



THE YOUNG FATHERS' EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM IN MARYLAND

AN INITIAL REVIEW OF PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Employment programs for noncustodial parents have been ongoing for decades. The intent of these programs is to provide assistance to noncustodial parents who are unable to comply with their child support obligations due to unemployment or underemployment. The philosophy behind these programs is that noncustodial parents are financially unable—rather than unwilling—to support their children, and once they obtain a job, they will begin to regularly pay their child support. Generally, participants in these programs express the willingness and commitment necessary to find employment and provide for their children. In fact, these programs have been effective in providing immediate job placement for participants and improving the frequency and amount of child support payments (OCSE, 2012).

The Maryland Child Support Enforcement Administration (CSEA) recently funded a noncustodial parent employment program called the Young Fathers' Employment Program. This program was funded in three counties—Baltimore, Caroline, and Talbot. In order to begin to understand the impact of this particular program, CSEA requested that the University of Maryland School of Social Work examine participant outcomes. This initial review is a pre-post assessment of participants' employment, earnings, and

The goals of the Young Fathers' Employment program are to:

- (1) increase parental involvement through relationship and parental skill development and mediation;
- (2) assist with barriers to financial and emotional responsibility through job readiness, employment development, and life skills counseling; and
- (3) promote and increase the frequency of child support payments through job placement and retention assistance.

child support payments. That is, we examine the status of each indicator before participants enrolled in the employment program, and then we examine changes that occurred in the subsequent year. The sample for this report includes 328 non-custodial parents who enrolled in the program between July 2011 and June 2014, each having one year of pre-enrollment data and one year of post-enrollment data. We present main findings below.

Participants resembled the typical noncustodial parent in Maryland.

Most participants were African American (61%) men (90%). Participants, however, were slightly younger than the typical noncustodial parent in Maryland (35 years old vs. 40 years old).

Participants worked, but struggled to support themselves.

Two in three participants were employed in the year before enrolling in the program, but they earned a median of \$7,192 during that year. In fact, few (18%) participants earned a living wage in Maryland (\$27,186). Additionally, many (61%) participants received Food Supplement benefits in the prior year.

Participants paid one third of current support due in the year preceding enrollment.

Eight in 10 participants owed current support during the prior year, and the median amount owed was about \$3,200. Most participants made a payment toward their current support obligations, but they only paid 34% of the amount that was due.

Most participants had an arrears balance when they enrolled in the program.

Nearly nine in 10 participants had a past-due current support balance, known as an arrears balance. About 70% of participants made at least one arrears payment.

Employment and earnings increased between the year before and after enrollment.

Employment increased from 66% to 71% of participants, and median earnings grew by about \$2,500. However, nearly two in three (64%) participants still earned an income equaling full-time minimum wage or less.

The employment status of most participants did not change—about half were employed in both years and 16% were unemployed in both years. Importantly, though, 18% of participants who were not employed before enrollment became employed in the year after enrollment.

Among clients employed in both years, half experienced wage growth of about \$10,000, and about four in 10 participants had an earnings decrease of just under \$4,800.

Payments to current support and arrears rose between the two years.

The percentage of participants with at least one payment to either current support or arrears went from 73% to 89%, and the median amount paid grew by nearly 20% per participant. Total collections among participants climbed from about \$526,500 to \$742,900.

Most (68%) participants made a payment in both years. Just over 20% of participants who did not make a payment *before* enrollment made at least one payment in the year *after* enrollment.

Payments to current support in the year after enrollment were more common among participants who were employed in that year.

More than nine in 10 participants who were employed in the year after enrollment made a payment toward current support, regardless of whether they were employed in both years (95%) or only employed in the year after enrollment (92%). Participants who were employed in both years paid 49%

of their obligations, compared to 36% among those who were previously unemployed.

Nonetheless, more than six in 10 participants who were unemployed in the year after enrollment made a current support payment during that year. Participants who were unemployed in both years only paid 12% of their obligation; participants who were previously employed paid 33% of their obligations.

Participants who experienced improved earnings paid a larger percentage of their current support obligations.

Participants who were employed in both years and had an earnings increase between the two years paid 64% of their current support obligations after enrollment. Participants with either a decrease in earnings or stable earnings paid about 37% of their obligations.

These initial findings are quite positive and show increased employment and earnings among participants. Additionally, the percentage of participants with child support payments grew as did the amount paid. These outcomes suggest that the Young Fathers' Employment Program may have had an impact on participants. *However*, we are unable to make any definitive claims about the efficacy of this program without a control group from a random assignment study or other sophisticated analysis methods. This pre-post analysis allows us to see what changes occurred among participants after enrollment into the program, but other factors—differing program implementation between the three counties or the improving economy throughout the follow-up period—may have also contributed to these findings. This report, nonetheless, begins to provide some initial findings about participants and the potential of the Young Fathers' Employment Program.

BACKGROUND

In 2015, about \$28 billion in child support payments was collected on behalf of children who do not reside with both of their parents (Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), 2015a). According to the OCSE (2015a), nearly three-fourths of collections were retrieved by income withholdings from noncustodial parents' paychecks, making this a reliable source of child support payments. However, this approach is only successful among noncustodial parents with stable employment in the formal economy. Many low-income noncustodial parents struggle to obtain and maintain regular employment, making income withholdings ineffective for some parents (OCSE, 2012). Other methods must be used to assist and encourage these noncustodial parents to comply with their child support obligations.

Employment assistance programs are an alternative method to support noncustodial parents who may be unable, due to unemployment or underemployment, to comply with their child support obligations. Depending on the program, noncustodial parents can participate voluntarily, or they can be required to participate by a court order. At least 30 states and the District of Columbia have work-oriented programs designed for noncustodial parents (OCSE, 2014). Furthermore, eight of the state programs are funded by the federal child support enforcement agency through the National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (OCSE, 2015b).

In general, these programs provide a case management model of services that may include job search instruction and support, job readiness training, and job development services (Paulsell et al., 2015; OCSE, 2012; Lippold, Nichols, & Sorensen, 2011). Some programs offer a fatherhood or parenting component as well (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2014). All of these services are intended to achieve the central

goal of employment assistance programs— jobs for noncustodial parents so they can pay their child support.

Noncustodial parent employment programs typically serve young, never-married African American men who are unemployed or underemployed and are failing to make child support payments. (Lippold et al., 2011; Martinson & Nightingale, 2008). Participants often have barriers to employment, such as a lack of education, little to no employment history, and criminal records, as well as mental health issues and substance abuse problems (OCSE, 2012; Lippold et al., 2011). Furthermore, the children of participants tend to reside in low-income households, making the receipt of child support essential to these families (Martinson & Nightingale, 2008).

Evaluations of employment programs provide evidence that participation helps many noncustodial parents secure employment and make consistent child support payments.

Program Effectiveness

Noncustodial parent employment programs vary state by state, and sometimes by local jurisdictions within a state. That is, some programs are voluntary while others are court-ordered, some focus on immediate job placement while others provide educational opportunities or on-the-job training, and some programs may provide more intensive case management services that assist noncustodial parents with alleviating barriers to employment (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2014). Even with these differing components, assessments of employment programs provide evidence that participation helps many noncustodial parents secure employment and make consistent child support payments. An evaluation of NCP

Choices, a court-ordered employment program in Texas, found that in the first year after enrollment, participants were 21% more likely to be employed and paid \$57 more per month than non-participants. Additionally, collections among participants increased by 51% during that first year (Schroeder & Doughty, 2009). Custodians associated with NCP Choices' participants were 21% less likely to receive TANF benefits in the first year after enrollment—and 27% less likely in the two to four years after enrollment—compared to custodians associated with non-participants (Schroeder & Doughty, 2009).

Voluntary employment programs, which often include a fatherhood or parenting component in the curricula, also showed positive results (OCSE, 2012). For example, an evaluation of the Strengthening Families through Stronger Fathers Initiative—a statewide voluntary program in New York—found that participants were 19% more likely to be employed and earned 22% more than a comparison group during one year after enrollment. Participants' child support payments were 38% higher than the comparison group in the year after enrollment (Lippold et al., 2011).

Most evaluations of these employment programs have consistently found that participants increased the frequency and amount of their child support payments, but unlike the New York program, most participants did not experience a similar increase in their earnings (OCSE, 2012). Martinson and Nightingale stated that “many low-income nonresident fathers continued to experience poor economic outcomes even after involvement in fatherhood programs” (p.5, 2008). They posited that employment programs may focus too much on soft skills, face difficulties in getting participants accepted into training programs, do not adequately address employment barriers, or focus on immediate employment rather than long-term careers (Martinson & Nightingale, 2008). In fact, participants in Texas' NCP Choices program earned almost \$600 less

per quarter than the comparison group (Schroeder & Doughty, 2009).

In most evaluations, earnings did not increase for the majority of participants, except for those lacking a high school diploma or work experience (OCSE, 2012; Martinson & Nightingale, 2008). Even still, these earnings were often still not adequate enough to cover their families' financial needs (Martinson & Nightingale, 2008; Anderson & Kohler, n.d.). The 22 percent increase in earnings among participants in the New York Strengthening Families through Stronger Fathers Initiative is unique (Lippold et al., 2011).

