

## **RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD PROGRAMMING: TWO APPROACHES TO SERVICE DELIVERY**

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### **Introduction and background**

**T**oday, nearly one in three children in the United States—more than 20 million—live in a home without their biological father (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). Although there is strong consensus on the important role of fathers in children's development, some fathers face significant barriers to positive involvement with their children. These barriers include an inability to provide financial support due to low earnings or lack of employment, dissolution of relationships with the children's mothers, incarceration, and unstable housing (Cabrera et al. 2007; Marsiglio et al. 2000; Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2004; Carlson 2006; Hofferth 2006).

Since 2005, Congress has funded the Responsible Fatherhood (RF) grant program, which supports service interventions to alleviate these barriers. In accord with the legislation, the 2011 Funding Opportunity Announcement required that RF grantees promote fathers' development of parenting and relationship skills as well as economic stability.<sup>1</sup> While all grantees offer this content, their programs vary in design and structure, including the amount and focus on each element, the sequence and duration of services, and the frequency and mode of service delivery. These can all affect the type of content and amount of services received by fathers.


This brief describes four RF grantees and how their different approaches to service delivery may address the needs of fathers, influence their engagement and participation in services, and affect the program content to which they are exposed. The research reported here is part of the Administration for Children and Families' multicomponent Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation of selected grantees from the 2011 cohort. Recognizing that RF programs are continuing to grow and develop, the PACT evaluation is intended to provide foundational information that can be used to guide ongoing and future program design, implementation, and evaluation efforts, and to serve as an initial building block in the evidence base for programming in this area. It approaches research questions from several angles in order to tell a more complete story about the programs and participants. PACT includes three research components related to these RF programs:

- Program design and operations (process study)
- Fathers' perceptions of their roles as parents, partners, and providers (qualitative study)
- Effects of the program on fathers' lives (impact study)

<sup>1</sup> The legislation requires that grantees offer content in these areas, but because participation in all programs is voluntary, fathers cannot be required to participate in all three areas.

**While all grantees offer content in parenting, relationship skills, and economic stability, their programs vary substantially in design and service delivery, which can affect the type of content and amount of services received by fathers.**

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**Two grantees in PACT take an *integrated cohort* approach that delivers an integrated and intensive set of services to groups of fathers who proceed through the program together.**

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The findings presented in this brief are from the process study. They rely on data gathered via staff interviews and program observations conducted during site visits in fall 2013; ongoing interactions with leadership at each program; and data on service receipt from each program's management information system. Future reports will describe fathers' perceptions of their roles in the lives of their families, and the effects of the programs on fathers' parenting behavior and other aspects of their lives.

### **RF grantees in the PACT study**

Four RF grantees in the 2011 grantee cohort are participating in this portion of the PACT evaluation of RF programming.<sup>2</sup> A review of all 2011 RF grant applications culminated in the selection of these grantees' programs because they planned to offer at least a minimum level of services related to parenting, relationship skills, and economic stability and were the most suitable for a large-scale rigorous evaluation involving random assignment of fathers to either a program or a control condition. The four RF programs in PACT's process, impact, and qualitative studies are:

- Successful STEPS at Connections to Success (Kansas City, Kansas and Missouri)
- The Family Formation Program at Fathers' Support Center (St. Louis, Missouri)
- The FATHER Project at Goodwill/Easter Seals of Minnesota (Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota)
- The Center for Fathering at Urban Ventures (Minneapolis, Minnesota)

### **Programs offer services through one of two approaches**

All four RF programs in PACT deliver services in group and one-on-one formats. Curriculum content is delivered during core workshops; staff typically use one-on-one meetings to help men find employment and to address social service needs. Aside from these commonalities, each program takes one of two distinct approaches to delivering services (Table 1). In one approach, programs provide integrated and intensive services to groups of fathers who proceed through the program together. We refer to this approach, taken by Connections to Success (CtS) and Fathers' Support Center (FSC), as the "integrated cohort." The second approach offers an open-entry format with a menu of lower-intensity services that fathers can join at any time. Goodwill and Urban Ventures (UV) use this approach, which we call the "open-entry workshop."

