POLICY STUDIES ASSOCIATES, INC.

STUDY OF THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE

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Executive Summary

The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) Fatherhood Initiative helps low-income, non-custodial fathers achieve two main outcomes: increased engagement in their relationships with their child; and increased material and financial support to their child. The Fatherhood Initiative offers workshops and resources to three groups of fathers: fathers ages 16 to 24 ("young fathers"), fathers 25 and older ("older fathers"), and fathers with prior involvement in the criminal justice system ("justice-involved fathers"). Specifically, DYCD Fatherhood programs are designed to address five core areas: (1) parenting skills, (2) effective co-parenting with the child's guardian, (3) employment and education, (4) child support, and (5) visitation. These programs are offered through community-based organizations and DYCD requires programs to engage fathers using a case management approach and the *24/7 Dad* curriculum developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative. Programs track the needs and progress of fathers through intake and follow-up surveys using the DYCD Capricorn database system.

This report, prepared by Policy Studies Associates, summarizes findings from focus groups with Fatherhood program participants, alumni, and staff in summer 2015; interviews with referring caseworkers; focus groups with men who reside in New York City Housing Authority facilities; and analysis of data collected at program enrollment and follow-up from cohorts of fathers from June 2012 to July 2015 (spanning fiscal years FY13 – FY15). The purpose of this analysis was to explore the experiences of Fatherhood participants, perceptions of the effectiveness of the program, and to inform future refinements to the DYCD program model.

Characteristics and Needs of Fatherhood Participants

The three groups of participants served by Fatherhood programs each entered the program with distinct assets and distinct needs. Generally speaking, young fathers and justice-involved fathers faced the greatest financial needs at intake, while older fathers struggled the most with engagement with their child and communication with their co-parent.

Young fathers served by Fatherhood programs ranged from 16 to 24 years of age, with an average age of 22. On average, the children of younger fathers were 1.5 years old (ranging from 0 to 8). Overall, these young fathers had positive relationships with their child and the child's mother at intake: they reported strong levels of engagement with their children (74 percent saw their child at least weekly during the three months prior to starting the program) and good communication with their child's mother (74 percent had contact with their child's mother). However, data collected at intake suggested that younger fathers typically needed support in employment and education: 62 percent were unemployed and only 44 percent had completed high school or a GED.

Programs geared towards **older fathers** served men ages 25 to 69, with an average age of 37. The children of older fathers ranged in age from 0 to 18, with an average age of 7. As a group, these fathers were somewhat more stable than the younger cohort financially: 61 percent had completed high school or a GED at intake, and 49 percent were unemployed. In contrast to

the younger fathers, however, fathers participating in groups serving men 24 and older needed support in engaging with their child and in communicating with their child's mother. Just over half (55 percent) of older fathers saw their child at least weekly over the three months prior to intake; 20 percent had no contact with their child in the past year or had never met their child. Less than half (48 percent) of older fathers had contact with the child's mother at intake.

Programs explicitly targeted to **justice-involved fathers** (although the other groups may also include participants who are court-involved) served men from 16 to 61 years of age, with an average age of 35. On average, the children of justice-involved fathers were 7 years old (ranging from 0 to 18). These justice-involved fathers brought certain assets to the program: the majority reported regular contact with the child's mother (75 percent). However, they faced significant challenges when it came to employment and engaging regularly with their child. The majority (83 percent) of justice-involved fathers were unemployed at intake, and just under half (49 percent) had seen their child at least weekly prior to intake, while 22 percent had no contact over the past year or had never met their child.

Program Recruitment and Retention

Fatherhood program participants were recruited in a variety of ways. In some cases, Fatherhood program participants were required to complete the program as part of a court order, while in other cases they were enrolled because the referring caseworker from a city agency or outside organization believed that they could benefit from the program. A major source of referrals to Fatherhood programs was through the Administration for Children's Services and Family Court. Other referral sources included legal, foster care, and non-profit organizations.

According to intake data, men most typically became connected with the Fatherhood program through a referral from another program or agency (48 percent of younger fathers, 55 percent of older fathers, and 58 percent of justice-involved fathers). Older fathers were most likely to be mandated by a court or government agency to attend the program than young or justice-involved fathers (36 percent, compared to 18 and 12 percent, respectively), while young fathers and justice-involved fathers were more likely to have self-referred than older fathers (34 and 31 percent, compared to 10 percent).

According to the data tracked by programs, a total of 2,952 men enrolled in the Fatherhood Initiative from July 2012 to June 2015, with the total number of men served over this time period ranging from 113 participants for one provider organization to 594 participants for another. Fatherhood programs were expected to complete intake surveys for each program participant within the first month of program attendance. Participating fathers were expected to remain enrolled in the program for at least 90 days, at which point a follow-up survey was expected to be administered to track progress and to determine whether the father had achieved both financial and engagement outcome goals.

Of the 2,629 men who completed an intake survey between July 2012 and June 2015, 1,721 (65 percent) completed the first follow-up survey. Young fathers had the lowest retention, with only 41 percent completing this follow-up survey. Seventy-two percent of older fathers and

67 percent of justice-involved fathers completed the first follow-up survey. Retention varied somewhat by program, ranging from a low of 54 percent to a high of 73 percent.

Program Benefits

Fatherhood programs focused supports on DYCD's five core areas: (1) parenting skills development, (2) effective co-parenting with the child's guardian, (3) visitation, (4) child support, and (5) employment and education; and how those core areas led to outcomes for participants. This evaluation examined the ways in which programs provided supports to participants in each of these areas through focus group interviews and analysis of follow-up survey data.

Parenting skills. Participants reported that the program helped them to shift their perspective and thought process about being a father. They learned how to prioritize their child and how their actions could impact their child. Fathers also developed concrete parenting skills through the use of the *24/7 Dad* curriculum used by programs as well as supplemental resources and group discussions with other fathers in the program. Key skills and knowledge included a better understanding of the stages of child development, how to communicate effectively with their child, appropriate discipline strategies, and how to connect emotionally with their child. Across all groups, more than three-quarters of fathers who did not report providing verbal or physical affection "often" or "always" to their child at intake reported more frequent demonstrations of affection at follow-up.

Co-parenting. Fathers also learned skills and reported changes in attitudes that led to improved relationships with their co-parent, including becoming more patient in their communication, avoiding arguments in front of their child and prioritizing their child's needs, and letting go of trying to control the co-parent's decisions. The data from follow-up surveys administered by programs indicated some improvements in fathers' relationships with the child's mother. Most notably, more than half of older fathers who did not have contact with their child's mother at intake were in contact with the mother at follow-up (56 percent). These data also showed, however, that there was room to continue to improve participants' relationship with their co-parent. Across all groups of fathers, only about a third who had reported challenging communication with the child's mother at intake reported easier communication at follow-up.

Visitation. Fathers reported a wide range of logistical and geographic realities that were obstacles to regular interactions with their children. Some fathers lived far away from their children, while others required supervised visits (based on intake survey data, 34 percent of participating fathers had a court order regulating visits, and 78 percent of those required supervised visits). Fatherhood programs helped some fathers meet visitation goals and offered opportunities for fathers to spend quality time with their children, either by providing supervision, planning an organized group activity for fathers to bring their children to the program, or providing an outing or a space in which to meet. Others helped participants navigate the court systems to handle the logistics of getting supervised visitation.

Among fathers who had had less than weekly contact with their child over the three months prior to intake, at follow-up more than two-thirds of young fathers (67 percent) reported at least weekly contact, as did 55 percent of older fathers and 40 percent of justice-involved fathers.

Employment. Although not required by the DYCD initiative, many of the Fatherhood program providers were part of larger organizations that also offered job training; other providers referred participants to job training programs in the area. Participants also reported receiving help with their résumés and interview skills. Other programs referred men to GED classes and other supports that could prepare them for college. Many participants saw this service as an integral part of their progress towards their employment and financial goals.

The typical timeframe of participation in a Fatherhood program is three months, a short time in which to gain workforce skills or make significant employment changes. With that caveat in mind, follow-up surveys indicate that 30 percent of young fathers and 32 percent of older fathers who were unemployed at intake were employed at follow-up. Justice-involved fathers had made the greatest gains in employment, with 41 percent of those who had been unemployed at intake gaining employment at the three-month follow-up.

Child and financial support. Fatherhood programs organized family events which the fathers would not have been able to provide for their children otherwise, and helped participants developed financial skills such as budgeting. Programs also helped fathers understand how child support works and helped them navigate both the bureaucratic and emotional hurdles of child support.

With this encouragement, fathers' reports of financial support for their child increased considerably. At follow-up, 73 percent of young fathers reported providing financial support, which they had not provided at intake, as did 49 percent of older fathers and 68 percent of justice-involved fathers.

Overall program outcomes. Fatherhood program participants are considered to have "graduated" from the program once they achieve an increase on two outcomes established by DYCD and aligned with the goals of the program: engagement with their child, and financial support of their child. Progress on these outcomes is captured through the follow-up survey administered by programs at approximately 90-day intervals. If a father increases by at least one point on both outcomes, he has successfully completed the program. If not, the expectation is that the father will remain the program.

The PSA evaluation team examined the DYCD engagement and financial scale data and found that, from July 2012 to June 2015, 73 percent of young fathers met both benchmarks by the first survey follow-up, as did 84 percent of older fathers and 69 percent of justice-involved fathers.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Several recommendations emerge from this evaluation. These include recommendations for expansion of services to meet additional participant needs, ways in which DYCD can better support program providers, and improvements to the Fatherhood survey.

Services for program participants. Participants reported benefiting greatly from the variety of services offered through the program. Some Fatherhood programs connected participants to additional services through internal or external referrals. Because many participants have extensive needs, existing services could provide more comprehensive supports and expand to additional areas that will help participants reach the goals of the program.

- ***Offer more differentiated services***. Each of the target groups of fathers has distinct needs. Although programs are allowed to adapt supplemental services, all currently use the same curriculum and adhere to the same outcomes. The Fatherhood program model, including the curriculum, should acknowledge these differentiated needs and encourage programs to focus on different outcomes and skills based on the fathers they serve.