Benefits of Child Support to Families

The additional money paid by participants through child support payments is essential for the families receiving the child support, particularly for deeply impoverished families. Child support, when fully received, constitutes a substantial source of family income, representing 70 percent of a poor custodial parent's average income (Grall, 2016). Furthermore, child poverty would increase without the receipt of child support by custodial families (Sorensen, 2010). Women who left the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and received child support payments after exit were significantly less likely to return to TCA than those who did not receive payments, and those payments make up a substantial portion of income for these families (Hall & Passarella, 2015; ASPE, 2004).

In addition to the increased financial security child support payments bring to custodial families, a non-monetary benefit of these programs is an improved relationship between noncustodial parents and their children as well as with the co-parents of their children. Parenting curricula generally include modules on parenting skills and responsibilities, the importance of parental involvement, and co-parenting (Martinson & Nightingale, 2008, Anderson & Kohler, n.d.). This curriculum helped build participants' self-confidence and perceived ability to

provide for their children, and often deepened their connections with their children (Anderson & Kohler, n.d.).

Research also established that parenting curricula and improved relationships between custodial families and noncustodial parents can encourage child support payments. For instance, a random assignment evaluation of the Texas PEER program—which is an additional curriculum component on parenting and relationship

skills as well as financial literacy that supplements the workforce development program of the Texas NCP Choices program—indicates that parents who participated were more likely to pay child support than the control group (Schroeder, Walker, & Khan, 2011). Other evaluations of child support programs have shown there is a positive association between noncustodial parents making payments and having strong relationships with their children (Turetsky, 2005).

Young Fathers' Employment Program

Similar to other noncustodial parent employment programs, the Young Fathers' Employment Program in Maryland is designed to empower participants to be financially, emotionally, and physically supportive of their families. The stated goals of the program are to (1) increase parental involvement and nurturing of mothers and fathers through relationship and parental skill development and mediation; (2) assist with barriers to financial and emotional responsibility through job readiness, employment development, and life skills counseling; and (3) promote and increase the frequency of child support payments through job placement and retention assistance.

There are other employment programs throughout Maryland, but the Young Fathers' Employment Program was funded in three counties—Baltimore, Talbot, and Caroline. Talbot and Caroline counties are located on Maryland's Eastern Shore with populations of less than 40,000 people; both counties have a median household income of about \$60,000, but Caroline County has a higher poverty rate (16% vs. 12%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Baltimore County is a suburban jurisdiction outside of Baltimore City and is home to over 800,000 people; the median household income is just under \$70,000, and its poverty rate is just about the state average (9.8% vs. 10.1%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

While the overall goals of the program remain consistent, the design of the program varies by jurisdiction and may have an effect on the outcomes of the noncustodial parents. In particular, the Baltimore County program operates out of the Baltimore County Detention Center where the average stay is 50 days (MD Commission on Correctional Standards, 2013), while Talbot and Caroline counties' programs are available to all noncustodial parents who meet one of the conditions listed below. The description of each program can be reviewed in Appendix A.

In order to participate in the Young Fathers' Employment Program, participants must be noncustodial parents residing in one of the three funded jurisdictions and meet at least one of the following:

- Have children who are currently or previously received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF);
- Have children who are currently in the state welfare system;
- Have a child support case that is pending establishment;
- Be incarcerated and within 90 days of release date; or
- Be an ex-offender.

METHODS

Sample

The sample for this report includes noncustodial parents who enrolled in each of the three Young Fathers' Employment programs between July 2011 and June 2014. Between the three programs, coordinators submitted information on 376 participants. Some (n=48) participants were excluded for various administrative data reasons, such as case closure during the follow-up period or the death of the participant. The final sample for this report is 328 noncustodial parents, but two noncustodial parents are excluded from all employment and earnings analyses due to missing identifying information.

Analyses

Administrative data is used to compare participants' employment, earnings, and child support payments before and after their enrollment in the Young Fathers' Employment Program. In particular, we examine the percentage of participants employed and their median earnings in the year before and year after the month they enrolled in the program (enrollment dates range from July 2011 to June 2014). Similarly, we examine the amount of child support due and payments made during the same time frames.

The analyses presented in this report are a pre-post assessment of the participants; there is no comparison group, and there was no random assignment of noncustodial parents into the program. The findings in this report, therefore, cannot be attributed directly to the performance of the Young Fathers' Employment Program, because we do not know if these outcomes would have occurred even without participation in the program. The best way to understand the contribution of any program—*the gold standard*—is to conduct a random assignment evaluation. In lieu of a well-designed experiment, researchers can also

use a myriad of other methods to evaluate outcomes and make causal inferences. This initial report, however, is descriptive and provides the employment, earnings, and child support payments of participants before and after their enrollment.

Data Sources

Administrative data from two information systems operated by the State of Maryland were used for this report: Child Support Enforcement System and Maryland Automated Benefits System.

Child Support Enforcement System

The Child Support Enforcement System (CSES) has been the statewide automated information management system for Maryland's public child support program since March 1998. CSES contains identifying information and demographic data on children, noncustodial parents, and custodial parents receiving services from the IV-D agency. Data on child support cases and court orders, including paternity status and payment receipt, are also available.

Maryland Automated Benefits System

Data on quarterly employment and earnings come from the Maryland Automated Benefits System (MABS), and all earnings have been standardized into 2015 dollars. MABS includes data from all employers covered by the state's Unemployment Insurance (UI) law and the unemployment compensation for federal employees (UCFE) program. Together, these account for approximately 91% of all Maryland civilian employment. Independent contractors, commission-only salespeople, some farm workers, members of the military, most employees of religious organizations, and self-employed individuals are not covered by the law. Additionally, informal jobs—for example, those with dollars earned *off the books* or *under the*

table—are not covered.

Because UI earnings data are reported on an aggregated, quarterly basis, we do not know, for any given quarter, how much of that time period the individual was employed (i.e. how many months, weeks, or hours). Thus, it is not possible to compute or infer hourly wages or weekly or monthly salary from these data. It is also important to remember that the earnings figures reported do not necessarily equal total household income; we have no information on earnings of other household members, if any, or data about any other income (e.g. Supplemental Security Income) available to the family.

Also, the MABS system only tracks employment in Maryland. The state shares borders with Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia, and out-of-state employment is relatively common. Overall, the rate of out-of-state employment by Maryland residents (17.2%) is over four times greater than the national average (3.8%).¹ Out-of-state employment is particularly common among residents of two very populous jurisdictions (Montgomery County, 29.0%, and Prince George's County, 42.1%), which have the 4th and 2nd largest child support caseloads in the state, and out-of-state employment is also common among residents of two

smaller jurisdictions (Cecil, 29.6%, and Charles, 33.9%, counties). Hence, our employment analyses will necessarily underestimate the employment rate.

Additional Employment Data

To supplement the employment data from MABS, we use data from CSES to approximate employment of noncustodial parents. CSES contains information on how payments were made by noncustodial parents, including payments made by a wage withholding. A wage withholding is a deduction from a noncustodial parents' income to pay for child support; the wage withholding applies to private and federal employees as well as independent contractors (U.S., HHS, OCSE, 2015). In order to have a payment made by wage withholding, a noncustodial parent must have a job from which deductions could be taken. Therefore, if a noncustodial parent appeared to be unemployed in MABS due to its limitations, but a payment was made by wage withholding during the same time period, that participant is counted as employed. There were a total of 24 noncustodial parents identified as employed during the study period through this method. However, we were unable to include these 24 employed noncustodial parents in any earnings analyses as that information is not in CSES.

¹ Data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau website: <http://www.factfinder.census.gov> using the 2011-2013 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates for

Sex of Workers by Place of Work—State and County Level (B08007).

WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM?

Characteristics of Participants

The general demographic profile of noncustodial parents in Maryland remains relatively consistent over time. In 2014, most noncustodial parents were African American (68%) men (92%) with an average age of 40 years (Gleason & Passarella, 2015). However, since participants for this employment program resided in three specific counties—suburban Baltimore County and Talbot and Caroline counties, which are both rural, Eastern Shore counties—the profile of Young Fathers' Employment Program participants is slightly different, as shown in Figure 1.

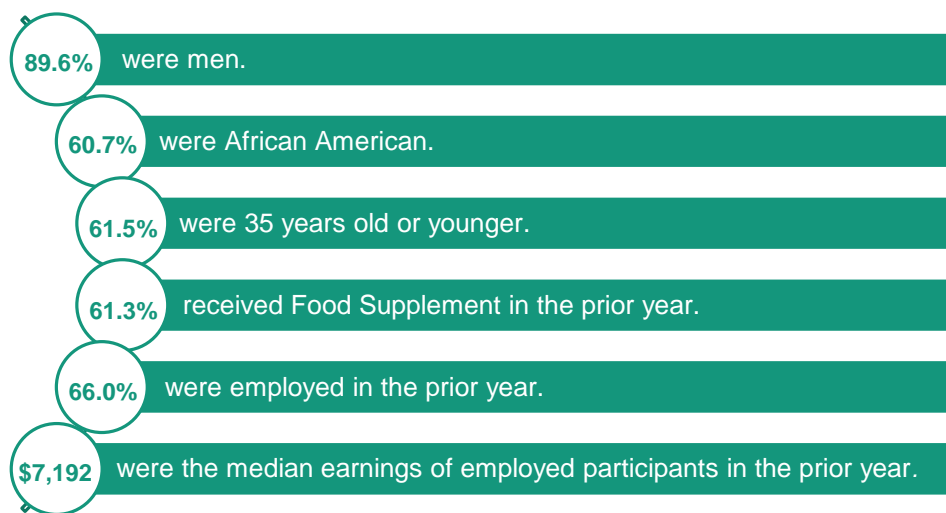
Similar to the larger noncustodial parent population—although inconsistent with the program's name—there were some female participants. Even still, the majority (89.6%) of program participants were men. Most participants were also African American (60.7%), but less so than the general, statewide profile. The average age of program participants was also younger than

the statewide profile (35 years vs. 40 years). In fact, three in five (61.5%) program participants were 35 years old or younger, compared to one in three (32.6%) noncustodial parents in the 2014 profile (Gleason & Passarella, 2015).