**Integrated cohort** programs combine content in at least two of the three required content areas into a single core workshop that all fathers are expected to attend. FSC wraps parenting, relationship, and economic stability content into a six-week daily workshop, whereas CtS integrates economic stability and parenting into a two-and-a-half week daily workshop (with relationship education offered separately following the integrated workshop). Groups of fathers proceed through the programs' core workshop together, providing the opportunity for men to create close bonds based on shared experiences. Both FSC and CTS are designed to provide fathers with considerable support and the programs expect a significant commitment from the fathers. Men are expected to attend daily, unless they have an excused absence (such as for a job interview, court or parole meeting), and at FSC, fathers who aren't attending regularly in the first week must restart with the next group.

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<sup>2</sup> A separate set of four grantees are participating in a PACT study of how grantees address the needs of Hispanic populations. A separate report on that study is forthcoming.



Table 1. Two approaches to service delivery		
	Integrated cohort	Open-entry workshop
<b>Core services</b>	Workshops with integrated content and a prescribed sequence	Separate workshops for each content area, fathers have flexibility to choose workshops
<b>Emphasis and sequence of content</b>	Early content emphasizes personal development as a foundation for building employment, parenting, and relationship skills	Fathers encouraged to complete a parenting workshop first, followed by a relationship workshop and/or employment services
<b>Intensity/duration</b>	Higher intensity/daily participation	Lower intensity/weekly participation
	84–240 hours	24–72 hours
	22–32 sessions	20–28 sessions
	2.5–6 weeks	20–28 weeks
<b>Attendance</b>	Fathers progress as a cohort at a set pace	Self-paced, open-entry, open-exit workshops

Source: Site visits and program documents.

The structure and sequence of integrated cohort workshops emphasize that personal growth is fundamental to building the skills needed for stable employment, responsible, nurturing parenting, and healthy adult relationships. At the outset, FSC staff challenge fathers to confront and take responsibility for their problems, while providing support from staff and peers who have overcome similar challenges. As men adjust their mindsets, workshop leaders begin engaging them in content on parenting, relationships, and workforce preparation, only adding active job search in the final two weeks of the workshop. At CtS, staff begin by addressing fathers' socio-emotional development, for example focusing on topics such as emotion regulation. Job readiness topics, such as resume development, are covered after fathers have had an opportunity to address their personal barriers.

**Open-entry workshop** programs offer fathers support in the three required content areas through a menu of separate workshops, with programming that meets less frequently than

**Two grantees in PACT take an open-entry workshop approach that provides a menu of lower intensity services that fathers can join at any time.**

Connections to Success	
<b>Program Name</b>	Successful STEPS
<b>Location</b>	Kansas City, Kansas Kansas City, Missouri
<b>Approach</b>	Integrated cohort
<b>Core Services</b>	Daily workshop for two and a half weeks; integrates content in personal development, employment, and parenting Separate weekly workshop on healthy relationships for graduates of the integrated workshop
<b>Workshop Curricula</b>	
<b>Parenting</b>	Quenching the Father Thirst
<b>Employment</b>	Developed by CtS
<b>Relationships</b>	Ready for Love

### Fathers' Support Center

<b>Program Name</b>	The Family Formation Program
<b>Location</b>	St. Louis, Missouri
<b>Approach</b>	Integrated cohort
<b>Core Services</b>	Six-week daily workshop; integrates content in personal development, parenting, employment, and healthy relationships
<b>Workshop Curricula</b>	
<b>Parenting</b>	Father Development for Young Fathers
<b>Employment</b>	Developed by FSC
<b>Relationships</b>	Within My Reach

the integrated programs. Both UV and Goodwill offer stand-alone workshops in parenting, healthy relationships, and economic stability, typically during weekly one- to two-hour sessions. UV offers each of its workshops in an eight-topic sequence, whereas Goodwill's parenting and relationship workshops are offered in 12-week cycles. Workshop sessions do not build on one another, so fathers may begin attending a workshop at any point and take as long as they need to complete the series. Although fathers may choose to participate in any or all of the services, program staff generally encourage fathers to complete the parenting workshop first. These programs also prioritize the assessment of fathers' needs. Goodwill, for example, assesses fathers and develops a "fatherhood plan" with each participant which specifies the sequence and type of services he should receive.