- ***Expand services to address basic needs of participants.*** Focus-group participants want access and referrals to providers of health care, mental health services, housing, and substance abuse counseling. The scope of the Fatherhood program should be expanded to ensure that these basic individual needs are met so that participants can successfully build fatherhood skills.

- ***Systematically offer legal services and support for navigating the legal system.*** The greatest need of men in the focus groups that was not comprehensively met by the program model was the need for legal services and a better understanding of the criminal justice system and process. Providing more legal resources to support fathers in on-going criminal cases, family court, and ACS proceedings, either directly or through referrals or partnerships (e.g., with legal clinics), would fill a significant need for participants and help them achieve the goals of the Fatherhood program.

- ***Provide more options for programs for mothers or joint workshops with co-parents.*** Fatherhood programs need to remain "safe spaces" where fathers can focus on their own growth. However, at appropriate points in a father's progress through the program, inviting the child's mother to attend a joint parenting workshop could help to strengthen the trust of the relationship. Furthermore, identifying opportunities for parallel skill-building workshops for mothers would ensure that both parents develop the communication and parenting skills necessary for an effective co-parenting relationship.

- ***Expand education and employment supports.*** Enhancing partnerships with workforce development and job placement programs would benefit the Fatherhood program. For example, Fatherhood program providers could connect

with other DYCD programs that focus on employment, such as the Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP) and Out of School Youth (OSY).

- ***Focus on retention.*** Many fathers do not stay in the program long enough to experience the benefits, with only about two-thirds of enrolled fathers completing a follow-up survey, including fewer than half of young fathers. Programs should consider implementing new outreach and retention measures (e.g., incentives) to engage and retain these participants who could benefit from the program services.

- ***Create more structured supports for alumni.*** Focus groups with alumni reveal that although they had completed the program, they were still in need of support, especially from peers, and could still benefit from some services. Programs, with support from DYCD, could facilitate weekly alumni groups in which former participants come to discuss parenting issues with other fathers. These groups would continue to provide needed peer supports for the alumni as well as a mentorship community for new Fatherhood participants.

Recommendations for DYCD. Feedback from program staff and participants produced additional recommendations for the way the Fatherhood Initiative is implemented city-wide.

- ***Increase the visibility of Fatherhood programs.*** Participants spoke of obtaining significant benefits from participating, and felt that it was important to help other fathers in similar situations become aware that such programs existed. New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents, who were not involved in Fatherhood programs, reported that they believed such programs would be useful to themselves or to other fathers they knew, and that they were unaware that such programs existed. For example, outreach at community fairs and events, or locating Fatherhood programs within DYCD's Cornerstone Community Centers in NYCHA facilities could make the programs more visible and accessible.

- ***Increase access to programs across the city.*** Participants and alumni reported that while program staff had made great strides to help them participate in the program through flexible scheduling options and by providing subway fare cards, they still faced some challenges in accessibility. For example, some men commute a long way to access the program and would like to have more local options.

- ***Update and expand the curriculum and supplemental resources.*** Program staff would like an updated or new curriculum. Programs found that the *24/7 Dad* curriculum materials were thin in some areas, particularly in the area of child development and employment supports. In the short term, a repository of supplemental materials, such as videos, to share across programs could help program staff better administer their workshops; DYCD should consider whether another curriculum would better suit the needs of the program.

Recommendations for the Fatherhood survey. The survey is a key tool for both case management and for tracking the success of the Fatherhood program. Improving the reliability of the survey would increase its effectiveness in informing service delivery.

- ***Modify outcome measures to better align with program expectations***. Currently, the program model expects that fathers make measurable progress on two outcomes: increased engagement, availability, and responsibility with their child/children and increased material and financial support to their child/children. The current measures for the engagement and financial outcome measures are very broad, and do not necessarily lend themselves to useful interpretation for how the initiative has helped fathers or for program improvement. DYCD should consider reorganizing the intake and follow-up survey around the five core areas targeted by programming, to better assess progress over time on these specific priorities: parenting skills, co-parenting, employment/education, child support, and visitation.

- ***Modify indicators of outcomes to better reflect participant progress***. Programming is implemented by providers from a strengths-based perspective, recognizing that each participant begins the program from a different place and supports should be tailored to address the individual's needs. Narrower outcome indicators that serve as a better measurement of a participant's progress, aligned with the unique needs of each individual, might include finding stable housing, progress through a substance abuse program, educational certifications obtained, or improvements in the relationship with the child's mother. Providing a menu of possible outcome indicators and allowing program staff to select two to four indicators that will measure a participant's specific areas of need would help better track participant progress and hold programs accountable for more useful information.

- ***Streamline the survey to collect less, but more reliable data.*** Significantly shortening the survey would increase the reliability of the data. The current survey includes 43 questions, many with multiple subparts. Programs currently collect a lot of data in the DYCD Capricorn system, but not all data are useful. Some variables have large amounts of missing data, and some ask seemingly redundant questions. DYCD and programs should focus on capturing data on fewer questions at a true baseline (on average, providers collected the intake survey within 41 days of enrollment) and reliably at follow-up (consistently after 90 days), which may produce data that can better guide program services and to track participant progress. In addition, providing clearer questions that minimize opportunities for case managers to make decisions about how to interpret a response—or whether to skip or ask a question—would increase the reliability of data.

The evaluation team recommends using the following questions to guide decisions about streamlining or shortening the survey:

- *How will the information be used by DYCD, or by Fatherhood providers? Will the answers drive decisions about program services? How much detail is needed?*

For example, while gathering information about the frequency of fathers' communication with their child's mother is likely important for the program to track, detail about the mechanism of communication might not be. Is it important for DYCD or providers to know whether fathers are communicating with custodial mothers through text message, Facebook, phone, or other means? How will that information be used? If the utility is not clear, we recommend dropping that question.

- *Is there an expectation for fathers? If not, how will the information be used?*

  For some questions, there is a clear association with a goal of the Fatherhood program, such as whether fathers are engaging regularly with their child. For other questions, this is less clear. For instance, the survey asks whether fathers have gained sole custody of the child since intake. It is not clear that sole custody is an indication of success—or failure—of the program, and therefore why the information is useful to track and report. We recommend focusing the questions on elements that are associated with clear expectations for outcomes for fathers.

- *Is there an expectation for programs? If not, how will the information be used?*

  Similarly, we recommend focusing on questions where there is a clear expectation for program services and supports for fathers, and avoiding questions that are unrealistic given program resources and timelines. For example, there is currently a survey question about the percent of fathers who have completed their GED since enrollment in the program. This is likely too unrealistic of an expectation given the program guidelines and timeframe. If DYCD wants to communicate support for education as a priority goal for Fatherhood programs, *enrollment* in a GED program, rather than completion, may be a more appropriate indicator.

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Introduction

The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) is committed to improving the lives of parents and their children through programs that encourage the parental involvement of non-custodial fathers. In programs offered through community-based organizations, the DYCD Fatherhood Initiative addresses the needs of three groups of low-income, non-custodial fathers in order to empower them to establish positive, healthy, and supportive relationships with their children: fathers ages 16 to 24 ("young fathers"), fathers ages 25 and older ("older fathers"), and those with prior involvement in the criminal justice system ("justice-involved fathers"). Specifically, DYCD Fatherhood programs are designed to address five core areas: (1) parenting skills, (2) effective co-parenting with the child's custodial guardian, (3) employment and education, (4) child support, and (5) visitation. By focusing on these core areas, DYCD aims to help fathers achieve two main outcomes: increased engagement in their relationship with their child; and increased material and financial support to their child.

In June 2015, DYCD contracted with Policy Studies Associates (PSA) to conduct a study of the Fatherhood Initiative. At the time of the study, eight community-based organizations were implementing 10 Fatherhood Initiative contracts, each focusing on one or two of the three target groups of fathers. This study is intended to inform DYCD about the effectiveness of the Fatherhood program, and to suggest ideas for improvements to services for the initiative and services offered to program participants.

Methods

The PSA team conducted focus groups and interviews with five distinct groups of stakeholders in order to learn about experiences with the services and resources offered and the effectiveness of the Fatherhood Initiative. Focus groups were conducted by pairs of experienced PSA researchers, who were female. The study team also analyzed data collected from fathers by Fatherhood programs.

Primary data collection included:

- Focus groups with 41 **current participants** of Fatherhood programs, including groups of young fathers (15), older fathers (7), and justice-involved fathers (19)[1]
- Focus groups with 20 **alumni** of Fatherhood programs, including groups of fathers who had participated in programs for young fathers (6), older fathers (7), and justice-involved fathers (7)
- In-person interviews with 14 Fatherhood **program directors and other staff**

[1] Men in programs serving justice-involved fathers fell into both the 18- to 24-year-old and 25 and over demographics, but were counted by the target population of the program in which they participated.

- Telephone interviews with 12 **caseworkers** from various agencies (i.e., the Administration for Children's Services, foster care agencies, non-profit organizations, the court system, etc.) who refer participants to Fatherhood programs

- Focus groups with 22 **young male New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents,** ages 18-24, who did not participate in Fatherhood programs, to learn about the resources and supports that could benefit fathers in NYCHA communities. These groups included both fathers and non-fathers.

Focus groups and interviews addressed reasons for fathers enrolling in the program, benefits of participation, strengths and weaknesses of program services, program services most and least valued, challenges faced in attaining program outcomes, quality of relationships with co-parents, suggestions for program improvement, and behavior changes attributed to participation. Focus groups with NYCHA residents addressed perceptions and understandings of the roles and responsibilities of being a father and needed resources.

