction were placed on outdoor crews.

PROGRAM-OPERATED MICROBUSINESSES

Three programs (KISRA, PB&J, and RIDGE) operated their own microbusinesses. KISRA and PB&J built their microbusinesses to employ program participants temporarily and provide them with job experience. KISRA established a social enterprise called the Growing Jobs Project. With assistance from West Virginia State University, KISRA built three greenhouses in two of its community-based offices. West Virginia State University trained fathers to work on the farms growing organic fruits and vegetables to sell at local farmer's markets. KISRA also offered fathers at the Growing Jobs Project cooking, culinary math, and knife skills classes, as well as the certifications described above. After completing these courses, fathers could work in KISRA's commercial kitchen or food truck, which catered events in the Charleston, West Virginia, area. Fathers who were trained and worked in the Growing Jobs Project earned \$8 an hour for 40-hour weeks for up to eight weeks.

PB&J established a workforce development center called Fathers Building Futures (FBF). FBF was used to operate PB&J's microbusinesses, and PB&J hired participating fathers as transitional employees in one of several trades operated through FBF. Trades changed over time but included woodworking and automobile power washing and detailing. Fathers were hired for 23–30 hours a week for up to 30 weeks (or more in certain situations). Initially, fathers earned minimum wage (\$8.60 an hour). After 90 days of work, participants who excelled in their jobs and expressed interest were deemed eligible to become a facilitator-in-training. Facilitators-in-training were paid \$9.60 an hour for 30 hours per week. Those who qualified as facilitators were hired full time at \$12 an hour. PB&J arrived at this payment and schedule structure over time. Program staff increased the cap on participants' weekly hours from 20 to 30 hours to help them meet their parole requirements of full-time employment, ensuring they did not have to find a second job while working at FBF. This also allowed fathers additional time to gain skills or find a permanent job. One PB&J employee oversaw the operation of the FBF businesses, managing the training, work schedules, safety protocols, and employees. Through FBF, fathers received training in hard skills and soft skills. PB&J tried several different businesses to determine which was the most profitable and rewarding for its participants. Ultimately, it found that auto detailing services provided on-site or at auto dealers, as well as mobile power washing for large vehicles and parking lots, were most successful. PB&J also forged relationships with local businesses to drive demand for their products. For example, PB&J worked with FRENCH Funerals and Cremations in Albuquerque to design a prototype for urns and pine caskets that PB&J participants could produce at the FBF work site.

RIDGE launched two microbusinesses: a small farm and a mobile food venture called CarneQ, where fathers could train and practice agriculture and culinary skills. RIDGE initially conceived of its farming and agriculture training as a single farm-to-plate venture. But during initial implementation of the business, it found that participants were not necessarily interested in both aspects of the training (i.e., agriculture and culinary). Consequently, RIDGE made the agriculture and culinary trainings available as two separate opportunities. For the farm, fathers were trained over a period of six months for four days a week. The final month included a paid internship for fathers intended to help them move into permanent employment or start their own businesses. RIDGE hired a TYRO alumnus who had participated in the first cohort of the agriculture training to work on the farm. The culinary component included food skills training and paid apprenticeship with a local food vendor. In return, the vendor used the food truck equipment purchased by RIDGE to prepare and sell food at local events. Through their apprenticeships, fathers could earn a small wage from the vendor and learn culinary skills while learning how to run a small food venture.

EMPLOYER NETWORKING AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

The programs also engaged in various networking and relationship-building activities to provide employment opportunities or improve the existing opportunities of their participants. Some positive outcomes of these employer partnerships are described above. Unlike the other programs, RIDGE and Rubicon hired staff whose positions were focused on liaising with employers specifically. RIDGE employed workforce development specialists to network with employers by attending local chamber of commerce events and working with one-stop centers operated by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to help people search for jobs and provide job skills training. Rubicon employed business service representatives who researched job opportunities in one of four regions of Contra Costa County and determined whether jobs were accessible by public transportation, whether and what types of background checks were involved in the hiring process, and whether certain types of convictions were restricted for those jobs. Business service representatives presented these openings at weekly peer support groups that Rubicon hosted at its offices. In addition to these presentations, peer support groups called job clubs were opportunities for fathers to discuss their career interests and goals and share their experiences in looking for employment.