A critical detail that is often overlooked when discussing noncustodial parents is *their* use of public assistance programs. Many of the custodial families associated with participants may receive public benefits. In fact, this is one of the criteria to participate in the Young Fathers' Employment Program (see the Methods chapter for all criteria). But many participants also struggled to support themselves. In the year prior to their participation in the program, three in every five (61.3%) received Food Supplement benefits, which is Maryland's version of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This finding points to an inadequate level of self-sufficiency among this group of participants who are financially responsible for their non-resident children.

Figure 1. Characteristics of Participants

At program enrollment (n=328)



Among the Young Fathers' participants, many (66.0%) were employed at some point in the year prior to their enrollment in the employment program, as indicated in Figure 1. This employment rate is actually higher than what we see among the general noncustodial parent caseload; in 2014, just under half (48%) of noncustodial parents were employed (Gleason & Passarella, 2015). However, the level of need among the program participants is reinforced by the disparity in earnings. The median annual earnings among employed participants were \$7,192, meaning that half of participants

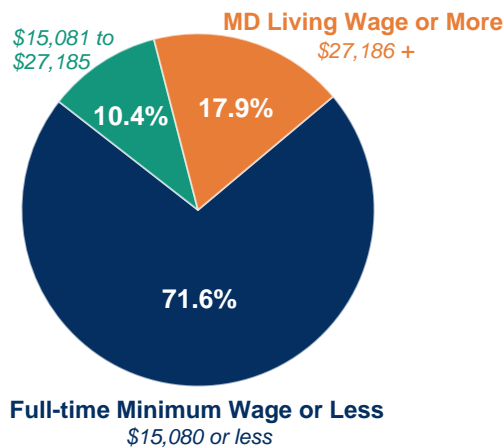
Seven in 10 employed participants earned full-time minimum wage or less in the year before program enrollment.

earned less than that amount and the other half earned more. In contrast, the median earnings among noncustodial parents in the 2014 caseload report were \$20,999 (Gleason & Passarella, 2015), which is nearly three times the earnings of the participants enrolled in the Young Fathers' Employment Program. It seems paramount, then, that employment programs assist noncustodial parents with increasing their earning potential; programs have had mixed

success in achieving this outcome, however (see for example, Lippold et al., 2011; Schroeder & Doughty, 2009).

Figure 2 provides supplementary information on participants' earnings. The majority—7 in 10—of participants earned an annual wage equal to full-time minimum wage (\$15,080) or less. For perspective, the poverty threshold for a single adult was \$11,670 in 2014 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014), and an individual working full-time at the minimum wage would earn only \$3,400 more than that threshold. Less than one in five (17.9%) participants earned a living wage in Maryland. A living wage accounts for the market-based costs of minimum food, child care, health insurance, housing, transportation, and other basic necessities in a particular community or region (Glasmeier, 2014). In Maryland, the hourly living wage is \$13.07 for one adult, amounting to annual earnings of \$27,186 at full-time employment. Whether participants earn a living wage or full-time minimum wage, these are earnings that they must use to pay for their child support obligations, support themselves, and in some cases, support another family with whom the noncustodial parent resides.

Figure 2. Earnings of Employed Participants
Year before program enrollment (n=201)



Child Support Cases among Participants

In order to understand who is participating in the Young Fathers' Employment Program, we must also examine participants' child support cases, including their obligation amounts and their compliance with those obligations when they enrolled in the program. Figure 3 provides information on participants' current support obligations, and Figure 4 shows their past-due current support obligations. According to Figure 3, eight in 10 participants had an order for current support, and the median order amount was \$303 per month. This monthly obligation amount includes all current support orders for participants with multiple child support cases.²

Participants owed a median of about \$3,200 in current support during the prior year, and about 80% of participants made at least one payment toward their current support in that year. However, only 34% (a median of about \$1,200) of their obligations were paid.

Nearly nine in 10 (88.4%) participants had an arrears balance when they enrolled in the program, as shown in Figure 4. An arrears balance is generated when a noncustodial parent misses a current support payment. In some instances, an arrears balance exists when a child support order is established because the order is effective as of the date on which the request for a child support order was filed by the

custodial parent. If a noncustodial parent does not immediately pay the amount due back to that filing date, then the non-custodial parent will have an arrears balance. However, considering the median arrears balance of just under \$5,500, it is likely that participants have missed some current support payments.

The majority (73%) of the arrears balance was owed to the custodial parent. This means that the noncustodial parent missed current support payments that were supposed to go directly to the custodial family. The remaining 27% of the arrears balance was owed to the state for current support payments that were missed while the custodial family received cash assistance benefits through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. In Maryland, any child support payments that are made while custodial families received TANF benefits are

recouped to reimburse the state and federal governments for those benefits (Child Support Enforcement Administration, n.d.). When a noncustodial parent misses any of those payments, then an arrears balance is accrued to the state.

Most participants tried to pay down their arrears balance, as nearly seven in 10 made a payment toward that balance. However, half of participants paid only \$466 or less during the prior year, while half paid

"I used to think of child support for my children as a negative," Carter said. "I even quit a job to avoid paying child support. Now I realize it's about being responsible for your children and supporting them."

Young Fathers' Employment Program participant; The Star Democrat, 2012

² One-third (33.9%) of participants had multiple child support cases as a noncustodial parent; few (5.2%)

were the custodial parent on a child support case.

that amount or more. Considering that median earnings were just under \$7,200 during that year and the median payment to current support was just under \$1,200, it is unsurprising that payments to arrears were minimal. Even still, these current support and arrears payments may represent more

than 20 percent of a participant's earnings, and there is research suggesting that noncustodial parents are unable to consistently pay more than 20 percent of their earnings toward child support (Takayesu & Eldred, 2011; Formoso & Liu, 2010).

Figure 3. Current Support Due
At program enrollment (n=328)

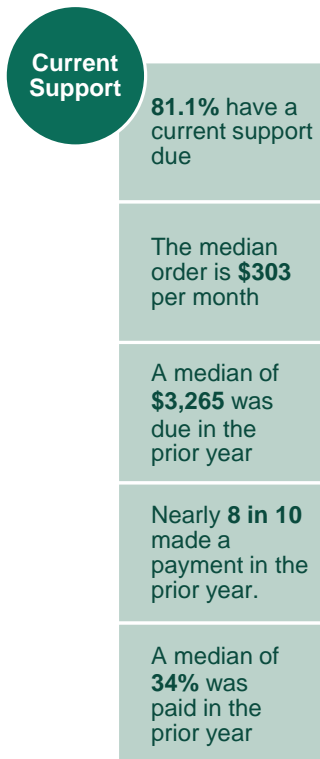
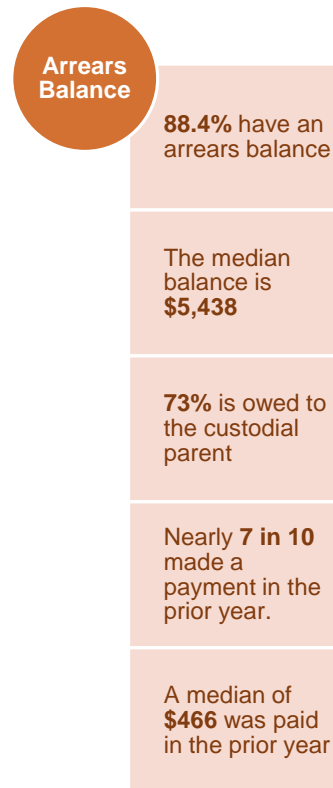


Figure 4. Arrears Balances
At program enrollment (n=328)



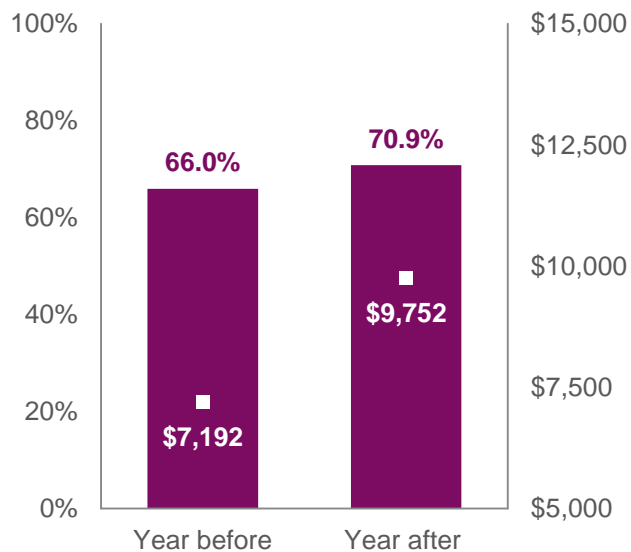
PARTICIPANTS' EMPLOYMENT & EARNINGS

One of the goals of the Young Fathers' Employment Program is to promote and increase the frequency and amount of child support payments by assisting participants with job placement. Therefore, we assess employment and earnings in the year before and the year after participants enrolled in the employment program. One consideration is that it may take several months for participants to obtain employment or to obtain a higher paying job, but we begin examining employment and earnings in the month following their enrollment into the program.

