

Child Support -  
work  
programs

### Parents' Fair Share pilot phase and preliminary results

The Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Demonstration is testing employment and training services for unemployed noncustodial parents to more effectively reduce poverty among children and decrease their reliance on welfare by requiring their fathers to establish paternity and helping them increase their earnings so they can adequately support their children. ACF began to support the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) in its pilot test of nine state PFS programs during which MDRC showed that PFS sites developed effective procedures to identify eligible noncustodial parents, move them into program services, and encourage and enforce regular participation. PFS programs also allow sites to discover previously unreported income of non-paying noncustodial parents -- approximately 25 percent of the men in the pilot phase had previously unreported income.

The PFS demonstration programs have developed effective procedures to identify eligible non-custodial parents and have established court-based processes to require fathers to participate in work-based program activities and to enforce regular participation. Preliminary data from PFS shows that the work and training requirements provide states a promising mechanism to discover previously unreported income of non-paying, non-custodial parents. Also, in the PFS sites, as well as in other non-custodial parent demonstration programs, title IV-D agencies have developed flexible and responsive child support enforcement systems to complement non-custodial parent work and training requirements.

Additional findings are:

- o The PFS participants in the pilot were found to live in poverty and face critical barriers to employment.

- . Vast majority were men.

- . Almost half were 30 years old or older; more than one-third were 25 years old or younger.

- . Almost 60 percent had never been married.

- . Overall, two-thirds were black, one-third white, and approximately 6 percent Hispanic. (Breakdown varied substantially by site.)

- . Almost two-thirds said they had worked 3 months or less in the past year, and one in seven said they had been unemployed for more than two years.

- . Just over half had a high school diploma or GED.

- . Three-fourths reported that they has been arrested at least once since their 16th birthday; nearly half said they had been convicted.

- . The vast majority of participants had child support orders in place.

- o Most of the PFS participants said they cared deeply about their children and thought it important to support them.

However, their views of a father's role were often narrow, and many strongly resisted paying child support formally.

- o The peer support component emerged as the glue that holds PFS together for participants, maintaining their interest and involvement.
- o Fewer noncustodial parents participated in OJT than were expected. Low skill levels and difficulty working with the JTPA system were common obstacles for sites.
- o Despite a range of obstacles to developing flexible and responsive child support enforcement systems, child support agencies emerged as strong supporters of PFS.
- o Few PFS participants volunteered for mediation services, as was expected.

In FY 1997, MDRC will be able to answer whether training unemployed noncustodial parents will enable them to make regular child support payments and reduce their children's welfare dependency, and whether providing courts with an alternate way to deal with non-paying fathers results in their paying child support?

- o Preliminary results from Kent County are promising. From March 1994 until March 1995 Kent County collected \$209,800 in child support from approximately 400 PFS control group participants and \$321,806 from approximately 400 experimentals.
- o Preliminary results from Los Angeles are also promising. In 1994 and early 1995 Los Angeles collected approximately \$93,000 in child support from 319 PFS control group participants and approximately \$145,000 from 315 experimentals.

Note, moreover, that in both Kent County and Los Angeles the experimentals had their orders downward modified to \$0 while they're in training; controls, of course, are subject to ongoing enforcement efforts with no exposure to PFS. Thus, the increases in child support payments were made over a shorter period of time than the controls' payments because the average length of active participation in PFS is about six months.

These preliminary results show a direct benefit to the individuals served and their children and families. Continuing evaluation activities will provide more information about employment and wage impacts among participants.