Initially, PB&J also employed a job developer tasked with building relationships with employers; however, in the later years of the program, this position's job functions were incorporated into the program manager and case managers' responsibilities because they had better rapport with fathers and were better positioned to help them find employment. With the help of a law firm, PB&J also developed a presentation to educate local employers about the benefits of hiring people with histories of incarceration, including the availability of federal bonding programs, and best practices for creating job applications that do not exclude people with criminal records.

Barrier Removal and Reduction

All the programs included activities intended to increase fathers' self-sufficiency by helping them overcome reentry-related barriers. These activities varied and included helping fathers access **substance abuse, housing, and legal assistance services, and essentials and tools needed to succeed in the workplace** (e.g., clothing, identification, and transportation). The authorizing legislation did not permit programs to use OFA funding for the provision of substance abuse, housing, or legal services; however, the programs found it useful to provide these services in response to participants' needs. Therefore, they referred participants to available community-based partners and services as well as in-house services available through non-OFA funding streams.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

All six programs were responsive to fathers grappling with substance abuse issues. Participants were given assessments and referrals to external providers, curriculum-based classes, and counseling. LSS, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon used their intake assessment process to make an initial determination about which participants needed substance abuse services. These four programs and KISRA referred participants to external partners for various substance abuse-related services. KISRA also referred participants to partner agencies for mental health services. Rubicon referred most participants to in-house substance abuse services and those with severe addictions to outpatient or inpatient treatment programs.

Unlike the other programs, NJDOC and PB&J addressed participants' substance abuse issues by incorporating these issues into their core programming. NJDOC provided the Living in Balance curriculum to all participants. Living in Balance was offered for two hours during the day once a week for three months and covered topics such as different types of drugs and their effects on the mind and body, withdrawal symptoms, triggers and cravings, the processes of addiction and sobriety, effects of substance use on relationships, stress, depression, anger, and relapse prevention. NJDOC program managers believed the Living in Balance curriculum was applicable to participants who exhibited any kind of destructive behavior patterns, including substance abuse. NJDOC also worked with the Office of Substance Abuse Programming and Addiction Services to assess participants for substance abuse issues. Based on their Addiction Severity Index score, NJDOC referred fathers to the Therapeutic Community Program in prisons. After realizing the need to address both substance abuse and trauma more directly, PB&J incorporated elements of the Seeking Safety curriculum, intended to help families with a history of trauma or substance abuse, in its group sessions. PB&J case managers were also trained to integrate relapse prevention into their case management services.

HOUSING AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Housing is a critical need for people returning to the community after incarceration and can be a significant barrier to economic stability. Without housing, it can be difficult for people to reunify with their children and families, find and retain a job, and feel stable (see Fontaine and Biess 2012). Although the programs could not use OFA funds to provide housing to participants, all six programs addressed fathers' housing needs. The programs typically addressed housing as part of their routine case management services, using their intake assessment processes to assess housing needs and help fathers

access available services in the community. Two programs connected a limited number of participants to in-house transitional housing programs funded by other grants, and three programs had formal partnerships with local housing providers to address some of their participants' housing needs. Many programs addressed housing needs by encouraging self-sufficiency through the various economic stability activities previously described.