According to Figure 5, many participants were employed before their program participation. Two-thirds (66.0%) of participants worked at some point in the year prior to their enrollment. Due to data limitations, we do not know how many months or hours they were employed during the year. We do know, however, that based on median earnings (\$7,192), half of these participants earned less than an individual working consistently for 20 hours per week at the minimum wage (\$7,540).

Figure 5. Percent Employed and Median Earnings

Year before & after program enrollment (n=326)



Both employment and earnings increased in the year after participants enrolled in the employment program. There was a five percentage point increase in the percentage of employed participants, from 66.0% to 70.9%. Part of the increase in employment could be related to an improving economy. Throughout this period, the unemployment rate in Maryland decreased from 7.7% in 2010 to 5.2% in 2015 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Therefore, participants who began the program in July 2011 faced a higher rate of unemployment than those who began participating in June 2014. For all participants, however, the unemployment rate improved between the year before and year after their enrollment in the program.

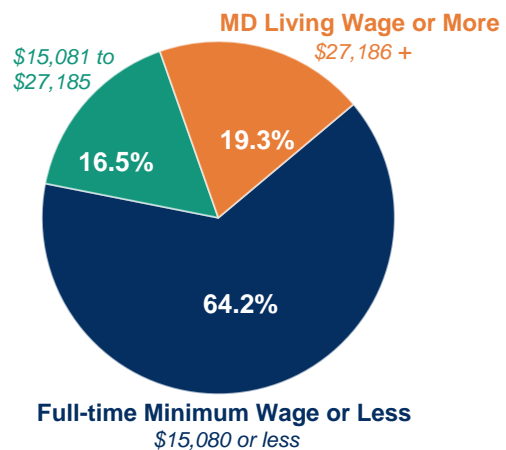
Additionally, median annual earnings increased by about \$2,500 to just under \$9,800. This nearly 40% increase in earnings could also reflect improving economic conditions that allow participants to find higher-wage jobs or work more hours. Most (64.2%) participants were still earning a wage that amounted to full-time minimum wage or less, according to Figure 6. There was a small increase the percentage of participants earning a living wage (from 17.9% in the year before enrollment to 19.3% in the year after), but most participants with an increase in earnings fell between full-time minimum wage and a living wage (an increase from 10.4% to 16.5%).

Generally, noncustodial parent employment programs have been able to increase employment participation relative to a comparison group (see for example, Lippold et al., 2011; Schroeder & Doughty, 2009). However, increases in earnings among participants have not been so clear (Martinson & Nightingale, 2008). For example, the NCP Choices program in Texas increased employment by 21 percent, but participants earned almost \$600 less per quarter than the comparison group (Schroeder & Doughty, 2009). Conversely, the New York Strengthening Families through Stronger Father Initiative observed a 19 percent increase in employment and a 22 percent increase in earnings relative to a comparison group (Lippold et al., 2011). While there is an increase in employment and earnings among participants in Maryland's Young Fathers' Employment Program, without more sophisticated methods, we are unable to assess how much of the employment and earnings increases can be attributed to the employment program, although it may have played an important role.

Employment participation among participants increased by five percentage points between the year before and after their enrollment in the Young Fathers' Employment Program, but this finding masks changes that occurred between those years. For example, were there participants who were employed in the prior year, but became unemployed in the subsequent year? Figure 7 provides the employment status of participants in the year before and after their enrollment in the employment program.

Figure 6. Earnings of Employed Participants

Year after program enrollment (n=218)



“People help you if they see you helping yourself,” Kinnamon said. “This program has really allowed me to be independent and to show my children a good life.” This participant obtained legal custody of his two children and worked for a local physician office. He is working toward his associate degree in computers and business and hopes to remain in the medical field.

Young Fathers' Employment Program participant; The Star Democrat, 2012

The majority of participants did not have a change in their employment status from one year to the next. In fact, just over half (53.1%) of participants were employed in both years, and 16.3% were unemployed in both years. Participants who remained unemployed may have faced some substantial barriers to employment such as a criminal history, low educational attainment, or minimal work experience (Martinson & Nightingale, 2008; OCSE, 2012).

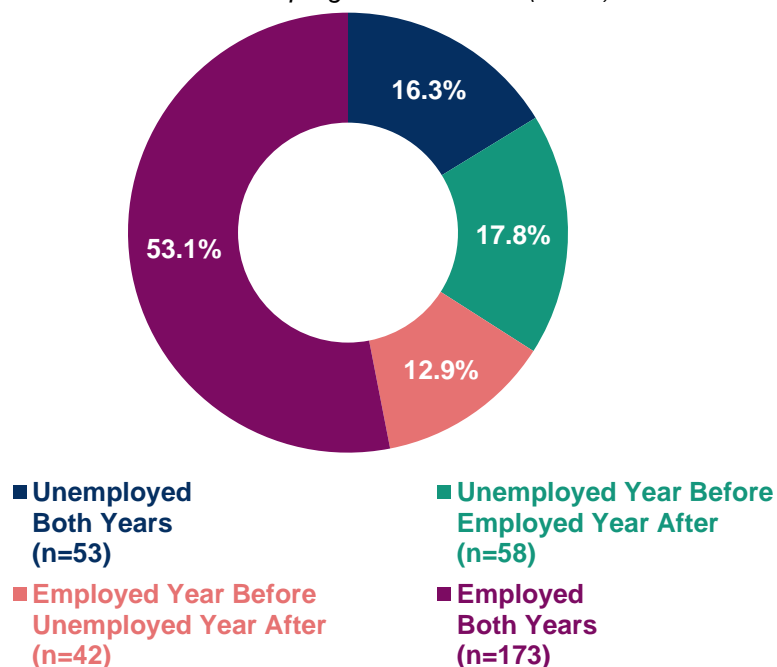
Nearly one in five participants who were unemployed before program enrollment were able to obtain a job after enrollment.

On the other hand, some participants experienced a change in employment status. Almost one in five (17.8%) participants were unemployed in the prior year but obtained a job in the year after their enrollment in the program. This is considerable improvement in employment

participation from one year to the next, but it is hampered by the 12.9% of participants who were employed before their enrollment in the program but had no employment in the subsequent year. It is possible that a job loss precipitated these participants' involvement in the employment program. Unfortunately, these participants were unable to return to the labor force in the subsequent year, potentially having a negative effect on their child support payments.

It is quite impressive that half (53.1%) of participants maintained employment from one year to the next. Nonetheless, some participants may have experienced employment changes over the two years—job loss, new jobs, increase in hourly wage, increase or decrease in hours worked—that could affect their child support payments. In order to gauge any change experienced by participants employed in both years, Figure 8 provides the percentage of these consistently employed participants who had a change in their earnings from one year to the next.

Figure 7. Participants' Employment Status
Year before & after program enrollment (n=326)

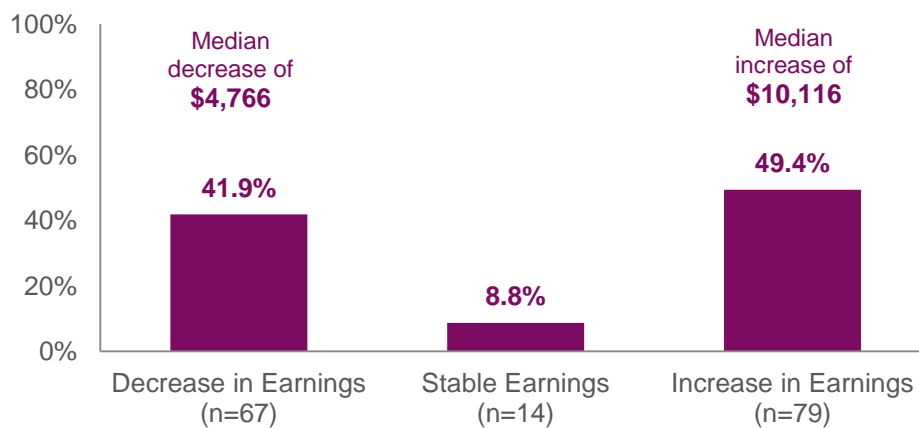


Less than one in 10 (8.8%) participants had stable earnings between the two years, meaning that their earnings did not increase or decrease by more than 10 percent. Just over two in five (41.9%) participants experienced a decrease of more than 10 percent in their earnings from one year to the next, and half (49.4%) experienced an increase of more than 10 percent. Participants with an earnings increase had a median increase of just over \$10,000. Considering the median earnings of all participants in the year before enrollment--\$7,192—this increase in earnings can be quite meaningful to participants’ income. On the other hand, these earnings may still be below the Maryland Living Wage which is closer to \$30,000. For participants with a decrease in earnings, the median decrease was much lower (\$4,766), although it may still represent a substantial portion of their incomes.