### Programs serve low-income, nonresidential fathers

Fathers in the RF programs participating in PACT typically have low incomes, live apart from their children, and face an array of challenges (Table 2). The majority are African American and, on average, in their mid-30s. Most have low levels of education, employment, and earnings; a history of incarceration; and unstable housing. On average, they have fathered multiple children, often with more than one woman, and frequently are no longer romantically involved with the mother of their children.

### Service delivery approach linked to fathers' characteristics

Despite the similarities among fathers in these programs, some differences emerge by the type of program they attend and its approach to service delivery. Fathers in the two integrated cohort programs face more challenges than those in the two open-entry workshop programs (Table 2). More than one-third of fathers in the integrated cohort programs lack a high school diploma or GED, compared with only about one-quarter of fathers in the open-entry workshop programs. Although a larger share of fathers in the open-entry workshop programs have been convicted of a crime, fathers in the two integrated cohort programs have served more time in prison and are more likely to be on parole, suggesting that they have been incarcerated more recently. In all four programs, about half of fathers are unemployed, but those in the two integrated cohort programs have significantly lower earnings and are significantly more likely to have fathered children with multiple women. Fathers in integrated cohort programs are also more likely to have child support arrangements.

**Fathers in the two integrated cohort programs face more challenges than those in the two open-entry workshop programs.**



Table 2. Baseline characteristics of enrolled fathers			
	Integrated cohort grantees	Open-entry workshop grantees	Total PACT RF sample
Age (years)*	34.9	35.8	35.3
Black, non-Hispanic (%)*	89	73	81
Hispanic (%)*	2	9	5
Have high school diploma or GED (%)*	65	72	69
Earnings in last 30 days (%)			
No earnings	50	51	50
\$1–\$500*	32	22	27
More than \$500*	18	27	23
Unstable housing (%)*	56	52	54
Ever convicted of a crime (%)*	69	76	73
Longest time in correctional institution (years)*	1.9	1.4	1.7
On parole (%)*	37	30	34
Number of children*	2.7	2.5	2.6
Have children with multiple mothers (%)*	51	43	47
Live with at least one child (%)	22	22	22
Have legal child support arrangement (%)*	65	52	58
In romantic relationship with mother of at least one child (%)	35	33	34
Spent time with at least one child in the prior month (%)	83	77	80
Sample size	2,333	2,401	4,734

Source: PACT baseline survey. Includes all fathers enrolled between December 9, 2012, and August 22, 2014.

\*Differences between fathers in integrated cohort programs versus open-entry workshop programs are significant at .01 p-value.

The approach to service delivery may reflect the circumstances of the population served. For example, the daily structure embedded in the integrated cohort model may be beneficial to men who are re-entering society after incarceration. In contrast, fathers with relatively more earnings and somewhat fewer life challenges may have already assumed roles and responsibilities that make participation in a daily, intensive program difficult or impossible: for example, those who work may be unable to attend daily classes. These fathers may prefer the less intensive services of the open-entry workshop programs as well as the flexibility to receive only the program content they believe they need.