KISRA and Rubicon connected a limited number of participants to transitional housing programs offered in-house and funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. As the state department of corrections, NJDOC was able to refer participants to some of the transitional housing units it operated in the community. Three programs (KISRA, LSS, and PB&J) established formal partnerships with local housing providers to refer and educate participants about their services. Through its partnership with a local housing authority, LSS had participants who planned to return to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, fill out applications for public housing while still incarcerated. The local housing authority also provided housing educational sessions to fathers at LSS's offices. PB&J referred participants to a local housing department to help them apply for public housing and to provide resources and information to address their housing needs. PB&J also referred participants to a transitional housing facility that provided family counseling, case management, and aftercare planning services to PB&J participants. The housing facility worked with PB&J to develop flexible payment schedules for program participants. The programs also advocated for fathers with local property owners and housing authorities, encouraging them to be inclusive of residents with criminal histories.

Rubicon referred participants to an in-house attorney who conducted legal assessments on fathers' cases to examine their record of arrest and prosecution to see if a conviction would impede their employment goals. This knowledge was intended to help fathers decide whether their criminal record would be a barrier to obtaining certain jobs and to inform them about what employers could determine by looking at their record. The attorney also helped fathers prepare to talk with employers about their criminal history and provided information on how to expunge their records. The attorney also worked closely with local legal assistance organizations to help fathers with potential legal barriers to employment, public benefits, and housing.

WORKPLACE ESSENTIALS AND TOOLS

To remove some of the common minor (but important) barriers that people face when returning to the community from incarceration, each program provided several essentials and tools to help fathers succeed in the workplace. In particular, the programs purchased work and interview clothes for fathers and conducted mock interviews to help them build confidence and get their foot in the door with employers. One program worked to build fathers' interviewing confidence by partnering with a tattoo removal service. To overcome barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment, the programs helped fathers get their state identification cards from government agencies and provided transportation and money for transportation to and from jobs and job interviews. Most programs worked with fathers to obtain birth certificates, social security identification, driver's licenses, and other important information to help them secure employment.

To increase their employability, fathers were supplied with job interview clothes and other necessary equipment or clothes. KISRA partnered with Men's Wearhouse to equip fathers with business clothes for interviews and jobs. For those participating in KISRA's transitional jobs program, KISRA provided up to \$75 to purchase work clothes. LSS allocated \$200–250 to each participant for clothes, tools, and other equipment necessary for their jobs, which the program distributed incrementally. At the end of the first week of the Work Training Program, LSS purchased interview clothing for each participant. Once a participant found employment, LSS purchased the clothes, tools, and other necessary equipment mentioned above and spent the remaining \$200–250 on additional clothes or tools after the father was employed for 30 days. All three of NJDOC's employment partners provided similar assistance: Shiloh Community Development Corporation and A Better Way helped participants obtain clothes for interviews and work; Catholic Charities referred fathers to Suits for Success, which provided clothes for interviews; and Career Opportunity Development, Inc. gave fathers gift cards to purchase interview clothes. PB&J gave participants up to \$500 to buy clothes and materials specific to a trade. RIDGE maintained a wardrobe at its headquarters in McClure, Ohio, where participants could find interview clothes. An organization called Wardrobe for Opportunity offered Rubicon participants a personal stylist session and professional clothes.

The programs offered other services intended to build participants' confidence for interviews. PB&J provided funds to help several participants remove tattoos that could be a barrier to employment. PB&J's partner, D-Ink, charged \$6–8 per square inch of tattoo removed (compared with the market rate of \$80). All six programs also conducted mock interviews with fathers. The mock interviews, incorporated into the work readiness curricula, were provided one-on-one by case managers and/or offered by program partners. Mock interviews were intended to help build interviewing confidence and help fathers answer difficult questions about their criminal justice histories and gaps in their job histories.