In Maryland, a support order can be modified when there is a material change of

circumstances, such as a change in earnings (Md. Family Law Code Ann. § 12-104, 2016). We did not examine any court-ordered modifications, but we did compare changes in the amount of current support due between the year before and after enrollment in the employment program. Although not shown, we found that participants with a decrease in their earnings were more likely to have no change (53%) or a decrease (18%) in the order amount, compared to participants with an increase in earnings who were about equally likely to have no change (44%) or to have an increase (44%) in their order amount.³ Hence, there seems to be quite a bit of stability in current support amounts regardless of income changes. The greatest change in order amounts occurred among participants who had an increase in earnings; this is not surprising because a \$10,000 increase in salary is a substantial and positive change of circumstances for both the participants and to the custodial families.

Figure 8. Changes in Earnings among Employed Participants
Between year before & after program enrollment



Note: Only includes participants employed in both years. Valid percentages are reported. Increases and decreases in earnings represent a change of 10% or more; stable earnings represent a change of less than 10%.

³ This analysis was completed for participants with a change in their earnings who had only one child support case so that the change in the order amount could not be attributed to the opening of a new case

or the closure of another case. Changes to the order amount were greater than \$10, similar to our review of child support guideline deviations (see Hall, Kim, Passarella, & Born, 2012).

PARTICIPANTS' CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS

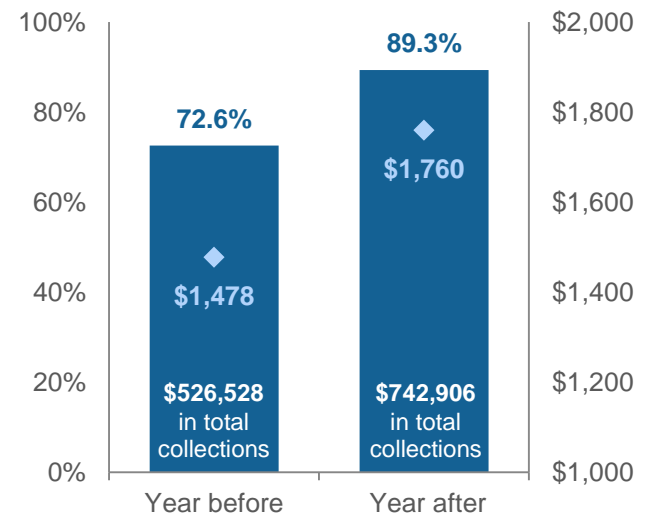
The main goal of the Young Fathers' Employment Program is to increase the frequency and amount of child support payments made by participants. There are many factors that may contribute to noncustodial parents' compliance with their obligations—connection with their children, relationships with their children's custodial parent, understanding the importance of child support to their children—but it would seem that the most critical influence on child support payments is employment and earnings. However, most noncustodial parent employment programs are effective in increasing the amount of child support paid and the frequency of those payments, regardless of improvements in participants' economic situations (Martinson & Nightingale, 2008).

Even still, half of participants in the Young Fathers' Employment Program were employed in both the year before and year after their enrollment in the program, and half of those participants experienced a median earnings gain of \$10,000. Additionally, nearly one in five participants who were unemployed before the program, became employed in the subsequent year. These are all factors that may positively impact child support payments.

This final chapter examines child support payments made by participants in the year before and after their enrollment in the program. We document all payments made during these two years and then specifically look at payments to current support and arrears separately. Furthermore, we analyze current support and arrears payments made relative to participants' employment status and earnings.

Figure 9. Participants' Total Payments to Current Support & Arrears

Year before & after program enrollment (n=328)



■ Percent with a payment
◆ Median amount paid per NCP

After participating in the program for more than five years, a father of six had paid over \$28,000 in child support. These payments have been made even through his personal struggles with addiction.

According to a program coordinator in Talbot County

We begin by examining the percent of participants making at least one payment during the year before and after enrollment, the median amount paid during each year, and the total amount collected from all participants in each year. As shown in Figure 9, there was an increase in the percentage of participants making at least

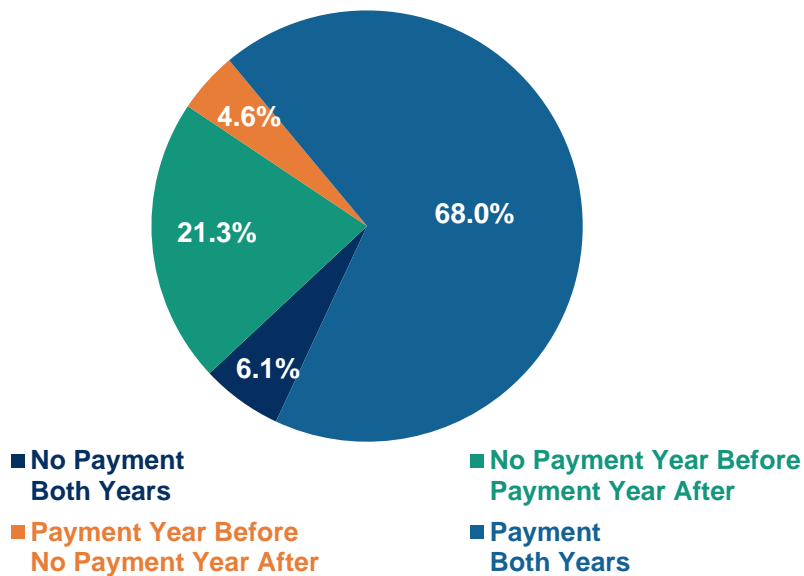
One in five participants who were unable to make a child support payment in the year preceding enrollment made a payment in the year after enrollment.

one payment toward their obligations, whether current support or arrears. About three in four (72.6%) participants made at least one payment in the year before the program, and nearly nine in 10 (89.3%) made at least one payment in the subsequent year. The median amount that participants paid toward their current

support or arrears obligations increased by nearly 20%, from a median of \$1,478 to \$1,760. The increase in participants making a payment and the increase in the amount that was paid resulted in a 41% increase in total payments collected from these participants. Just over \$525,000 was collected in the prior year, and \$743,000 was collected in the subsequent year.

Figure 10 shows how payment status among participants changed between the two years. Most importantly, one in five (21.3%) participants who did not make a payment in the prior year did so the next year. This may indicate some impact that the Young Fathers' Employment Program had on these participants, in particular. Very few (6.1%) participants did not make a single payment in either year, and most (68.0%) made at least one payment in both years. Nonetheless, there was a small percentage (4.6%) of participants who had made a payment in the previous year did not make one in the subsequent year.

Figure 10. Participants' Change in Total Payments
 From the year before to year after program enrollment (n=328)



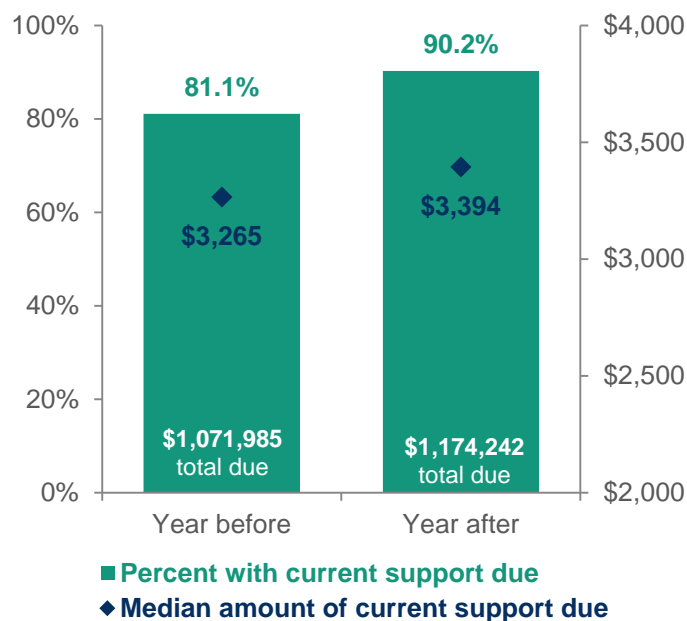
Current Support Payments

Current support obligations are required to be paid on a regular basis, usually monthly. This is income on which custodial families rely to support children and their needs. Additionally, one of the goals of the Young Fathers' Employment Program is to increase the number of participants who pay their current support and increase the amount that is paid. This section, then, examines the percentage of participants who had current support due, how much was due, and how much participants paid.

Most participants had current support due in

the year before and the year after their enrollment in the program. According to Figure 11, there was an increase in the percentage of participants who were ordered to pay child support, from 81.1% in the year before enrollment to 90.2% in the following year. The typical obligation amount among participants increased only slightly between the two years, with a median annual obligation of about \$3,300. This resulted in an increase of about \$100,000 in total current support obligations among all participants with a current support order (from about \$1.0 million to \$1.1 million).

Figure 11. Participants with Current Support Due
Year before & after program enrollment (n=328)



More participants complied with their child support orders after enrollment in the employment program, as shown in Figure 12. In the prior year, one in five (21.1%) participants did not make a current support payment; that declined to 13.5% in the following year. In the general noncustodial parent caseload, there was a similar decline. Among noncustodial parents with current support due in 2010, for example, 19.9% had not made a payment in the previous year; among noncustodial parents with current support due in 2014, only 13.6% had not made a payment in the previous year (Gleason & Passarella, 2015).