**Across all four programs, about 70 percent of fathers attended a workshop one or more times.**

Goodwill/Easter Seals of Minnesota	
<b>Program Name</b>	The FATHER Project
<b>Location</b>	Minneapolis, Minnesota St. Paul, Minnesota
<b>Approach</b>	Open-entry workshop
<b>Core Services</b>	Twice monthly, two-day orientation Two-hour weekly parenting workshop Two-hour weekly healthy relationship workshop Stand-alone, single-day employment workshop twice a month Individual fatherhood plan to identify participant goals and program activities
<b>Workshop Curricula</b>	
<b>Parenting</b>	Young Dads/Young Moms and Nueva Familia
<b>Employment</b>	Developed by Goodwill
<b>Relationships</b>	Within My Reach

### Service delivery approach linked to participation and retention

Fathers' initial participation in the programs is important because it provides a measure of how successfully programs engage participants in their core workshops and connect them to program staff. We looked at whether fathers had participated in a workshop of any type provided by the RF program, or whether they had had at least one (non-workshop) contact with an RF program staff member. Across all four programs, about 70 percent of enrolled fathers attended a workshop one or more times (Figure 1). With regard to staff contacts, more fathers in open-entry workshop programs than the integrated programs had at least one individual contact with program staff; these programs emphasized the early assessment of fathers' needs, which was usually completed during an individual meeting with staff (i.e., an individual contact).

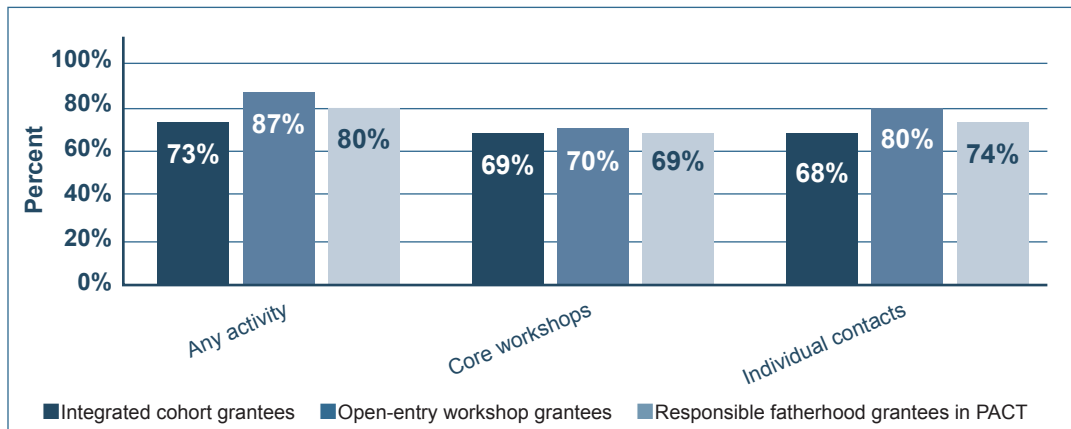
Retention is an indicator of the extent to which fathers stay in the program; we measured retention as the percentage of fathers who attended at least half of a workshop's sessions within four months of enrollment. Retention was higher in the integrated cohort programs than in the programs with open-entry workshops.

Of the four participating programs, CtS achieved the highest retention in its two-and-a-half week integrated workshop: 59 percent of fathers attended at least half of the employment sessions, and 63 percent attended at least half of the parenting sessions (Table 3). However, retention at the relationship skills workshop, which was provided separately, was very low. At FSC's six-week workshop, which is longer-term and integrates all parenting, relationships, and employment services, 41 percent of fathers attended half or more of the 30 all-day sessions.

Retention at the two programs implementing open-entry workshops was lower compared to the integrated cohort programs, ranging from 2 to 38 percent (Table 3). Of the three



**Figure 1. Initial program engagement by service delivery approach**



Source: Data from PACT Information System (PACTIS)/Site management information system.