The evaluation team also analyzed data maintained in DYCD's web-based Capricorn database system, including enrollment, intake and follow-up survey data, to identify patterns in needs and outcomes as well as differences in experiences between target groups of fathers. Fathers with multiple children were instructed to select one child to report on in the survey. According to the data tracked by programs, a total of 2,952 men enrolled in the Fatherhood Initiative from July 2012 to June 2015, with the total number of men served over this time period ranging from 113 participants for one provider organization to 594 participants for another. Fatherhood programs were expected to complete intake surveys for each program participant within the first month of program attendance. Participating fathers were expected to remain enrolled in the program for at least 90 days, at which point a follow-up survey was expected to be administered to track progress and to determine whether the father had achieved both financial and engagement outcome goals. Fathers who continued in the program were surveyed again every three months. Throughout this report, analyses of a participant's improvement over time compare information from the intake survey to that of the last survey collected.

Exhibit 1
Number of surveys, by target population, July 2012 to June 2015 (N = 2,952)

	Young fathers	Older fathers	Justice-involved	Total
Intake survey	682	1,139	808	2,629
First follow-up	401	816	504	1,721
Second follow-up	67	101	53	221
Third follow-up	7	9	5	21

Exhibit reads: From July 2012 to June 2015, 2,629 of the 2,952 fathers who enrolled in a Fatherhood program completed an intake survey. Of these, 682 enrolled in a program for young fathers, 1,139 enrolled in a program for older fathers, and 808 enrolled in a program for justice-involved fathers.

Participant Characteristics and Needs

This section describes the characteristics and needs of Fatherhood program participants, based on data collected at intake and reports during interviews and focus groups. As summarized below, the needs varied to some extent by the target group of the fathers. Generally speaking, younger fathers and justice-involved fathers faced the greatest financial needs and assets at intake, while older fathers struggled the most with engagement with their child and communication with their co-parent.

Across all groups, the majority of participating fathers were Black (56 percent) or Latino/Hispanic (27 percent).

Young Fathers

Young fathers ranged from 16 to 24 years of age, with an average age of 22. On average, the children of younger fathers were 1.5 years old (ranging from 0 to 8). The data collected at intake suggested that younger fathers typically needed the most support in the areas of employment and education. They reported strong levels of engagement with their children and good communication with their child's mother.

- ***Financial stability.*** Sixty-two percent of young fathers were unemployed at intake and 85 percent were looking for employment or better employment. Fewer than half (44 percent) had completed high school or a GED and 10 percent were enrolled in school. Sixty-four percent of young fathers required to pay child support had paid on time and in full each month over the last three months.

- ***Engagement with child.*** Overall, young fathers were engaged with their children at intake. About three-quarters (74 percent) reported seeing their child once a week or more often over the last three months. The majority of fathers reported regularly demonstrating affection towards their child, often or always giving physical affection (85 percent) and verbal affection (85 percent). Less than a third of young fathers (27 percent) had a court or agency order that regulated contact with their child, although the majority of those with court orders (81 percent) required supervised visitation.

- ***Relationship with co-parent.*** Most young fathers (74 percent) had some contact with their child's mother at intake. More than half of these fathers (61 percent) had daily contact with the child's mother, and almost all (95 percent) had at least weekly contact. The majority (82 percent) had either easy or neutral (neither difficult nor easy) communication. Most (73 percent) did not report major conflicts with their child's mother about raising their child, and 73 percent rated their partnership with their co-parent as average or better at intake.

Older Fathers

Programs geared towards older fathers served men ages 25 to 69, with an average age of 37. The children of older fathers ranged in age from 0 to 18, with an average age of 7.[2] In contrast to the needs of younger fathers entering the program, fathers participating in groups serving men 24 and older struggled the most in engaging with their child and with communicating with their child's mother. By comparison, employment and child support were not the most pressing of concerns, although these remained clear needs to be addressed.

- ***Financial stability.*** About half (51 percent) of older fathers were employed at intake and looking for new or better employment (54 percent). Sixty-one percent had completed high school or a GED; 3 percent were enrolled in school. Older fathers were more likely than younger fathers to pay required child support regularly: at intake, 71 percent of older fathers had paid child support in full each time it was due over the last three months, and an additional 6 percent had paid on time but not in full.

- ***Engagement with child.*** Just over half (55 percent) of older fathers saw their child at least weekly over the three months prior to intake; 20 percent had no contact with their child in the past year or had never met their child. Half (50 percent) of older fathers had a court order that regulated the amount of time spent with the child, and the majority of court orders required supervised visits (81 percent). Older fathers also reported providing more limited affection to their child compared to younger fathers, with 36 percent reporting often or always giving physical affection, and 39 percent reporting often or always providing verbal affection.

- ***Relationship with co-parent.*** Forty-eight percent of older fathers had contact with the child's mother at intake. Of those who did have contact, the majority (82 percent) had at least weekly contact, but 40 percent reported that communication was difficult. Half of older fathers (50 percent) reported their partnership with the child's mother was poor or very poor.

Justice-Involved Fathers

Programs for justice-involved fathers served men from 16 to 61 years of age, with an average age of 35. On average, the children of justice-involved fathers were 7 years old (ranging from 0 to 18). Although the majority (83 percent) of these fathers were in the same age range as the older fathers group of the Fatherhood initiative, their needs were distinct. The most consistent needs of justice-involved fathers at intake were in employment and financial support. As a group, justice-involved fathers had limited recent engagement with their child, perhaps reflecting their involvement with the justice system, but for the most part they reported positive interactions with both the child and the child's mother.

[2] Fathers were only asked to report on children up to age 18. It is possible that some fathers had children older than 18 who were not included in the data and analysis.

- ***Financial stability.*** The majority (83 percent) of justice-involved fathers were unemployed at intake; more than half (54 percent) reported they had been out of work six months or longer. Almost all (91 percent) were looking for employment or better employment. Sixty-two percent had completed high school or their GED; 2 percent were in school. Consistent with this employment struggle, justice-involved fathers were less likely than the other Fatherhood participants to be regularly paying child support (45 percent paid on time over the last three months) or to be paying child support in full (40 percent).

- ***Engagement with child.*** Slightly fewer than half (49 percent) of justice-involved fathers had seen their child at least weekly over the last three months, and 22 percent had no contact over the past year or had never met their child. However, justice-involved fathers were least likely out of the three groups to have a court or agency order regulating their contact with their child (16 percent) and those who did were least likely to have required supervision of their visits (66 percent). Although justice-involved fathers as a group had the most limited amount of interaction with their children, they demonstrated high levels of affection, with 69 percent reporting that they often or always gave physical affection to their child and 73 percent reporting that they often or always gave verbal affection.

- ***Relationship with co-parent.*** The majority (75 percent) of justice-involved fathers had contact with their child's mother. Of those who had contact, most (79 percent) had at least weekly contact, and most (75 percent) reported either neutral or easy communication. About two-thirds (64 percent) rated their relationship with their child's mother as average or better at intake.

Additional Needs of Fatherhood Program Participants

The needs captured by the intake surveys were reflected in the interviews that PSA evaluators conducted with Fatherhood program staff and referring caseworkers. Fathers reported struggling with a variety of issues, including substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence, poverty, lack of housing and material resources, lack of education, and unemployment. Although these needs fell outside the explicit scope of the Fatherhood Initiative, addressing these needs was key to participants' progress towards the goals of the Fatherhood Initiative. Fathers were also in need of resources to help them become a better parent. For instance, various stakeholders reported that program participants needed help in understanding their roles and responsibilities as a father, basic knowledge for the day-to-day care of their child, and how to interact with and discipline their child.

The interviews and focus groups revealed two categories of additional needs of fathers that were closely tied to the core areas and outcomes of the Fatherhood Initiative. These needs were not explicitly addressed by the program, although some providers offered supports:

Advocacy services. Some participants dealing with visitation rights, child protective services, or child support enforcement lacked the knowledge to navigate "the system." One caseworker explained that fathers needed education on their rights so that they could "adequately address their wants and needs regarding their children and how to go about getting their rights." In addition to needing knowledge, many participants were in need of legal representation and advocacy. Some participants needed legal support for on-going criminal cases, while others needed advocacy and support in family court for custody battles or navigating Administration for Children's Services (ACS) procedures.

One justice-involved participant described how the program staff had begun to help him understand and address some of the legal issues he faced, although more comprehensive support was needed:

> *She helped us get our rap sheets. I saw how many arrests I'd had since I was 15. They were all misdemeanors, this was my first felony. There could be more help. They could help with the paperwork at the court house. Teach us more about the law, how to talk to a police officer. [When you] have a confrontation. If you know how to diffuse the situation, it will not be as bad as it is now. We don't have that much of that now.*

Transition services. Young fathers typically needed a program environment that addressed their transition from adolescence to adulthood. This transition involved shifting how they viewed their priorities and responsibilities. A caseworker at one referring agency explained, "A lot of them are first-time fathers and have not grown up in environments where they have positive father role models. And so they don't really know." Another referring caseworker noted that young fathers oftentimes were unemployed and lacked the material resources to meet the basic needs of their child. Young fathers also needed vocational training and career development to complement basic employment services.

In contrast, many older fathers appeared to have more employment stability, but incidents of domestic violence or physical abuse may have disrupted the fathers' ability to live in the home or spend time with their child. This targeted subpopulation was in need of anger management and domestic violence classes, assistance with visitation, and supports that would help them to understand the impact of their upbringing and cultural differences on their parenting skills.

Finally, fathers who were previously involved in the criminal justice system primarily needed transitional supports that could help them to find employment and housing as they reenter society. Thereafter, they needed resources that could help with child support and legal issues.

Program Services

DYCD requires that all Fatherhood programs use a case management approach and the *24/7 Dad* curriculum developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative and adapted for New York City. Participants are exposed to the curriculum through workshops and receive the support of a case manager who helps connect fathers to resources, and of a life/career coach who helps fathers meet their employment and education goals. Some Fatherhood programs may provide

additional, non-mandatory workshops that complement these services. The evaluation team did not examine the implementation or quality of the services offered, or their fidelity to the intended model; the analysis below summarizes the experiences of participants and staff as described to the evaluation team in focus groups and interviews.