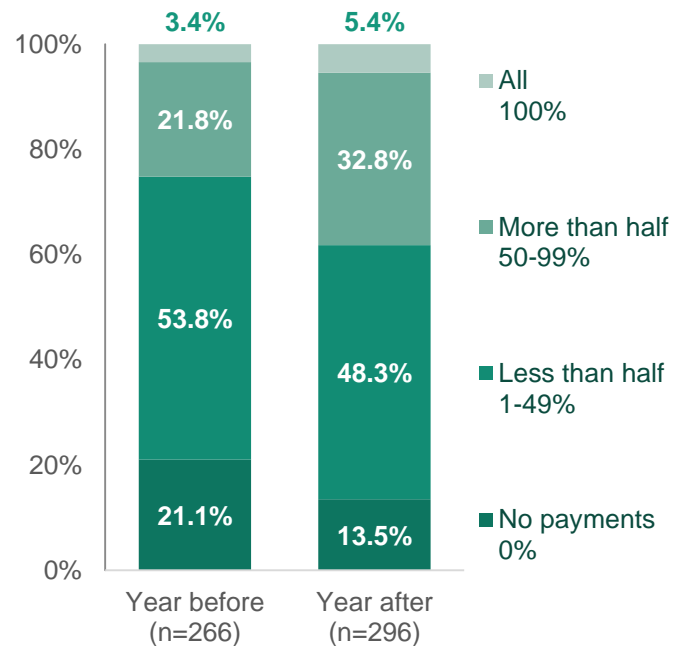
More participants made a current support payment in the year after enrollment.

This suggests that there may be some statewide changes, such as an improving economy, that may increase the ability for all noncustodial parents—not just program participants—to pay their obligations. Again, without a comparison group, we are unable to attribute the increase in child support payments to the Young Fathers’ Employment Program.

Compared to the year preceding enrollment in the employment program, participants paid more of their obligations in the year after. In the year prior to program enrollment, 53.8% of participants paid less than half of their obligation, and 21.8% paid between 50 and 99 percent of their obligations. In the subsequent year, 48.3% paid less than half of their obligation, and 32.8% paid between 50 and 99 percent of their obligations. Few paid their entire obligation in both years, although there was a small increase from 3.2% to 5.4%.

Figure 12. Percent of Current Support Paid by Participants

Year before & after program enrollment



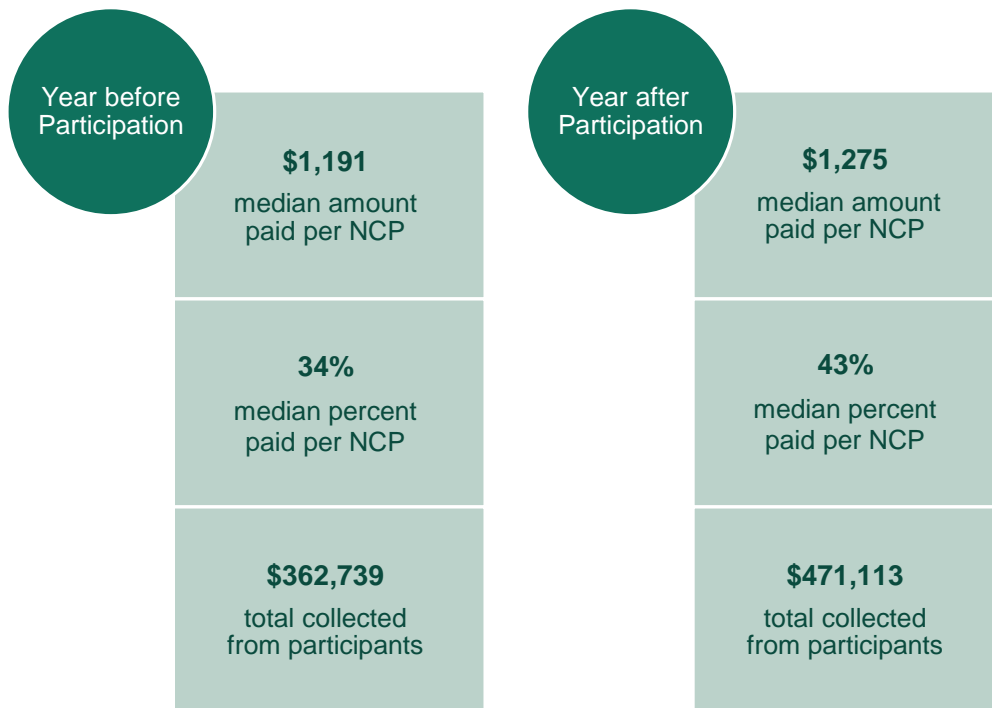
Note: Counts represent participants with current support due in each respective year.

Figure 13 provides more specific information about the current support payments that were made by participants between the two years. The median amount paid per noncustodial parent increased by \$84 (from a median of \$1,191 to \$1,275). This resulted in a corresponding increase in the percentage of current support due that was paid, from a median of 34% to 43%. Furthermore, Maryland was able to collect an additional \$108,000 in current support from the year before to the year after program enrollment.

These payments, however, only represent what participants paid through the formal child support system. Many noncustodial parents—low-income noncustodial parents in particular—may support their children

through informal payments or with in-kind support. For example, Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel (2010) found that fathers from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study provided about \$60 per month directly to the mother of their child, and about one third provided in-kind support, such as diapers, formula or other food, and clothes. Also, a recent study revealed that the most disadvantaged fathers—those without a job or very low earnings—were more likely to provide in-kind support compared to formal or informal cash payments (Kane, Nelson, & Edin, 2015). Even though participants may not pay support through the formal child support system, this does not mean that they are not providing support to their children.

Figure 13. Paid Current Support



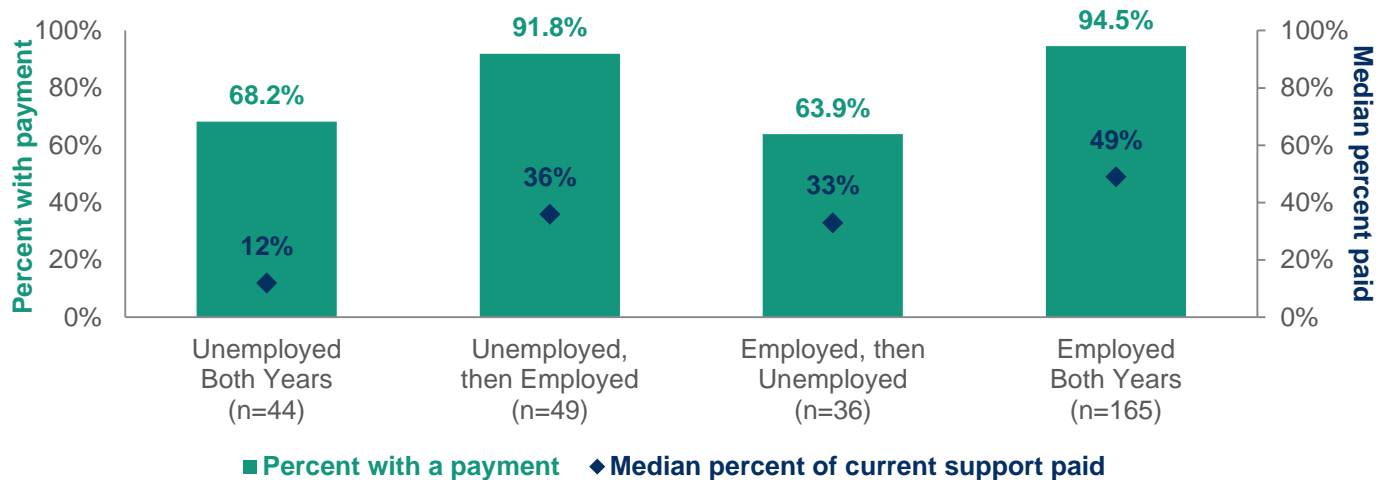
Employment and earnings can have a sizable impact on a noncustodial parent's ability to pay current support. In other research, we found that more than half of noncustodial parents who paid the majority of their obligations were employed in all four quarters of that year; additionally, the noncustodial parents who paid between 76 and 99 percent of their obligations earned about \$35,000 (Hall, Passarella, & Born, 2014). Therefore, we examine the percentage of participants with a payment in the year after they enrolled in the program by their employment status and changes in earnings in Figures 14 and 15, respectively.

Unsurprisingly, participants who were employed in the year after they enrolled in the employment program were more likely to have a payment in that year. In fact, more than nine in 10 participants who were employed in either both years (94.5%) or

became employed in the subsequent year (91.8%) made a current support payment. Participants employed in both years, however, paid a larger portion of their current support obligations (49% vs. 36%).

Interestingly, there was a high percentage of participants who made a payment in the year after enrollment even though they were unemployed during that year. More than two-thirds (68.2%) of participants who were unemployed in both years made a payment, which is a slightly higher percentage than those who were previously employed (63.9%). The major difference between these two groups is the percentage of the obligation that was paid. Those who were previously employed paid 33% of their obligation while unemployed, compared to only 12% among those who were unemployed in both years.

Figure 14. Current Support Payments by Employment Status
Payments in the year after program enrollment



Note: Counts represent participants in each employment status who owed current support in the year after they began participating in the NPEP program.

Participants who were employed in both years paid only about half of the current support that was due. However, we know that some of these participants experienced a decline in earnings, while others had a substantial increase in earnings. These changes may affect the percentage of the current support that participants paid. Therefore, Figure 15 examines the percentage of consistently employed participants who have a current support payment in the year after program enrollment as well as the percentage of current support paid during that year by changes in the participants' earnings.