To address transportation challenges, which was more of an issue for some programs than for others, the programs provided transportation assistance. KISRA provided bus passes and gas gift cards and connected fathers to the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources for further transportation assistance. LSS case managers leased a van and used it to transport fathers to and from the LSS offices for classes and to and from job interviews and work. LSS also distributed bus passes and gas gift cards, as did PB&J and Rubicon. NJDOC's employment partners offered some fathers transportation assistance. RIDGE provided fathers with transportation reimbursement, and one of its employer partners, PI&I Motor Express, drove some fathers living in halfway houses to and from its truck-driving training.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The various activities the programs implemented in institutions and through their community-based offices were designed to help fathers achieve economic self-sufficiency by increasing their employability, improving their financial literacy and financial prospects, providing them with employment opportunities, and reducing or removing barriers to economic stability. This comprehensive approach to overcoming both individual and systemic barriers is consistent with literature noting the importance of collaborative partnerships for improving outcomes for people with criminal justice histories (Duran et al. 2013; McKay, Lindquist, and Bir 2015; Spaulding et al. 2009).

The following recommendations are drawn from the experiences and lessons learned of the Fatherhood Reentry programs and are intended for practitioners seeking ways to implement their own strategies or initiatives to help fathers returning from incarceration achieve self-sufficiency and family reunification:⁹

- ***Cast a wide net to find partners that can help your population become more employable.*** Fathers being released from incarceration lack recent work history and may have extremely limited skills. Therefore, they need opportunities to develop and build the skills and work history necessary to be marketable to employers. Program staff did not always have the expertise to develop and build fathers' work skills, but the programs were creative in finding partners who did. The projects partnered with community colleges, vocational schools, employers, and nonprofits that could equip their participants for jobs in industries as varied as commercial truck driving, welding, information technology, and agriculture. In some cases, the programs had to build these relationships from scratch: program staff engaged new partners, hosted trainings and certification programs at their offices, managed workforce development centers in the community, established new programs in correctional institutions, and created social enterprises where fathers could pursue opportunities. In other cases, the projects leveraged internal resources to enroll fathers in trainings offered by local vocational schools and nonprofit organizations. Depending on the organization and the local context, programs may need to cast a wide net to find partners that can help them develop the economic self-sufficiency of people who are returning from incarceration and have diverse needs.
- ***Offer a range of services to be responsive to participants' needs and be willing to adapt these offerings.*** People released from incarceration have different employment histories and skill sets, and the programs offered a wide range of activities focused on economic stability goals. Some participants were ready to work but needed to develop a work history or receive a certification or special license. Others needed to learn a specific soft or hard skill to succeed in a work environment. And others needed to address personal barriers before they were able to focus on employment. The programs provided activities to help fathers at all levels of readiness achieve their economic stability goals. Furthermore, most programs made some modifications to their offerings based on participant feedback to retain and continue attracting participants. Some modified their curriculum, some offered more opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction, and

others modified their microbusinesses. This flexibility is consistent with literature suggesting that programs are better able to engage fathers when they adapt their curriculum to participants' concerns (see McKay, Lindquist, and Bir 2013, for example) and seems necessary when working with a reentry population with diverse needs.

- ***Be willing to advocate for the reentry population.*** Employers might have preconceived ideas and misconceptions about the trustworthiness or reliability of formerly incarcerated people as employees and might be reluctant to hire them. The Fatherhood Reentry programs engaged local employers and advocated for their participants to change these misperceptions within their communities. Some programs actively promoted the fathers they served by networking with organizations and employers and presenting the benefits of hiring people who have been incarcerated. The programs were willing to invite employers to their offices to connect with participants and to subsidize fathers' employment with local businesses so they could demonstrate their work ethic and professionalism. Some programs, such as RIDGE, encouraged fathers to make themselves visible in the community and rebuild their reputation through volunteer work. Although some employers will be more willing than others to hire from the reentry population, a successful economic stability strategy should include program staff advocating strongly for the population.
- ***Build credibility with employers by communicating and demonstrating the benefits of program participation.*** Advocacy for the reentry population also includes advocacy for the specific program and the benefits it can offer employers. Given employers' reluctance to hire people with incarceration histories, program staff must communicate and demonstrate how reentry programs can make people more successful employees or trainees. The programs spent considerable time promoting the quality and importance of their activities, establishing relationships with employers, and building strong reputations. Program staff can communicate to employers how specific aspects of their program (e.g., curriculum and training activities) prepare participants for the work environment and how their program can hold participants accountable through case management activities and job clubs. Program staff, specifically case managers, can serve as another check on participants' job performance, stepping in when there are problems and using the program to address work-related issues (e.g., using job clubs to discuss how to address interpersonal issues or work habits). Over time, employers were willing to hire fathers because the Fatherhood Reentry programs were well regarded in the community and served as a source of credibility for their participants. Because of this credibility and the demonstrated success of participants in the workforce, some programs were able to establish a pathway from training or transitional employment to permanent employment opportunities.
- ***Focus on removing and reducing barriers as a critical component of economic stability.*** The reentry population faces various barriers to economic stability that are critically important to address. In addition to employment-specific barriers, these include unmet substance abuse and mental health needs, residential instability, and lack of prosocial connections or social support