One-on-one counseling provided opportunities for staff to build relationships with participants, address their individual needs, and track their progress and outcomes. As noted above, upon enrollment, each participant was assigned a case manager. Within the first couple of weeks of case management, participants completed an intake survey, which collected baseline data on the participant's particular circumstances and allowed program staff to identify the participant's greatest needs and goals. One-on-one counseling provided an avenue for program staff to track progress on an individual's goals and ensure his needs were being adequately met.

One-on-one sessions helped to build rapport between program staff and participants. Program staff met with participants both formally and informally to identify problems and set goals. These conversations built trusting relationships that allowed participants to discuss emotional issues and seek advice on how to address specific problems. As one program alumnus said, "My favorite thing was the one-on-one with the counselor. He gives good advice about stuff, made me feel better than when I walked in." In some cases, the program staff may have referred the participant to another service within the provider organization or to an outside organization.

Programs typically supplemented the* 24/7 Dad *curriculum with additional resources and activities, as well as group discussion time. Program staff at most sites felt that the *24/7 Dad* curriculum was a good basis for programming, but that it had insufficient depth to cover all the information needed. Two areas that program staff identified as lacking in the curriculum were workplace readiness and understanding of developmental milestones of a child. Program staff reported needing to rely on outside sources to supplement the *24/7 Dad* curriculum, and some stated that a shared repository of supplemental resources would help better facilitate program activities. Program staff at some sites further critiqued the *24/7 Dad* curriculum, saying that they found it out-of-date and that it did not take into account variations in parenting circumstances, such as relationships with co-parents and visitation. They reported developing many of their own curriculum materials that better suited their needs.

All Fatherhood programs also offered group discussion time for participants to discuss issues they were facing and to seek advice both from program staff and from the other participants. Many participants identified this time as one of the most valuable resources the program provided; they typically did not have a venue to talk about their emotional needs, and the support of other men in similar situations was helpful to them. As one participant said, "If I need counseling, I can talk one-on-one with others in this group. I feel like this group is the counseling."

Based on the needs of the population served, Fatherhood programs were typically structured in one of two ways: short-term, high-intensity courses, and longer-term, low-intensity courses of programming. The short-term programs typically ran full-time five days a week for three to six weeks. Participants in these programs were typically either in the young fathers or justice-involved

fathers groups. Men in these groups were less likely to be employed at the start of the program. This allowed them to attend meetings full-time for the duration of the program.

These populations typically needed high-dosage programming around life transitions (adolescence to adulthood in the case of young fathers, and post-incarceration reentry in the case of the justice-involved fathers), and the short-term model was delivered in a way to help prepare the participants for these transitions. As one program director explained,

> *Many come eager to get started but can't stay. They're not ready to make that commitment to make changes for themselves. Retention is about 70 percent. It's 9:00-3:00 pm every day. If you can't sustain a three-week program, it's a problem, because, after that, you're moving to employment. It's a test for employment.*

Programs using the longer-term model typically had workshop sessions once or twice a week. Some programs offered these classes both during the day and in the evening to accommodate participant schedules. Near-perfect attendance was often required for completion of the program. Some participants, particularly those working full-time, noted some difficulties in arranging their schedules to make it to the required workshops, but no one reported that those scheduling difficulties prevented them from meeting their attendance obligations. They also noted that program staff found ways to make the schedule work. For example, participants at one site reported that program staff allowed them to make up a class either by attending it on another day it was offered or by going over the material with a staff member one-on-one.

Some programs also reported providing referrals to additional services to meet the full needs of the participant. Depending upon the nature of the provider organization and access to partners, services were sometimes provided in-house (such as GED classes or internships) or through referrals to other organizations (such as housing assistance, healthcare, and Medicaid enrollment).

Outside of regular programming, sites also often offered special events for participants, sometimes through initiative-wide activities organized by DYCD. For example, there were frequent reports of opportunities to attend family events, such as barbecues, where fathers could bring their children, and more rare reports of retreats. These events were welcomed as opportunities to share experiences with fathers and families in similar situations.

Program Staffing

Providers staffed Fatherhood programs with case managers and facilitators who could connect well with participants and provide strong guidance both in the classroom setting and one-on-one. Staff leading workshops and serving as case managers were mostly, but not exclusively, men. Many of them were fathers themselves, and, in some cases, single fathers. Program staff noted that having been through the parenting situations that the participants were experiencing allowed them to connect with them and thoroughly understand their needs. Several of the referring caseworkers think that this staffing model was beneficial. One caseworker noted, "I think it's great because it comes from a man's perspective and it's really hard to get men to go places…and when I tell them about this…there are other men there, they can listen to their stories and their situations and it's easier for them to relate."

The nature of the work made it difficult to staff Fatherhood programs. Program leaders noted that it was difficult to staff their programs: "These are hard positions to fill, with the issues we're talking about. The turnover was really serious." Program staff needed to be relatable and to connect with the participants, especially since many participants frequently had a distrust of authority. Another program staff member further described the importance of hiring staff who were invested in the program in order to connect with participants, saying, "My team members are genuinely passionate about the work they do. When you work with a high-risk population, there's no sense of being judgmental. They can open up to you."

In some cases, staff capacity was insufficient. For example, a participant at one site needed paperwork completed for a court appearance, and no staff member was available to complete the paperwork before the deadline. Aside from general staffing, many programs lacked staff with the expertise to help fathers navigate legal issues.

Program Recruitment and Retention

The methods of recruitment varied by program and based on the situations of individual participants. In some cases, Fatherhood program participants were required to complete the program as part of a court order, while in other cases they were enrolled because the referring caseworker from a city agency or outside organization believed that they could benefit from the program. A major source of referrals to Fatherhood programs was through the Administration for Children's Services and Family Court. Other referral sources included legal, foster care, and non-profit organizations.

According to intake data, men most typically became connected with the Fatherhood program through a referral from another program or agency (48 percent of younger fathers, 55 percent of older fathers, and 58 percent of justice-involved fathers). Older fathers were most likely to be mandated by a court or government agency to attend the program than young or justice-involved fathers (36 percent, compared to 18 and 12 percent, respectively), while young fathers and justice-involved fathers were more likely to have self-referred than older fathers (34 and 31 percent, compared to 10 percent).

Recruitment Approaches

Several of the Fatherhood programs, housed within larger multi-service organizations, referred participants internally when they came to the organization for other services, while other programs primarily recruited through word of mouth. One program, for example, operated entirely on word of mouth, with program staff and participants distributing flyers in various neighborhoods. Program staff noted that most fathers in their community were not involved in the system, making it hard to rely on a network of formal referrals to find potential participants.

Fatherhood programs were not well publicized within the communities that they served. This was evident during the interviews with NYCHA residents, who reported that they

had never heard of the Fatherhood programs. Alumni and current participants also reported that they knew many fathers who could benefit from the Fatherhood program, but believed that few of them knew about the program. As result, many fathers and caseworkers alike stressed the importance of providers and DYCD becoming more active in promoting the Fatherhood programs. One caseworker specifically suggested that there should be more outreach at community fairs and events.

Most of the Fatherhood programs offered incentives to participants as a strategy to retain and engage participants. Such incentives included weekly subway fare cards, grocery store gift certificates, or other basic provisions that fathers and their children needed, such as food, clothing, and diapers. Several participants have benefited from the subway fare cards not just for being able to attend the program, but also for providing transportation to go to work and to see their children. One program described wanting to improve retention of younger fathers through pre-employment incentives and on-site work opportunities. The program was struggling with ways of engaging this younger population of fathers and was hoping to find ways to incentivize the participation of this group. In a focus group with current older father participants at this program, the men debated whether the program should provide job incentives. Some participants felt strongly that the program should be for fathers who were willing to make a change and commit to the emotional work and not for fathers who were simply looking for a job.

Retention Strategies

The biggest driver of retention described by program staff and fathers alike was participant attitude and perceived benefit. Participants often tended to be resistant to the program at first. After participating in programming for some time, many of the participants had a marked shift in attitude and realized the benefits of completing the program. While the majority of the men who participated in focus groups acknowledged this shift in attitude, program staff noted challenges with engaging some men in the program, especially younger fathers.[3]

This challenge with retention was evident in the data: between July 2012 and June 2015, of the 2,629 men who had enrolled in the Fatherhood program, only 1,721 (65 percent) had completed the first follow-up survey. Young fathers had the lowest retention, with only 41 percent completing this follow-up survey. Seventy-two percent of older fathers and 67 percent of justice-involved fathers completed the first follow-up survey. Retention varied somewhat by program, ranging from a low of 54 percent to a high of 73 percent.

Program Benefits

Fatherhood programs focused their supports on DYCD's five core areas: (1) parenting skills development, (2) effective co-parenting with the child's guardian, (3) employment and

[3] This evaluation did not examine the relationship between program strategies and services and the engagement and retention of fathers; this is an area that DYCD could consider exploring as part of efforts to promote program quality and impact.

education, (4) child support, and (5) visitation and placement; and how those core areas led to outcomes for participants. This section describes the ways in which programs provided supports to participants in each of these areas. Because of the overlapping nature of the employment, and education goals and child support goals, these two core areas have been grouped together into a discussion of financial supports.

Parenting Skills

As a first step, program staff needed to work with participants to shift their perceptions of what it means to be a father. When NYCHA residents—not participants in Fatherhood programs or even fathers themselves—were asked about a father's main responsibilities, most initially described the role of a father as a provider of food, clothing, and shelter. Similarly, Fatherhood participants reported that prior to entering the program they had a narrow understanding of their responsibilities as a father. Many lacked a father figure growing up and, therefore, did not have a model of fatherhood beyond that of providing for a child's basic needs. Participants reported that the program helped them to shift their perspective and thought process about being a father. They learned how to prioritize their child and how their actions could impact their child. One referring caseworker recounted, "I've had a client tell me, 'I really didn't know that my child was really being affected in that way…I didn't think my kid was being affected but I went to the program and I heard stories from other men.'"