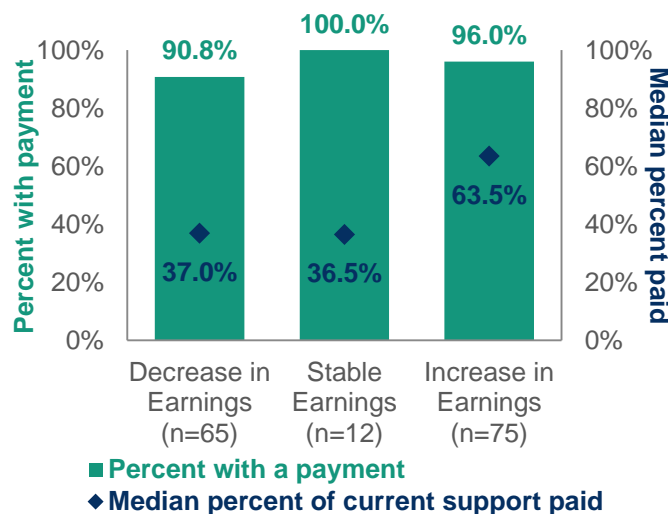
There is very little variation in the percentage of consistently employed participants who made a payment. At least nine in 10 made a current support payment, regardless of changes in earnings. Those with a decrease in earnings (90.8%) were slightly less likely to make a payment than those with stable earnings (100%) or those with an increase in earnings (96%).

Compared to the other two groups, participants with an increase in earnings

paid the largest percentage of their current support obligations. These participants paid nearly two-thirds (63.5%) of their obligations in the year after enrollment. The other two groups—those with stable earnings and those with a decrease in earnings—paid a median of 37% of their current support obligations. That is a difference of more than 25 percentage points from participants with increased earnings.

Certainly, the more participants earn, the more they are able to comply with their current support obligations. As shown in Figure 8, the median increase in earnings was about \$10,000, a sizeable boost to an individual's income, contributing to the ability to pay a larger portion of the obligation. In other research, we found that noncustodial parents who paid more than 75 percent of their current support earned a median of about \$35,000; those who paid between 51 and 75 percent had median annual earnings of about \$17,000 (Hall et al., 2014). This suggests that participants who earned full-time minimum wage or less—more than six in 10 employed participants—may find it difficult to pay the majority of their current support obligations.

Figure 15. Current Support Payments by Changes in Earnings
Payments in the year after program enrollment



Note: Counts represent participants employed in both years who also owed current support in the year after they began participating the NPEP program.

Arrears Payments

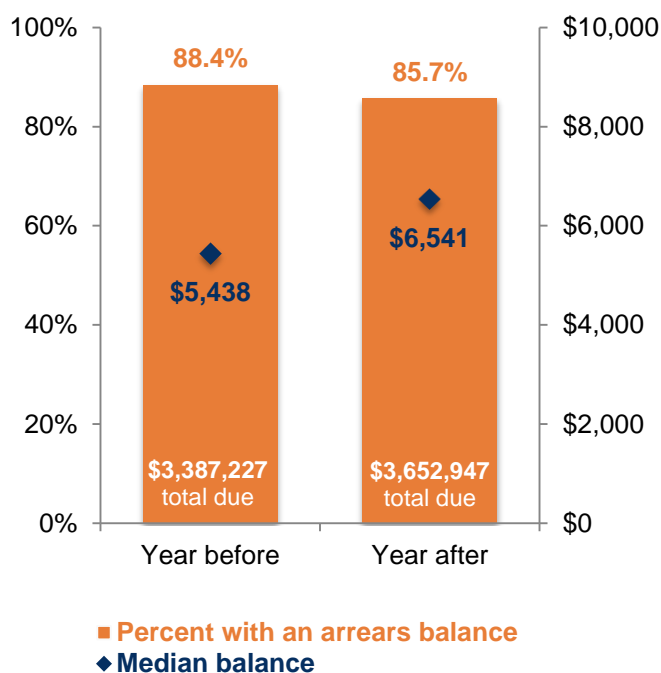
Arrears balances are past-due current support obligations. When noncustodial parents miss current support payments, they begin to accrue arrears balances. Although most arrears balances grow due to missed payments, many noncustodial parents start out with an arrears balance because current support obligations are set in place as of the date in which child support was initially filed, not the date the current support order was established. If a noncustodial parent does not immediately pay the current support for the months back to that filing date, then the noncustodial parent will have an arrears balance.

Total arrears collections grew by 55% between the two years.

According to Figure 16, nearly nine in 10 (88.4%) participants had an arrears balance when they started the employment program, and they owed a median of about \$5,400 in past-due current support. Fewer (85.7%) participants owed arrears in the subsequent year, suggesting that they either paid their balances or their cases were closed. Even though fewer participants had an arrears balance in the following year, the median balance per noncustodial parent increased to about \$6,500. About \$3.3 million in arrears was due among all participants when they began the program, and that increased to about \$3.6 million by the end of following year.

Figure 17 provides information on the payments that participants made toward those arrears balances. The percentage of participants with any payments toward their arrears balances rose from 67.2% to 80.1%, and the median amount paid also went up from \$466 to \$602. Arrears collections grew by 55% between the year before enrollment (\$152,959) to the year after (\$236,386).

Figure 16. Participants' Arrears Balances
Year before and after program enrollment (n=328)

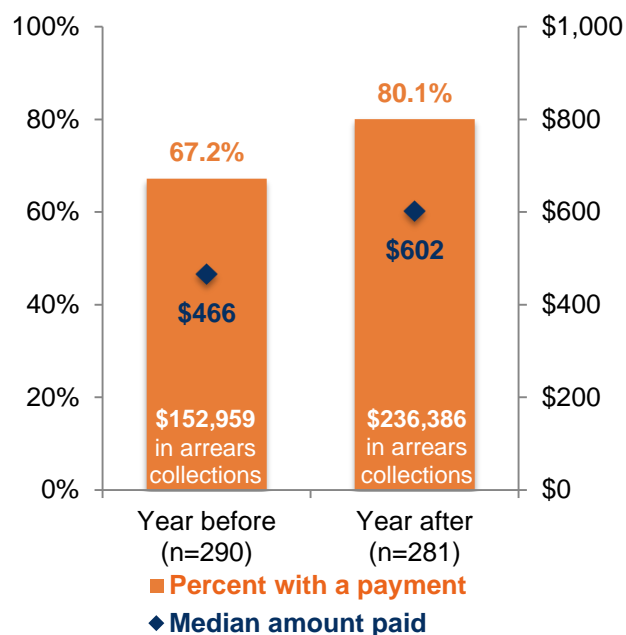


After a participant was released from the Baltimore County Detention Center, he entered a shelter. He was initially hired by a temporary agency, but was hired as a permanent employee with benefits after 90 days. During that period, he was able to move into his own apartment and pay his child support on a regular basis.

According to a program coordinator in Baltimore County

Figure 17. Participants' Payments toward Arrears Balances

Year before & after program enrollment



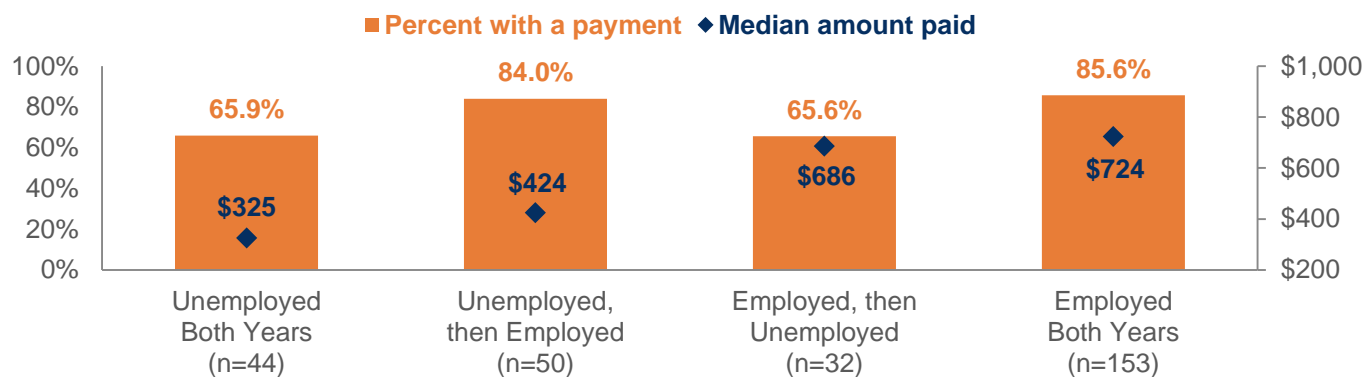
Note: Counts represent the participants with an arrears balance in each respective year.

We expect that positive changes in employment status and earnings will have a positive effect on arrears payments. Hence, we examine the percentage of participants with an arrears payment in the year after program enrollment by their employment status and changes in earnings in Figures 18 and 19, respectively. Similar to current support findings, employment increases the likelihood that participants will have arrears payments. At least one arrears payment was made by more than four in five participants who were employed in both years (85.6%) and by those who obtained employment in the subsequent year (84.0%). There was a \$300 difference in the amount paid by these two groups: participants employed in both years paid more, with a median total payment of \$724 for the year.