Note: The data show fathers enrolled between December 9, 2012, and March 31, 2014, and randomly assigned to receive the program. All participation during the first four months after random assignment was included. The sample size was 941 fathers from integrated cohort grantees and 913 fathers from open-entry workshop grantees.

workshop types at the open-entry programs, the parenting workshop was the most highly attended. At UV, 38 percent of fathers attended at least half of the parenting sessions, and at Goodwill, 21 percent of fathers attended at least half of these sessions. Few fathers attended open-entry employment sessions. Slightly more than 20 percent of fathers at Goodwill attended the employment workshop, and because it was offered as a single session, most fathers attended the full workshop. At UV, just over 30 percent of fathers attended at least one employment session, but only 7 percent attended at least half of the sessions.

Relationship skills education that was provided as a standalone workshop had the lowest retention. Between 2 and 15 percent of fathers attended at least half of the relationship skills education workshop sessions at the programs that provided this content as a separate component. Typically, fathers were expected to complete the parenting or employment workshop first, which may have led to lower retention compared with other workshops.

**Relationship skills education that was provided as a standalone workshop had the lowest retention.**

Urban Ventures	
<b>Program Name</b>	The Center for Fathering
<b>Location</b>	Minneapolis, Minnesota
<b>Approach</b>	Open-entry workshop
<b>Core Services</b>	1.5-hour weekly parenting workshops 1.5-hour weekly healthy relationship workshops Weekly employment services workshop
<b>Workshop Curricula</b>	
<b>Parenting</b>	Effective Black Parenting HighScope Early Childhood Curriculum
<b>Employment</b>	Developed by UV
<b>Relationships</b>	Nurturing Skills of Families

**Table 3. Attendance at core workshops**

Core workshop	Attended workshop at least once	Attended half or more of sessions
<b>Integrated Cohort Grantees</b>		
<b>Connections to Success (222 fathers)</b>		
Parenting <sup>1</sup>	72%	59%
Employment <sup>1</sup>	74%	63%
Relationships	37%	15%
<b>Fathers' Support Center (719 fathers)</b>		
Integrated content: parenting, employment, relationships	65%	41%
<b>Open-Entry Workshop Grantees</b>		
<b>Goodwill/Easter Seals of Minnesota (312 fathers)</b>		
Parenting	58%	21%
Employment	21%	21%
Relationships	17%	2%
<b>Urban Ventures (601 fathers)</b>		
Parenting	57%	38%
Employment	32%	7%
Relationships	22%	14%

Source: Data from PACTIS/Site management information system.

Note: The data show fathers enrolled between December 9, 2012, and March 31, 2014, and randomly assigned to receive the program. All participation during the first four months after random assignment was included.

<sup>1</sup>CtS integrates employment and parenting content into a single workshop but tracks attendance separately.

Of these four programs, FSC was the only one not to offer a standalone relationship workshop. FSC, included this content in the single core workshop.<sup>3</sup>

Three features of the integrated cohort programs may explain their greater rates of retention. First, fathers in integrated cohort programs were more likely to be on parole. Although not mandated to attend, these fathers may have been strongly encouraged to look for employment in some way as a condition of their parole, and the integrated cohort programs emphasized job readiness and supported job searches more strongly than the programs using open-entry workshops. Also, CtS served as a reporting station for parolees, which might have encouraged fathers' attendance. Second, having men progress through the workshop in a group, as in the integrated cohort programs, may have enabled them to develop and build close relationships with staff and peers that motivated them to continue attending. Third, the two integrated cohort programs offered fathers substantial financial incentives for participation, while only one of the two grantees using open-entry workshops

<sup>3</sup> For FSC, we could not calculate retention at relationship workshops, since the content was offered as part of its integrated workshop.



offered incentives. FSC paid fathers \$100 for each successfully completed week and, through a partnership with the child support office in Kansas, CtS arranged for reductions in child support arrearages up to \$1,625 based on the father's participation.<sup>4</sup> Goodwill offered up to 35% reductions in public assistance child support arrearages after fathers attended 12 parenting workshops through a partnership with the child support office in Ramsey County.<sup>5</sup> Urban Ventures did not offer incentives based on participation.