Fathers developed key parenting skills. Beyond this general shift in their perceptions of fatherhood and what it entails, fathers described acquiring an array of parenting skills through their participation in Fatherhood programs. Some of these parenting skills were learned through the use of the formal *24/7 Dad* curriculum and through supplemental resources used by program staff. One program used a six-week curriculum called *Think for Change* in which fathers learned parenting skills through role playing that addressed real-life scenarios. However, many fathers reported that they gained the majority of their parenting skills through group discussions with other fathers in the program.

The actual parenting skills acquired by fathers ranged from basic skills, such as how to properly hold their child, to how to develop age-appropriate emotional connections. Several key skills included:

- **An understanding of child development**. Fathers learned about child development and how children think and act at different ages. For instance, one father described how he used to get easily annoyed with his child's inquisitive nature, but after learning that children at that age are naturally inquisitive, he has started to provide explanations to help his child make sense of the world. However, fathers with children of all ages are often mixed in the same classes; one father noted that it would be helpful to have more age-specific classes so that fathers could better relate to the topics covered.

- **Quality time with their children.** Many of the fathers reported learning how to have better communication with their child due to their participation in the

Fatherhood program. Some described the importance of being both physically and mentally available when listening and talking with their child. Additionally, they acknowledged that the program has helped them to have deeper, more engaging conversations; to identify activities; and, overall, to find better ways of connecting with their child. One program staff member said, "The responsibility of spending quality time with the kids…we encourage them to take pictures with the kids, sit down and do activities with the kids…don't just sit there and hold them and look at your cell phone."

- **Proper discipline strategies**. Many of the fathers, particularly fathers over the age of 24, discussed how their upbringing and cultural background had an effect on their methods of disciplining their child. For instance, one father who had grown up overseas commented that, prior to the program, he thought using physical punishment was a proper means of discipline. Some American-born fathers also described how they were "raised by the hand," and since have learned that these methods were no longer considered appropriate and that there were other ways to discipline children. Several current participants and alumni discussed learning to have more patience and how to manage their frustrations. In addition, they reported learning alternative strategies for discipline, including positive reinforcement and redirecting bad behavior.

- **Establishing an emotional connection**. A higher-level parenting skill that participants and alumni across all programs discussed was the importance of understanding their child's thoughts and feelings. Many fathers described being raised in households in which children were seen and not heard. Since enrolling in Fatherhood programs, they have come to value what their children have to say. As one father explained:

  > *Children have feelings and we cannot tell them they don't have the right to have those feelings…they have to express themselves, so that did open up a door for me to be there to emotionally connect with them and listen to what they have to say because they have a right to have their own opinion…which is good because that forms their personality and, as a parent, I have to be mindful of the opinion and be respectful.*

Other fathers described the importance of really getting to know their child on a deeper level and establishing an emotional connection with their child. One father said, "You may know what your son or daughter likes and this is their favorite game or toy, but do you really know them? What makes them tick? It's much deeper than that…."

The survey data supported these reflections. Across groups, at follow-up the majority of fathers reported "often" or "always" giving verbal and physical affection to their child. Exhibit 2 displays the percentage of fathers who demonstrated improvement in affection: they reported often or always providing verbal or physical affection at follow-up, but had not reported providing affection with this frequency at intake.

Exhibit 2
Fathers reporting improved affection, by target population

	Verbal affection		Physical affection	
	N	Percent of fathers	N	Percent of fathers
Young fathers[4]	48	92%	51	96%
Older fathers	370	85*	380	77*
Justice-involved fathers	122	80*	142	86*

* Indicates a statistically significant improvement, $p \leq 0.05$.

Exhibit reads: Ninety-two percent of young fathers who did not report giving verbal affection to their child "often" or "always" at intake did so at follow-up.

Co-Parenting

At intake, fathers identify one child who is the focus of their participation in the Fatherhood Program: the program tracks the father's outcomes as they relate to engagement and support of this child. In practice, the lives of many of the fathers are more complex and they may apply the skills that they develop through the program to relationships with multiple children and co-parents.

The complexity of these relationships was reflected in data gathered during focus groups. The nature of the relationships with co-parents varied significantly for the fathers in focus groups: all information described here is based on what was disclosed by the fathers, and should be interpreted for context only, as it may not be representative. In some cases, fathers were still in romantic relationships or married to their co-parent but had been removed from the home due to pending domestic violence cases; some of these cases included restraining orders that prevented contact between the father and the child and the child's mother. Others had court-mandated agreements for supervised or unsupervised visits with the child; therefore, the relationship between co-parents was partially dictated by a formal order. Many fathers had positive or at least civil relationships with the mother and visitation arrangements were informal. In a few cases, men joined the Fatherhood program while the mother of their child was still pregnant. Finally, a few fathers were in fact custodial parents of children other than the child identified as their focus for the Fatherhood program.

[4] Chi-square tests for differences in young fathers' physical and verbal affection between intake and follow-up did not yield significant results because the vast majority of young fathers reported high levels of both types of affection at intake. Eighty-five percent of young fathers reported giving physical affection often or always at intake (N = 341), whereas only 35 percent (N = 580) and 68 percent (N = 441) of older and justice-involved fathers, respectively, reported giving physical affection to children at intake. Similarly, 86 percent of young fathers reported giving verbal affection often or always at intake, while only 36 percent of older fathers and 72 percent of justice-involved fathers reported doing so.

Participants reported changes in their own attitudes and behaviors that led to improved relationships with their co-parent. The varying nature of the fathers' relationships with their co-parent doesn't allow for the majority of Fatherhood programs to actually offer a co-parenting class. As such, most Fatherhood programs provide universal skills that fathers could use with their co-parent in any circumstance. Fathers reported learning the following:

- **Improved communication**. This skill is the most universally applicable, and a topic that came up regularly in focus groups. Participants described learning to be more patient in communication with their co-parent and how to use different types of communication (e.g., face-to-face, phone calls, texts) that would best maintain a civil relationship. Many participants noted the importance of anger management classes in their improved communication.

- **Removing children from arguments**. Participants learned to prioritize staying calm in front of their children and to avoid getting into fights with the co-parent in front of the child. Programs emphasized the importance of putting the child's needs first, and avoiding arguments that could negatively affect the child.

- **Transitioning from a romantic relationship to a co-parenting relationship.** Several participants spoke to the difficulty of keeping a civil parenting relationship while going through the break-up of a romantic relationship. The Fatherhood program helped them to stay focused on the needs of the child and to prioritize the child's needs over the issues of the adult relationship.

- **Letting go of trying to control the co-parent's decisions**. Several participants noted that although many men in the program were no longer in a relationship with the child's mother, they wanted to have a say in the mother's life. As one program alumnus observed, "You have to be responsible, you have to stop bickering.... You don't want to live with her, but you want to manage her." He said that the program had helped him and others understand his place in the co-parenting relationship. As another program alumnus said,

  You can't control other people's behavior. We have unreasonable expectations…. Trying to stay cognizant to not have unrealistic expectations. If they don't behave the way you want to behave, it's a reality they will do whatever they will do.

Some fathers noted that they received recognition from the mothers of their children for improvements they had made while participating in the program. One father described,

After me and my daughter's mother broke up, it was a struggle to be part of my daughter's life. [Participating in the program] showed her I was taking steps to be more active and be more of a father…she saw that I was trying, and I got to see my daughter more.

However, several participants described feeling frustrated because although they had experienced significant personal growth and had invested in changing their habits through the

program, their co-parent did not recognize or acknowledge this change. Furthermore, these fathers believed that they had gone through a transformative experience and changed for the better, but still had to co-parent with someone who did not share in their new-found communication and anger-management skills. One participant noted how he made changes but felt his efforts had not been recognized, saying, "We come here every Friday to make the necessary changes, but if we are changing and the mothers aren't, [it's hard]. They keep looking at the past."

While finding effective and appropriate ways to integrate co-parents into the program helped participants improve their relationships, the process presented many challenges. Programs addressed the issue of providing services to co-parents in different ways. Some providers also had a motherhood program, and, in some cases, both fathers and mothers participated in a parenting program through the same provider. In other circumstances, mothers may have been court-ordered to participate in motherhood programs through other organizations whose philosophies did not align with those of the Fatherhood program. As one program alumnus noted:

> *I don't know what they are doing over there in the woman's programs. Two different types of programs don't work. If you need to mediate for the couple, have them together. Having two different sides of a story…is very difficult. If it's really going to work, you need to have them counseled at the same time, like marriage counseling. [My ex-wife and I] would fight after class. If we did [counseling] together in the same room, it might have actually worked.*

Some Fatherhood programs offered specific activities that integrated the co-parent. One program had co-parenting classes that met on a regular basis; other programs offered mediation services, which were provided on an as-needed basis. These services were typically only offered after the participant had completed most of the Fatherhood program so that fathers could apply the skills they had learned to work on their relationship with their co-parent. One alumnus described the importance of the co-parenting class, saying "You learn to work together. You can't learn to work together without the other one." Not all participants at the sites that offered these services took part in these activities; program staff used their discretion to determine whether participation in such activities would help or hinder the relationship between the fatherhood participant and their co-parent.

Many fathers reported that they did not want to have mothers involved in the program in any way, however. Participants universally saw the Fatherhood program as a safe space where they could receive supports and raise their concerns in a community of other men. For fathers who did not want mothers affiliated with the program, they expressed concern that introducing co-parents into that environment could result in fights or other disagreements that might hinder their personal progress in the program. As one participant said, "I think you should have a program for the females not at this program. I don't want to bring them for the simple fact [that] everyone is comfortable."

The data from follow-up surveys administered by programs indicate some improvements in fathers' relationships with the child's mother, as summarized in Exhibit 3. Most notably, more than half of older fathers who did not have contact with their child's mother at intake were

in contact with the mother at follow-up (56 percent). These data also show, however, that there was room to continue to improve participants' relationship with their co-parent. Across all groups of fathers, only about a third who had reported challenging communication with the child's mother at intake reported easier communication at follow-up.

Exhibit 3
Fathers reporting improved co-parenting relationship, by target population

	Contact with mother		Easier communication with mother	
	N	Percent of fathers	N	Percent of fathers
Young fathers	108	47%*	138	33%*
Older fathers	407	56*	250	36*
Justice-involved fathers	118	37*	211	35*

* Indicates a statistically significant improvement, $p \leq 0.05$.