networks, transportation, identification, food, and clothing. Many people returning from incarceration need (sometimes significant) help and resources to overcome these barriers and achieve stability. For example, people experiencing housing instability have difficulty finding work, and people might struggle to be successful in the workplace if they do not address any substance abuse issues. Likewise, economic stability is likely to be an elusive goal for someone who has never had a bank account. All programs dedicated resources to some of these reentry-related challenges, but they could not use OFA grant funds to address all reentry barriers, such as housing and substance abuse. The programs instead addressed these needs through partnerships and other funding streams. Likewise, any program focused on helping fathers released from incarceration achieve economic stability must contend with formidable reentry challenges, many of which require substantial resources, perhaps from different funding sources, to address properly, and programs need to be innovative in identifying alternative resources.

The experiences of the Fatherhood Reentry programs offer various lessons for practitioners who wish to work with fathers who are incarcerated or were formerly incarcerated. Gainful employment and financial management are critical to helping fathers achieve economic self-sufficiency and provide for their children and families. Incarceration puts fathers at a significant disadvantage in the labor market and places significant financial strain on their families. Equipping fathers with the skills to find and retain employment and establishing rapport with partners and employers in the community allows programs to promote the economic stability of parents and their families.

Notes

1. The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation and the Office of Family Assistance are both part of the Administration for Children and Families in the US Department of Health and Human Services.
2. KISRA was funded under a different funding opportunity announcement than the other five projects and served fathers who may not have had recent incarceration histories.
3. The Fatherhood Reentry projects were part of the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood initiative, a discretionary grant program originally authorized under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and reauthorized under the Claims Resolution Act of 2010.
4. Postrelease enrollment varied widely: LSS, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon enrolled fathers who had been released from incarceration in the past six months; KISRA enrolled formerly incarcerated fathers with no time limit on the recency of their last incarceration; NJDOC did not enroll any fathers in the community.
5. Additional information about implementation of the programs, including target populations, geographic locations, and partnerships can be found in a companion report (Fontaine et al. 2017).
6. Two other briefs in this series focus on responsible parenting (Fontaine, Cramer, and Paddock 2017) and healthy marriage (Fontaine, Eisenstat, and Cramer 2017).
7. The other two components were responsible parenting and healthy marriage activities. Additional information about the parenting and marriage activities the Fatherhood Reentry programs implemented can be found in two companion briefs (Fontaine, Cramer, and Paddock 2017; Fontaine, Eisenstat, and Cramer 2017).

Fontaine, J., Cramer, L., and Paddock, E.
Encouraging Responsible Parenting among Fathers
with Histories of Incarceration. (2017).

OPRE Report #2017-02. Urban Institute.

Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation. Health and Human Services.

Fontaine, J., Eisenstat, J., and Cramer, L.
Supporting Healthy Marriages among Fathers
with Histories of Incarceration. (2017).

OPRE Report #2017-03. Urban Institute.

Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation. Health and Human Services.

Fontaine, J. and Kurs, E.
Promoting the Economic Stability of Fathers
with Histories of Incarceration. (2017).

OPRE Report #2017-04. Urban Institute.

Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation. Health and Human Services.

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