### Fathers in integrated cohort programs spent more time participating

Fathers in the two integrated cohort programs spent more time in program activities than fathers in the open-entry workshop programs. On average, participants at the integrated cohort programs spent 79 hours in core workshops, individual meetings with contacts, and other program activities, compared with 13 hours for participants at open-entry workshop programs (Table 4). Because the integrated cohort programs are more intensive, they offer more hours of participation than the other programs.

Fathers received most of the integrated cohort content through the workshops rather than through individual contacts. These programs emphasized employment and economic

**The largest share of content at integrated cohort programs focused on economic stability.**

Table 4. Hours of participation by content area			
	Integrated cohort grantees	Open-entry workshop grantees	All PACT RF grantees
Number of Fathers	941	913	1,854
Average Hours of Participation	79	13	46
Percentage of Average Hours Spent in Content Areas:			
Parenting	15	36	17
Economic stability	53	11	47
Relationships	11	26	13
Personal development	17	11	16
Other	5	15	6

Source: Data from PACTIS/Site management information system.

Note: Sites began PACT intake between December 9, 2012, and February 13, 2013. The data show all fathers randomly assigned through March 31, 2014, with at least four months since random assignment. The analysis includes fathers' participation in core workshops, individual contacts that lasted five or more minutes and did not occur by mail or leaving a message, and any other program services. Each attended activity was coded into one content area. Personal development includes such topics as values and roles as "real men," fathers, partners, and providers; problem-solving and decision-making; stress and coping; discrimination; interpersonal skills; self-sufficiency; and goal planning. Other content includes needs assessments and addressing such issues as substance abuse, domestic violence, emergency needs, housing, legal services, clothing, food, utility assistance, health and wellness, medical services, and transportation.

<sup>4</sup> Fathers earn reductions in arrearages based on the number of hours of programming attended.

<sup>5</sup> Fathers with child support cases Ramsey County may earn additional reductions in public assistance child support arrearages for full payment of child support obligations for six months.

**Even when RF programs are required to offer the same type of content, the ways in which programs offer and structure that content is linked to the population reached, fathers' engagement and participation, and the amount and type of information fathers receive.**

stability; just over half of the content received at the integrated cohort programs—the largest share—focused on economic stability. At open-entry workshop programs, parenting made up the largest share of content, about one-third.

## **Conclusions and implications**

Even when RF programs are required to offer the same type of content, the ways in which programs offer and structure that content is linked to the population reached, fathers' engagement and participation, and the amount and type of information fathers receive. At the two programs in PACT using an integrated cohort approach, fathers with multiple challenges enrolled in intensive services. Despite lower levels of initial engagement in the programs, compared to initial engagement at the open-entry workshop programs, many of these fathers attended at least half of the core workshop sessions and were exposed to several content areas, especially related to economic stability. In comparison, at the programs using open-entry workshops, fathers with fewer challenges enrolled in less intensive and more flexible activities. More of these fathers had at least some contact with the program, but few stayed with the program long term, and on average they spent less time in program activities and covered fewer topic areas.

These differences may, in turn, affect program outcomes (and a future report will look at impacts). Still, higher retention in the integrated cohort programs does not provide evidence that these programs were better than the open-entry programs at meeting fathers' needs or at improving their attitudes, behaviors, or outcomes. These results do suggest, however, that effective programs require an understanding of the needs and interests of the fathers to be served and implementation of a service delivery approach that is aligned with those needs and interests. This study identifies two approaches to service delivery; others may exist or may be developed. When developing such an approach, practitioners may want to:

- Gather data about the fathers to be served and analyze their needs
- Weave content on healthy relationships into other core program components; fathers may be more likely to receive this information if it is combined with or offered alongside other content
- Encourage participation in programs via financial incentives, ongoing peer support, or related practices
- Consider how the sequence of services may affect the topics to which fathers are exposed, given that attendance may decline later in the program
- Reflect on how the amount of content offered is likely to affect the number of hours of services that fathers receive

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