Exhibit reads: Forty-seven percent of young fathers who did not have contact with their child's mother at intake had contact at follow-up. This was a statistically significant improvement.

Visitation

In focus groups, fathers reported a wide range of family circumstances that offered insight into the ways they interact with their children. In a few instances, fathers described logistics and geographic realities as being an obstacle for them to interact daily with their children. For instance, one father described getting out of prison and finding that his child had grown up and gone to college; another father said that his son lived in another state; while another said that his child lived in another borough. These fathers were learning new ways of establishing communication with their child from the program and from their peers in the program.

Fathers also described other challenges to engaging with their child, including needing supervised visits (based on intake survey data, 34 percent of participating fathers had a court order regulating visits, and 78 percent of those required supervised visits). Fatherhood programs helped some fathers meet visitation goals. Regardless of whether fathers were required to have supervised visitation, programs offered opportunities for fathers to spend quality time with their children, either by providing supervision, planning an organized group activity for fathers to bring their children to the program, or providing an outing or a space in which to meet. These opportunities afforded the fathers quality time to spend with their children.

One father described how the Fatherhood program helped coordinate a visitation with his child:

> *This program helped me because even though I was out of the house, I could still see her [his daughter]. [The program] coordinated with the school and with her mother. The process took almost a year. If it wasn't for this program,*

I wouldn't have contact with my child. These people make it happen for you. They make sure you spend time with your kids.

At another program, two fathers received support from program staff to gain partial custody of their children, therefore increasing their contact and visitation.

A few referring caseworkers thought it would be beneficial for programs to have a visitation coach available to help improve the quality of visitation. One caseworker explained, "… lot of the time, because the ages of the kids varies, a lot of the time some of the fathers, they don't know what to do with the kids after 10 or 15 minutes…and just having someone there who can maybe make some suggestions and kind of give them a little push in how to engage with the child that can improve the quality of their visitation."

When fathers reflected on the challenges they face in spending time with their children, they typically described how Fatherhood programs have helped them to prove themselves worthy of visitation on a personal and legal level, with their child's mother and with the court system. In a similar vein, Fatherhood programs have also empowered many fathers to be their own advocates when pursuing visitation rights. A referring caseworker described a client who through the Fatherhood program learned to advocate on his own behalf and, in turn, was successful in reuniting with his child and the child's mother because "he fought for what he wanted and he wanted his child home."

Many fathers needed help understanding the court system and their visitation and custody rights. Several fathers reported that the Fatherhood program staff have advocated on their behalf in Family Court. Some fathers were allowed only supervised visitation with their children at some point during their participation in the program due to court orders. One provider offered court-approved supervised visitation to ensure that fathers could spend time with their children. Other providers helped participants navigate the court system to handle the logistics of getting supervised visitation. It was common for program staff to write letters of support or even to make court appearances to help participants expand their visitation rights.

Referring caseworkers often served as the liaison between the Fatherhood program and the courts, playing an additional and important role in determining a participant's visitation rights. One caseworker described his role in showing the judge that his clients were worthy of visitation:

So now what we do is actually create positive data for the judge stating that this individual has thought about change, is initiating change, and now is seeing positive rewards and results of that thought process. That's all the judge really wants to know. Is this individual responsible and accountable to be deemed worth to be a part of this person's life?

Developing and maintaining a civil relationship with the co-parent was key to fathers' access to their child. Finally, many fathers, particularly those who spoke of having acrimonious relationships with their child's mother, reported learning to take the necessary steps to rebuild and earn trust with the child's mother so that they would be granted more time with their child. Through their participation in the program, many fathers wanted to prove to the child's mother

that they were taking the necessary steps to become a responsible father and changing for the better and were worthy of more (or unsupervised) visitation. One alumnus said his involvement in the program allowed him to gain his co-parent's trust. The co-parent saw him attending the program and doing something productive with his days. She also attended a program outing at the zoo with her child and the father, and saw that he had the capacity to interact positively with the child.

As shown in Exhibit 4, the follow-up survey data reveal some improvements in the amount of time that fathers spent with their children compared to intake, although there continued to be significant differences by group. Among fathers who had had less than weekly contact with their child over the three months prior to intake, more than two-thirds of young fathers (67 percent) reported at least weekly contact at follow-up, as did 55 percent of older fathers and 40 percent of justice-involved fathers.

Exhibit 4
Fathers' reports of increased engagement with child, by target population

	At least weekly contact	
	N	Percent of fathers
Young fathers	87	67%*
Older fathers	322	55*
Justice-involved fathers	260	40*

* Indicates a statistically significant improvement, $p \leq 0.05$.

Exhibit reads: Sixty-seven percent of young fathers who had not had this level of contact with their child at intake had at least weekly contact with their child over the last three months at follow-up. This was a statistically significant improvement.

Financial and Employment Supports

The intake data revealed a great need for job training and employment resources for young fathers and for justice-involved fathers in particular. Fatherhood programs offered activities and services to help participants continue their education and receive job training, find and maintain stable employment, and financially support their child. The programs relied on a few key strategies to help participants prepare for long-term careers and obtain jobs in their fields of study, summarized below.

Fatherhood programs offered or referred participants to job training programs. Although not required by the DYCD initiative, many of the Fatherhood program providers were part of larger organizations that also offered job training; other providers referred participants to job training programs in the area. Many participants saw this service as an integral part of their progress towards their employment and financial goals.

Several program staff described the importance of selecting a career and training for it, rather than simply getting a job. As one program staff member said, "We're trying to move from job readiness to career pathways. If they get a job they really don't like for a paycheck, they fall off the wagon. We're trying to connect them to careers." Training sometimes came in the form of paid internships that led directly to a full-time position. Other programs referred men to GED classes and other supports that could prepare them for college. Some providers also referred participants seeking job training to outside organizations, including partnering with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) or local unions for vocational certifications. One father described his participation in a workforce readiness program, saying:

> *I was in this [workforce readiness] program in a shelter. It was called 'Ready, Willing, and Able.' [Program staff] had put me onto it. I stayed in for eight and a half months. Before that, I didn't know anything about it. I never graduated high school or middle school. That was the first thing I accomplished.*

Construction was the most common area in which programs connected participants to outside training. Other fields included culinary arts and maintenance work. Some participants reported attending college as a result of the supports of the program. However, there were some participants who felt that the options for employment supports were too limited and did not provide them with opportunities to pursue careers in fields in which they were interested or in which they could be successful.

Programs helped participants develop job readiness skills. Participants reported receiving help with their résumés and interview skills. Many participants had not learned the workplace skills needed to land a job, let alone a stable one that would lead to a career. When asked about the most useful part of the program, one program alumnus said, "My interview stood out to me. I had never done a real interview. I did a mock interview [through the program]. I am a talkative person but I freeze up [during job interviews]." One program, for example, partnered with a local store, and all participants were provided a tailored suit at the completion of their program. A participant said that he had received his first suit to wear to an interview through that program.

Some programs hired participants to work for the provider organization. In some cases, this was a short-term internship intended to develop their skills and establish work experience. These jobs included data entry, front-desk reception, and facilitating other programming. One program alumnus said that he owned his own business and networked at the Fatherhood program in order to recruit and hire additional workers whenever he needed them.

Despite these efforts, employment continued to be a challenge at follow-up, as shown in Exhibit 5. Justice-involved fathers had made the greatest gains in employment, with 41 percent of those who had been unemployed at intake gaining employment.

Exhibit 5
Fathers' reports of new employment, by target population

	N	Percent of fathers
Young fathers	233	30%*
Older fathers	390	32*
Justice-involved fathers	440	41*

* Indicates a statistically significant improvement, $p \leq 0.05$.

Exhibit reads: Thirty percent of young fathers who were unemployed at intake were employed at follow-up. This was a statistically significant improvement.

Some programs offered material resources that fathers could use to provide for their child directly. The incentives provided by Fatherhood programs to encourage retention sometimes helped fulfill a financial need for participants. Several sites reported providing products to Fatherhood program participants, such as diapers or children's clothing. One site regularly provided grocery store gift cards and organized store trips for participants, their children, and co-parents to purchase food, diapers, and other necessities. As one program alumnus reported:

> *For a small while, we had these [grocery gift cards], they were an incentive for us to come. That helped a lot, because that was before I was working. We went on field trips, with our children and their mothers…I had nothing, so that was everything. I felt like I was playing more of a part in my daughter's life because I was part of the program. I felt like I could do something even though I couldn't help financially.*

Other material resources included children's toys–offered as incentives or prizes for fathers for completing certain activities within a program–that they in turn could give to their children, and business apparel for fathers to wear when interviewing for jobs. Many programs organized family events, such as trips to sporting events or to the zoo, which the fathers would not have otherwise been able to provide for their children. All sites provided weekly subway cards to participants, which not only helped them attend the program but also facilitated their travel to work, interviews, and to visit their child.

Additionally, many participants noted that they learned financial skills. For example, one participant noted that he learned how to develop a budget. Another program taught participants about investing and retirement accounts.

Consistent with the Fatherhood Initiative model and in support of many participants' needs, programs addressed the obligations and processes related to child support payments. Participants at multiple sites reported having a guest speaker come to their workshops to teach them about how child support works. The paperwork required for documenting child support payments was one of many bureaucratic hurdles that participants needed help to navigate.

Program staff members also provided direct support and encouragement to fathers to help them navigate and fulfill child support obligations. For example, programs helped participants explore their concerns with providing financial support to the co-parent. Some men initially disliked sending money to the child's mother, as they felt she would spend the money on herself rather than on the child. The program addressed changing participants' mindsets around child support and letting go of the need to control the co-parent's decisions in order to develop a trusting relationship so as to serve the best interests of the child. Fatherhood programs helped participants to understand their child support obligations despite the relationship with the co-parent or how often they see their child. As one program alumnus said, "They had [a representative from the] child support [agency] come in, and they explained it. A lot of people thought if I pay child support, she's going to buy new shoes. You need to pay your child support. The mom is taking care of the child, so what if she benefits a little bit."