Two-thirds of participants who were unemployed in the year after they enrolled in the program—whether they were unemployed in both years or just the year after—made an arrears payment. Unsurprisingly, the participants who were unemployed in both years paid the least amount of all four groups (\$325).

Figure 18. Arrears Payments by Participants' Employment Status

In the year after program enrollment



Note: Counts represent participants in each employment status who have an arrears balance in the year after they began participating in the NPEP program.

Interestingly, though, participants who were previously employed but unemployed in the year after enrollment paid more toward their arrears balances than those who were previously unemployed but became employed in the year after (\$686 vs. \$424). However, we have to keep the sample sizes for those two groups in mind as their small numbers may factor into the differences we are seeing (32 and 50 participants, respectively).

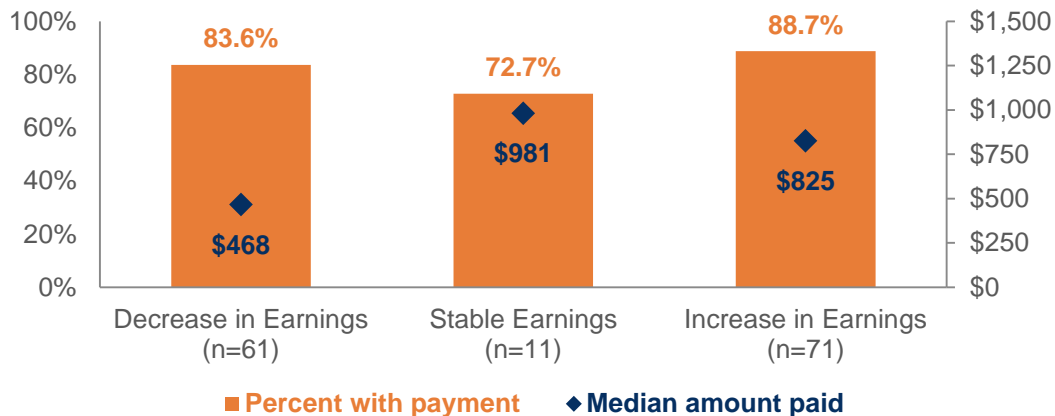
In Figure 19, we see that arrears payments by changes in earnings among participants employed in both years are slightly different than findings for current support payments. That is, those with stable earnings are no longer the most likely to make a payment, but instead, they are the least likely to make an arrears payment. Just under three-fourths (72.7%) of consistently employed participants with stable earnings made an arrears payment compared to 83.6% of those with decreased earnings and 88.7%

of those with increased earnings. The number of participants with stable earnings who had an arrears balance is very small (11 participants), so this likely is a factor in that lower percentage.

More than four in five participants employed in the year after enrollment made an arrears payment during that year.

However, participants with stable earnings paid the largest amount toward their arrears balances (median of \$981), while those with increased earnings were not far behind (median of \$825). Participants who experienced a decrease in earnings paid the least toward their arrears balances (median \$468).

Figure 19. Arrears Payments by Changes in Earnings
In the year after program enrollment



Note: Counts represent participants employed in both years who also had an arrears balance in the year after they began participating the NPEP program.

CONCLUSIONS

Maryland's Young Fathers' Employment Program is an employment assistance program that also includes a parenting component. The program is designed to increase parental involvement, to assist with financial barriers through job readiness, employment development, and life skills counseling, and ultimately, to promote and increase the payment of child support through job placement and retention assistance. Program coordinators in Baltimore, Talbot, and Caroline counties worked with several hundred noncustodial parents between July 2011 and June 2014. The typical participant was an African American man who was 35 years old or younger. Two in three participants were employed in the year preceding their enrollment in the program, but the majority earned about \$15,000 or less in that year. The financial insecurity among participants is further emphasized by the six in 10 who received food assistance during that year through the Food Supplement program in Maryland.

Most participants had no change in their employment status between the year before and after their enrollment in the program; about half were employed in both years and about 16% were unemployed in both years. Impressively, almost one in five participants gained employment in the year after enrollment. The remaining minority were unable to obtain employment although they had been previously employed. Median earnings increased by about \$2,500 between the two years, but unfortunately, about half of employed participants were still earning less than \$10,000 in the year after enrollment.

Noncustodial parents must have the ability to pay their child support obligations, therefore we expect the obtainment of a job or any growth in wages to have a positive effect on child support payments. We do, in

fact, find improvements in child support payments between the two years. Just over seven in 10 participants made at least one payment toward their child support obligations in the year before enrollment and paid just under \$1,500 during that year. In the subsequent year, nine in 10 participants made a payment with a median amount of \$1,760. Furthermore, the majority of participants made a payment in both years, but one in five participants who did not make a payment *before* enrollment made a payment in the year *after* enrollment. The increase in participants making a payment and the increase in the median amount paid resulted in a 41% increase in total collections, from \$526,500 to just under \$743,000.

Generally, research on employment programs for noncustodial parents has demonstrated a positive effect on child support payments compared to noncustodial parents who did not participate. These programs have also contributed to increases in employment participation, but the effect on earnings remains mixed. Most programs have not had a positive impact on earnings among participants compared to non-participants.

This initial examination of noncustodial parents who enrolled in Maryland's Young Fathers' Employment Program finds that there were improvements in participants' child support payments, employment participation, *and* earnings. However, these initial findings must be reviewed with caution. Without a comparison group, we are unable to attribute these positive findings solely to the employment program. This report simply compares participants' level of payments, earning, and employment before program enrollment to those same indicators after enrollment. That is, this is a pre- and post-comparison of participants' outcomes.

While the employment program may have had some impact on participants' outcomes, it is likely that other factors also affected these outcomes. In particular, the economy continued to improve throughout the time that these noncustodial parents participated in the program. Between June 2010 and July 2015—the period during which we examine pre- and post-employment—Maryland's unemployment rate decreased from 7.5% to 5.1% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). This improving economy likely affected some of the employment findings in this initial report.

Additionally, the fact that the program was operated in three different counties may also affect outcomes. The Baltimore County program targeted noncustodial parents in the Baltimore County Detention Center where inmates served an average sentence of about 50 days (MD Commission on Correctional Standards, 2013). Nonetheless, these participants have a criminal record to report when searching for

employment. Talbot and Caroline are neighboring counties on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Caroline County, however, has a high poverty rate and a per capita income of about \$25,000 compared to \$38,000 in Talbot County and \$34,000 in Baltimore County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

The next steps for evaluating the Young Fathers' Employment Program is to approximate its effect on participants' outcomes. Given that there was no random assignment of noncustodial parents to the program—which would have been the best assessment—we would need to consider other methods to measure the program's effect. The results of this initial examination of participants' pre- and post- outcomes provide preliminary support for the positive impact that the Young Fathers' Employment Program had on participants and their child support payments. Nonetheless, we do not know the degree to which the outcomes are solely from the program without more sophisticated analyses.

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APPENDIX A: YOUNG FATHERS' EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Baltimore County

The Winning Fathers Program within the Baltimore County Department of Social Services has operated out of the Baltimore County Detention Center for nearly 10 years. Fathers in the Baltimore County Men's Detention Center that have a child support order established or pending and have a minimum of 120 days remaining on their sentence are eligible to participate in Winning Fathers.

While detained, men are provided with job readiness training, including resume and cover letter development, background checks/employment law, legal resources, federal bonding, expungement, interviewing techniques, appropriate dress, and self-directed job search. Once released, a full-time job developer connects program participants with employment opportunities. A key to the program's success is the job developer's strong relationship with Baltimore County employers as well as the availability of social workers to provide mental health and substance abuse referrals.

Caroline County

Parents as Partners operates on the belief that children need to spend time with both men and women in order to form healthy, realistic images of adults. Children need to see men and women getting along together, communicating and sharing tasks. The Parents as Partners Program increases family self-sufficiency through positive parental involvement in children's lives by providing services in three areas: 1) increasing parental involvement and nurturing skills of mothers and fathers; 2) reducing barriers to positive financial and emotional responsibility and, 3) promoting and increasing the payment of child support.

Parents as Partners receive referrals from a variety of sources, including self-referrals, court ordered, office of child support enforcement, parenting or fatherhood programs from neighboring counties, and other community agencies. Once participants are enrolled, they are connected with community partners that provide assistance with job applications, business/personal letters, resumes, clothing for job interviews, transportation assistance, employment opportunities, vocational training, high school diploma/GED, mentoring/advocacy services, legal counseling, and medical care.

Talbot County

The Talbot County Department of Social Services, Young Fathers Employment Program offers the following services to noncustodial participants: personal assessments; development of personal goals and objectives; identifying barriers to employment; referrals to Chesapeake College for adult education & advanced certification programs; employment resource services; job readiness classes; assistance with resume writing; assistance with budget planning; father, child, and family fun activities, and referrals to parenting & nurturing classes.

In October 2010, the Talbot County Department of Social Services Young Fathers/Non-Custodial Parents Employment Program launched the Inside Out Dad's Curriculum through a partnership with the Talbot County Department of Corrections. In November 2012, the Young Fathers Employment Program launched another initiative: the Inspire Fatherhood Re-Entry Group which meets once noncustodial fathers are released from the Talbot County Detention Center. The program has also developed relationships with several community partners such as the Talbot County Department of Corrections, Building African American Minds, and the Talbot County Department of Social Services Advisory Board to assist in their efforts to provide services to young fathers.



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