Another participant echoed that sentiment, saying:

I knew from day one if I sent that woman money, it wasn't going to go to my kid. Because before she never bought our kid toys–and she made enough money. Especially if I can't see him. [Staff] said, "Do right by him." Even if it don't get to him. She had told everyone that. I learned we were all on the same page.

With this encouragement, fathers' reports of financial support for their child increased considerably from intake to follow-up, as shown in Exhibit 6. Most notably, at follow-up, 73 percent of young fathers reported providing financial support, which they had not provided at intake, as did 68 percent of justice-involved fathers. A smaller proportion of older fathers demonstrated this increase (49 percent), although it was still a significant improvement.

Exhibit 6
Fathers' reports of increased financial support, by target population

	N	Percent of fathers
Young fathers	135	73%*
Older fathers	459	49*
Justice-involved fathers	313	68*

* Indicates a statistically significant improvement, $p \leq 0.05$.

Exhibit reads: Seventy-three percent of young fathers who did not provide any form of financial support at intake did so at follow-up. This was a statistically significant improvement.

Participants learned new ways to define their financial responsibilities through participation in the program. Programs addressed both the emotional and psychological aspects of being a provider for the child and the obligation a father has to provide stable financial support.

Defining his role as a provider was key to developing each participant's sense of self-worth. At one site, the program director discussed how a participant who had made significant

gains in his financial stability had an increase in confidence, saying, "He talks about the pride and dignity he feels with that kid. That he can afford to buy him things." An alumnus similarly described the importance of being able to provide financially for his child, saying,

> *A lot of guys are going through this situation because they have no money. It's a lot on guys' shoulders to take care of everything. If you can't do it, it's a heavy rock to carry. When a guy is working, life is good. You feel less disoriented when you have money coming in.*

Programs must balance financial supports while encouraging emotional growth. Participants noted that programs were thorough in helping fathers define their role as a financial provider while reminding them that their responsibility to their child was emotional as well as financial. One program participant expressed concern over the program focusing so heavily on financial support. He felt he had experienced significant personal growth through the program but was afraid that people looking for jobs would come to the program and not engage in the program's more emotional aspects, thereby diluting the quality of the program for those genuinely invested in change. He said, "A lot of people were coming here for a job but not coming here for change. Look for a job somewhere else, but come here for change. Let people willing to change come here. Give some references but don't come here for jobs." Every provider worked to strike this balance and ensure that participants were engaged in the emotional aspects of the program as well as the financial.

Program Outcomes

Fatherhood program participants are considered to have "graduated" from the program once they achieve an increase on two outcomes established by DYCD and aligned with the goals of the program: engagement with their child, and financial support of their child. Progress on these outcomes is captured through the follow-up survey administered by programs at approximately 90-day intervals. If a father increases by at least one point on both outcomes, he has successfully completed the program. If not, the expectation is that the father will remain in the program.

The PSA evaluation team examined the DYCD engagement and financial scale data and found that, from July 2012 to June 2015, 73 percent of young fathers met both benchmarks by the first survey follow-up, as did 84 percent of older fathers and 69 percent of justice-involved fathers (Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7
Percent of fathers meeting program outcomes, by target population

	N	Engagement score improved	Financial score improved	Financial and Engagement score improved
Young fathers				
First follow-up	399	81%	86%	73%
Second follow-up	67	63	52	42
Third follow-up	7	86	86	71
Older fathers				
First follow-up	812	87%	91%	84%
Second follow-up	100	76	70	64
Third follow-up	9	78	67	67
Justice-involved fathers				
First follow-up	539	75%	89%	69%
Second follow-up	53	53	68	43
Third follow-up	4	50	100	50

Exhibit reads: At the first follow-up, 81 percent of young fathers had improved on the engagement score, 86 percent on the financial score, and 73 percent on both the financial and engagement score. For the fathers who continued with the program, at the second follow-up, 63 percent showed additional improvement on the engagement score, 52 percent on the financial score, and 42 percent on both scores.

Additional Reported Benefits of Participation

Overall, fathers were very appreciative of the opportunity to participate in Fatherhood programs. Many of the participants interviewed were originally mandated by child services or the court to participate and were resistant and angry at first. However, many of these same participants who were originally skeptical experienced a transformation in their attitude over the course of the program, recognizing the benefits of their participation. For example, program staff at one Fatherhood program described a father who "initially, I don't think he really bought into it, but as time went on, he began to see the benefits of it and he started to come because he saw the need."

Participants reported experiencing personal growth as a result of the Fatherhood program. Several participants, particularly older fathers, described their participation in the Fatherhood program as an opportunity for personal growth through which they have learned how to take responsibility for their own behavior, express emotion, and grow both as an individual and as a father. One father reflected:

There's a saying, "Let's talk about the man in the mirror." Let's not talk about what she [the mother] did, about what the child did, about ACS…. What can you improve on, what did you fall off on. Let's look at that, let's talk about it.... That's another problem, men don't like to talk. It's okay to talk, it's okay to cry.

Perhaps most importantly, current participants and alumni recognized their own personal growth and identified the areas in which they still needed to improve. The result of this self-reflection was an acknowledgement that participation in the Fatherhood program had benefitted them greatly, leading to a recurring refrain across sites: "This program changed my life."

Participants formed a supportive community of peers. Many fathers also described the benefit of being a part of a community of peers with similar experiences. Many participants became friendly with one another and were able to talk freely, ask questions, share experiences, and even network. One participant commented, "It's like a brotherhood." Most importantly, this community provided a safe space, in an all-male environment, where men were able to focus on their personal growth as fathers in a "judgement-free zone." One father described:

We are all growing here, we don't point the finger…. Here, there's no judgement. Opinions, yes. But no judgement…. With that there comes a freedom that you feel like you can talk about anything. Yeah, you did wrong, but the fact that you can come here amongst other people who probably did the exact same thing you did or know exactly where you are going through is a relief. It's a weight off your shoulders that you don't have to worry about.

One referring caseworker echoed similar sentiments regarding the importance of fathers having a support group and a safe space. She described a client who continued to go back to the program even after graduating because he felt comfortable with the group and continued to learn from his peers.

Having a community of relatable peers was a recurring theme across all respondent groups: young male NYCHA residents also recommended that having a place where fathers could go to meet and learn from other fathers in similar situations and to be mentored by older fathers would be useful to fathers in their own community.

Continued Contact with Alumni

Most programs either formally or informally provided outlets for fathers to stay connected after completing their formal engagement with the program. In some instances, this provided former participants with an opportunity to recruit other fathers into the Fatherhood program, become advocates or mentors for fathers currently enrolled, and, in many cases, receive on-going emotional or financial support from program staff and their peers.

Some alumni continued to receive supplemental services from the program's provider after completing the program. In fact, based on available follow-up survey data, at least 112 fathers who had completed the program continued to engage in the program; it can be assumed that

actual numbers may be higher and that not all men were formally surveyed after completing the required outcomes. Former participants reported that their program provided additional services, ranging from employment and referrals to reenrollment in fatherhood workshops. One participant, for example, mentioned that he had been in the program for three years, and voluntarily went through the cycle of workshops multiple times simply because he believed his role as a father was unceasing, and there was always something new to learn. The executive director of the same program validated this sentiment by explaining that he viewed his role as being "on the clock" at all times, because once fathers were enrolled, they were always connected to the program even after formal completion. He added that the program held an award ceremony event after participants completed the required workshops, but intentionally chose not to consider the event as a "graduation" because "you never graduate from being a father."

Another site facilitated a weekly alumni group, providing a room for the fathers to meet and a program staff member to facilitate discussion. Although the group was small, most of the fathers who attended had been coming to the meetings for years and had developed a close bond. All the participants reported receiving continued benefits from the support network they had developed through the program.

In other instances, former participants returned to programs in a mentoring or advisory capacity. Alumni were also invited back as guest speakers and to special family engagement events hosted by the programs. Program staff noted that giving current participants the opportunity to see program alumni interact with their children helped participants to see other examples of parenting and understand the issues that both alumni and participant fathers continuously face.

Alumni often served as advocates and recruiters for Fatherhood programs within their communities. Alumni who stayed connected with the program appeared to value the experiences and supports they received beyond their formal participation in the program and spoke about their experiences in a positive way. In one program where an informal alumni group had formed, alumni spoke about the empathetic and caring relationships with other men that had developed through the safety and structure of their program. Other alumni also felt a need to give back to their Fatherhood program and to their peers because of the substantial benefits and time invested in them. One alumnus said, "We've got guys who open their doors to us…. It saves lives, it saved mine." Additionally, current participants spoke of having been referred by alumni to the Fatherhood program.

Alumni have been great advocates of the Fatherhood program. Their advocacy can be seen in how they lead by example in continuing to receive services from the provider; it can also be seen by how they offer mentorship to current participants, by how they refer participants to the program, and by how they attest to the benefits and services that the Fatherhood program can provide. Alumni participation and support was particularly apparent when scheduling focus groups. Many of the fathers who participated in alumni focus groups had graduated from their programs years before–some as many as five years before–but still regularly engaged with the program in some way.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Several recommendations emerge from this evaluation. These include recommendations for expansion of services to meet additional participant needs, ways in which DYCD can better support program providers, and improvements to the Fatherhood survey.

Services for Program Participants

Participants reported benefiting greatly from the variety of services offered through the program. Some Fatherhood programs connected participants to additional services through internal or external referrals. Because many participants have extensive needs, programs could provide more comprehensive supports from existing services and expand to additional areas that will help participants reach the goals of the program.

Offer more differentiated services. Intake survey data, as well as data from focus groups, indicate that fathers from each of the target groups have distinct needs. In general, young fathers need help gaining employment to maintain financial commitments to their child, older fathers need support in engaging positively with the child and with the child's mother, and justice-involved fathers struggle with employment and regular engagement with their child. Although programs are allowed to adapt supplemental services, all currently use the same curriculum and adhere to the same outcomes. The Fatherhood program model, including the curriculum, should acknowledge these differentiated needs and encourage programs to focus on different outcomes and skills based on the fathers they serve.

Expand services to address basic needs of participants. Focus-group participants reported wanting access and referrals to providers of health care, mental health services, housing, and substance abuse counseling. Interviews with program staff confirm that fathers need to address these issues before program goals can be attained. One program staff member, for example, said that the men who attend his program had to go through a personal process of getting stabilized before embarking in the program or in attaining a job. The scope of the Fatherhood program should be expanded to ensure that these basic individual needs are met so that participants can successfully build fatherhood skills.

Systematically offer legal services and support for navigating the legal system. The greatest need of men in the focus groups that was not comprehensively met by the program model was the need for legal services and a better understanding of the criminal justice system and process. The potential for many Fatherhood program participants to meet DYCD's core outcome of increased engagement with their child is often contingent on court orders regulating their access to the child. Participants may also be hindered in meeting financial or employment goals based on outstanding legal issues. Providing more legal resources to support fathers in on-going criminal cases, family court, and ACS proceedings, either directly or through referrals, would fill a significant need for participants and help them achieve the goals of the Fatherhood program.

Provide more options for programs for mothers or joint workshops with co-parents. Providers have come up with a number of solutions to address the need to develop more effective

co-parenting relationships, but because of the acrimonious nature of the fathers' relationships with their children's mothers, most have not been able to offer comprehensive supports in this area. Expansion of mediation, counseling, and co-parenting workshops, created through thoughtful alignment with the individual needs of the participant and his co-parent, would help meet these needs. Fatherhood programs need to remain "safe spaces" where fathers can focus on their own growth. However, at appropriate points in a father's progress through the program, inviting the child's mother to attend a joint parenting workshop could help to strengthen trust in the relationship. Furthermore, identifying opportunities for parallel skill-building workshops for mothers would ensure that both parents develop the communication and parenting skills necessary for an effective co-parenting relationship.

Expand education and employment supports. Many of the Fatherhood program providers are part of larger organizations that also offer job training; other providers refer participants to job training programs in the area. Participants frequently found this training to be the most useful part of the program, and an expansion of those supports could help further support participant needs. Men at one program spoke about the limited types of jobs that were available through the program, such as an emphasis on custodial work or construction. They wanted a broader understanding of the types of job options that could be tailored to their interests. One group brought up the fact that the program pitted them in competition with one another for jobs. Providing additional connections to jobs in additional fields can help better meet the needs of participants. Enhancing partnerships with workforce development and job placement programs would benefit the Fatherhood program. For example, Fatherhood program providers could connect with other DYCD programs that focus on employment, such as the Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP) and Out of School Youth (OSY).

Focus on retention. Both program staff and interviewed fathers commented that fathers who initially enrolled in the program were often resistant and did not think that they needed the program; the biggest driver of retention was the perceived benefit of participation after having been in the program for a while. Most fathers experienced a marked transformation in attitude over the course of their participation in the program. However, the data indicate that many fathers do not stay in the program long enough to experience this transformation and benefit, with only about two-thirds of enrolled fathers completing a follow-up survey, including fewer than half of young fathers. Programs should consider implementing new outreach and retention measures to engage and retain these participants who could benefit from program services.

Create more structured supports for alumni. Focus groups with alumni reveal that although they had completed the program, they were still in need of support, especially from peers, and could still benefit from some services. Programs, with support from DYCD, could facilitate weekly alumni groups in which former participants come to discuss parenting issues with other fathers. These groups would continue to provide needed peer supports for the alumni as well as a mentorship community for new Fatherhood participants.

Recommendations for DYCD

Feedback from program staff and participants produced additional recommendations about the way the Fatherhood Initiative is implemented city-wide.

Increase the visibility of Fatherhood programs. Participants spoke of obtaining significant benefits from participating, and felt that it was important to help other fathers in similar situations become aware that such programs existed. A common refrain in interviews was that many programs for mothers exist and are highly visible, but few people know about resources for fathers. NYCHA residents, who were not involved in Fatherhood programs, reported that they believed such programs would be useful to them or to other fathers they knew, and that they were unaware that such programs existed. For example, one caseworker suggested that there should be more outreach at community fairs and events.

Increase access to programs across the city. Beyond the need for publicity was the need for improved accessibility of program services. Although participants and alumni reported that program staff made great strides in helping them participate in the program through flexible scheduling options and by providing subway fare cards, they still faced some challenges in accessibility. For example, some men commute a long way to access the program and would like to have options in their boroughs. Currently there are no Fatherhood programs on Staten Island, so some participants who live in Staten Island must commute long distances to attend programming. One participant even mentioned moving from a nearby suburb into New York City so that he could attend a Fatherhood program.

Several caseworkers that were interviewed mentioned that they were unaware of similar other free programs that provide services for fathers. This points to a critical need both for increased visibility of existing programs and for equal access to participation in high-quality programs throughout the city.

Update and expand the curriculum and supplemental resources. Program staff at most sites would like an updated or new curriculum. Programs found that the *24/7 Dad* curriculum materials were thin in some areas, particularly in the area of child development and employment supports. This left programs to create their own workshops or to seek out supplemental materials to teach these skills. Furthermore, one program staff member said the curriculum was not always culturally relevant and did not always account for variations in parenting circumstances or for all age levels of children. In the short term, a repository of supplemental materials, such as videos, that is shared across programs could help program staff better administer their workshops. DYCD should consider whether another curriculum would better suit the needs of the program.

Recommendations for Fatherhood Survey

Modify outcome measures to better align with program expectations. Currently, the program model expects that fathers make measurable progress on two outcomes: increased engagement, availability, and responsibility with their child/children and increased material and financial support to their child/children. The current measures for the engagement and financial

outcome measures are very broad, and do not necessarily lend themselves to useful interpretation for how the initiative has helped fathers or for program improvement. DYCD should consider reorganizing the intake and follow-up survey around the five core areas targeted by programming to better assess progress over time on these specific priorities: parenting skills, co-parenting, employment/education, child support, and visitation.

Modify indicators of outcomes to better reflect participant progress. Program staff offered several critiques of the measures currently used to measure participant outcomes. Programming is implemented by providers from a strengths-based perspective, recognizing that each participant begins the program from a different place and supports should be tailored to address the individual's needs. However, the two current measures of outcomes can sometimes work in contradiction with one another: increased time spent at work (financial outcome) may lead to decreased time spent with the child (engagement outcome).

Many program staff members suggested narrower indicators that serve as a better measurement of a participant's progress, aligned with the unique needs of individuals. Some of these indicators might include finding stable housing, progress through a substance abuse program, educational certifications obtained, or improvements in the relationship with the child's mother. Providing a menu of possible outcome indicators and allowing program staff to select two to four indicators that will measure a participant's specific areas of need would help better track participant progress and hold programs accountable for more useful information.

Alternatively, employing a different measurement approach may provide a better indicator of success. On certain components of the current outcome indicators, the majority of fathers score highly at intake. For instance, 71 percent of older fathers had paid child support in full each time it was due over the last three months at intake, and an additional 6 percent had paid on time but not in full. This high rate of compliance does not allow much room for improvement as a result of the program. Instead of measuring improvement, establishing a set of criterion-based benchmarks may be a more effective way of determining success: are fathers paying child support on time? Are they meeting other criteria of financial support, whether or not improvement was needed?

Streamline the survey to collect less, but more reliable, data. Regardless of the outcome measurement approach selected, significantly shortening the survey would increase the reliability of the data. The current survey includes 43 questions, many with multiple subparts. The evaluation team's examination of the intake and follow-up surveys revealed that the programs collected a lot of data in the DYCD Capricorn system, but that not all data were useful. Some variables had large amounts of missing data, likely due to the amount of precision and time required in the interview and subsequent data-entry process to capture that information. For example, the survey captures a long list of specific activities that the father might do with his child, which is likely at too granular of a level to be useful. Other questions addressed similar issues, leading to potential inconsistency across responses. For instance, there is one series of questions about child support, and a separate series of questions about financial support. The intended distinction is likely lost on the interviewer and respondent, leading to unreliable—and incomplete—data.

Instead, DYCD and programs should focus on capturing data on fewer questions at a true baseline (on average, providers collected the intake survey within 41 days of enrollment) and reliably at follow-up (consistently after 90 days), which may produce data that can better guide program services and to track participant progress. In addition, providing clearer questions that minimize opportunities for case managers to make decisions about how to interpret a response—or whether to skip or ask a question—would increase the reliability of data.

The evaluation team recommends using the following questions to guide decisions about streamlining or shortening the survey:

- *How will the information be used by DYCD, or by Fatherhood providers? Will the answers drive decisions about program services? How much detail is needed?*

  For example, while gathering information about the frequency of fathers' communication with their child's mother is likely important for the program to track, detail about the mechanism of communication might not be. Is it important for DYCD or providers to know whether fathers are communicating with custodial mothers through text message, Facebook, phone, or other means? How will that information be used? If the utility is not clear, we recommend dropping that question.

- *Is there an expectation for fathers? If not, how will the information be used?*

  For some questions, there is a clear association with a goal of the Fatherhood program, such as whether fathers are engaging regularly with their child. For other questions, this is less clear. For instance, the survey asks whether fathers have gained sole custody of the child since intake. It is not clear that sole custody is an indication of success—or failure—of the program, and therefore why the information is useful to track and report. We recommend focusing the questions on elements that are associated with clear expectations for outcomes for fathers.

- *Is there an expectation for programs? If not, how will the information be used?*

  Similarly, we recommend focusing on questions where there is a clear expectation for program services and supports for fathers, and avoiding questions that are unrealistic given program resources and timelines. For example, there is currently a survey question about the percent of fathers who have completed their GED since enrolling in the program. This is likely too unrealistic of an expectation given the program guidelines and timeframe. If DYCD wants to communicate support for education as a priority goal for Fatherhood programs, *enrollment* in a GED program, rather than completion, may be a more appropriate indicator.